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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
Monterey, California**



**THESIS**

**COLOMBIA: A RISK-PRONE DEMOCRACY**

by

Jose G. Cristy II

December 1998

Thesis Advisor:  
Thesis Co-Advisor:

Thomas C. Bruneau  
Scott D. Tollefson

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This thesis assesses the prospect for democracy in Colombia. In a single case study, the thesis argues that Colombia is a democracy at risk. The work attempts to answer the following questions:

- Why, after four decades of democratic processes, has Colombia's political society failed to achieve full democratization?
- Is Colombia vulnerable to democratic breakdown?
- What possible policy actions could the United States explore that would assist in halting Colombia's downward democratic spiral?

The thesis argues that the magnitude of the challenge of coping with ever-increasing levels of social violence, civil disorder, corruption, narco-trafficking, and insurgency is threatening the very fabric of civil and political society. The breakdown of democracy in Colombia could affect democratic institutions throughout the area. This single event - a non-democratic Colombia - would alter the balance of power in Latin America and significantly affect current U.S. policy in the region.

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**COLOMBIA: A RISK-PRONE DEMOCRACY**

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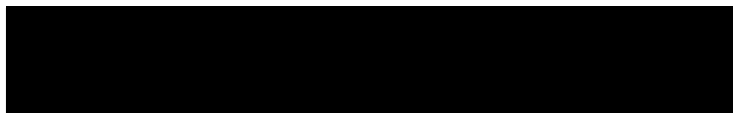
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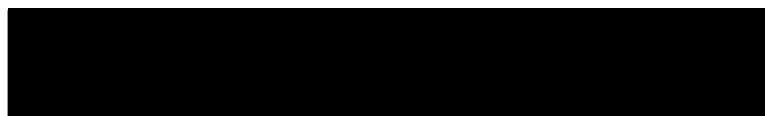
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis assesses the prospect for democracy in Colombia. In a single case study, it argues that Colombia is a democracy at risk. The work attempts to answer the following questions:

- Why, after four decades of democratic processes, has Colombia's political society failed to achieve full democratization?
- Is Colombia vulnerable to democratic breakdown?
- What possible policy actions could the United States explore that would assist in halting Colombia's downward democratic spiral?

This Latin American country, the fourth largest in South America, the Western Hemisphere's second oldest democracy and populated by almost thirty-seven million people, is facing a myriad of severe social, economic and political problems. The magnitude of the challenge of coping with ever-increasing levels of social violence, civil disorder, corruption, narco-trafficking, and insurgency is threatening the very fabric of civil and political society. Despite four decades of democratic processes, Colombia's political society has yet to complete democratic consolidation, much less full democratization. Furthermore, it is the incompleteness of its democratic consolidation that exacerbates and accelerates the downward spiral of the country's democracy and renders it vulnerable to breakdown. Colombia's political society – those institutions with control over the political decision making process – is the main culprit in hindering the establishment of full liberal democracy and facilitating a move away from the endemic political violence that plagues the country today.

The breakdown of democracy in Colombia could affect democratic institutions throughout the area. This single event – a non-democratic Colombia – would alter the balance of power in Latin America and significantly affect current U.S. policy in the region.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the prospects for democracy in Colombia. In a single case study, the work argues that Colombia is a democracy at risk. The work will attempt to answer the following questions:

- Why, after four decades of democratic processes, has Colombia's political society failed to achieve full democratization?
- Is Colombia vulnerable to democratic breakdown?
- What possible policy actions could the United States explore that would assist in halting Colombia's downward democratic spiral?

This Latin American country, the fourth largest in South America, the Western Hemisphere's second oldest democracy and populated by almost thirty-seven million people, is facing a myriad of severe social, economic and political problems. The magnitude of the challenge of coping with ever-increasing levels of social violence, civil disorder, corruption, narco-trafficking, and insurgency is threatening the very fabric of civil and political society.

Despite four decades of democratic processes, Colombia's political society has yet to fully consolidate democracy. The lack of democratic consolidation exacerbates and accelerates Colombia's downward spiral and renders democracy vulnerable to breakdown. I contend that procedural democracy, as defined by Robert A. Dahl, is necessary but not sufficient for full democratization. The necessary and sufficient elements that would constitute full democratization are the behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional tenets posited by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan in *Problems of Democratic Transitions and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-*

*Communist Europe*. The work argues that Colombia's political society – those people and institutions with control over the political decision making process – is the main culprit in hindering the establishment of full liberal democracy and facilitating a move away from the endemic political violence that plagues the country today. The thesis will look at three actors in the Colombian political society – political institutions, the military and the guerrillas – with regard to their roles in democratic transition and consolidation. Furthermore, the thesis will explore possible options for U.S. policy that could assist the Pastrana regime in stabilizing the democratic process in the country.

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. First, it seeks to explain Colombia's incomplete consolidation and its potential for democratic breakdown. The thesis focuses on how the political institutions, the military, and the guerrillas adapt and adjust to overcome the political challenges facing Colombia. Second, it attempts to review U.S. policy, and to make recommendations that would assist the Colombian government in stabilizing the democratic process in the country.

In Chapter II, the thesis examines the extent to which the Liberal and Conservative parties, and the National Front obstructed the development of political institutions in Colombia. That is, it evaluates how this closed two-party system impeded democratic consolidation. What was the impact of the National Front on democracy? What elements of this type of political arrangement contribute to breakdown? The chapter argues that Colombia's troubles with democratization began with the two-party system, deepened with the creation of the National Front, and finally reached a crisis point with the abolishment of the National Front.



Chapter III examines the role of the Colombian military. It explores current civil-military relations to determine whether or not the military has been a positive force in the democratization of the country. This chapter evaluates what influences have shaped the military, which has remained loyal to the democratic way of life.

Chapter IV considers the role played by the guerrillas in Colombian society. The chapter examines the negative impact of over forty years of internal conflict on democratization. Why has part of this disloyal opposition renounced disloyalty and joined the democratic process? Why have others chosen to remain outside the democratic process? The chapter analyzes two relatively new phenomena: the narco-guerrilla connection and the role of para-military units in Colombian society.

Finally, Chapter V offers some conclusions on the current status of democracy in Colombia. How is the Pastrana administration preparing to deal with the immense problems facing the nation? President Pastrana is enjoying an unprecedented level of high credibility and legitimacy, but he must coordinate a coherent national security strategy before the honeymoon is over. The thesis will also examine the implications of a non-democratic Colombia in the region. How would the success of guerrilla forces and drug cartels influence the democratic development of countries such as Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador? This chapter also looks at the role the United States can play in halting the downward spiral in which the Colombian nation finds itself. How can the U.S. avoid becoming an obstacle in the democratization process? The thesis argues this can be accomplished by helping to strengthen the judicial and legislative branches of government and sponsoring political institution building.

The argument that democracy in Colombia is at risk is nothing new to policymakers, scholars and regional experts of Latin American affairs. Linz, Stepan, La Rotta, Thoumi and others all have reached the same conclusion – that democracy in Colombia, barring major political, social, economic, and military reforms, is on the verge of collapse. There is ample evidence that high levels of corruption, domestic violence, institutional decline, and political disintegration in Colombian society are the principal motives for the “erosion of democracy.”<sup>1</sup> The erosion of the political elite’s legitimacy, efficacy, and effectiveness to govern has directly contributed to the increase in political violence and a weakening of the state. It is not new that Colombia needs to address significant problems within its political institutions in order to solidify its democratic gains, or that the country’s political society needs to develop a national strategy that would lead to the establishment of full democratization. Nor, that the strategy should include elements that would address the structural shortcomings of Colombia’s political institutions and assist in the consolidation of the state.

What is new in this work, is the discussion of the potential breakdown of democracy in Colombia within the framework of legitimacy, effectiveness and efficacy provided by Juan Linz, while specifically examining Colombia’s structural and non-structural problems. Using the above discussion as a departure point, we can confirm that the current Colombian regime is in the process of breakdown as a democratic institution. It may be, as John A. Peeler points out, that “we are witnessing a process of de-

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “Political Development and Political Decay.” *World Politics*, #27 Apr 1965, pp. 392-393.

consolidation, of slow-motion breakdown.”<sup>2</sup> However, some may argue, as does this thesis, that democratic consolidation never occurred. Although the basic tenets for consolidation – rules of the game, mass participation and political institutions – have been present, Colombia lacks the behavioral, attitudinal and constitutional requirements for full democratization. Colombia’s political elites, to use Linz’s words, have shown “a tendency to blame the accumulation of problems on neglect by a previous regime, rather than on the intractability of social reality.”<sup>3</sup>

Colombia’s structural problems, its political institutions, have hindered rather than promoted democratization. These institutions – Conservative and Liberal party – exercised a monopoly on the division of power in the political arena. This has resulted in the exclusion of other political actors, which have turned to the use of violence as a form of political expression.

The non-structural problems – the guerillas and the cartels – seek to destroy the democratic process through the exploitation of fissures within a weak state. Colombia’s problems with respect to the guerrillas and the cartels are twofold: 1) the threat to national security produced by the insurgency; and 2) the violent problems associated with the drug trade, which is a matter of internal national defense.

The breakdown of democracy in Colombia could affect democratic institutions throughout the area. This single event – a non-democratic Colombia – would alter the

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<sup>2</sup> John A. Peeler, “Elite Settlements and Democratic Consolidation: Colombia, Costa Rica and Venezuela,” in John Higley and Richard Gunther eds., *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 329.

<sup>3</sup> Juan J. Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 41.

balance of power in Latin America and significantly affect current U.S. policy in the region.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. OBJECTIVE

This thesis assesses the prospects for democracy in Colombia. In a single case study, it argues that Colombia is a democracy at risk. The work attempts to answer the following questions:

- Why, after four decades of democratic processes, has Colombia's political society failed to achieve full democratization?
- Is Colombia vulnerable to democratic breakdown?
- What possible policy actions could the United States explore that would assist in halting Colombia's downward democratic spiral?

### B. BACKGROUND

Colombia's democracy, one of Latin America's most enduring, is slowly dying. Colombia is not one of those nations identified in Huntington's *The Third Wave* as a relative newcomer to democracy; its longevity has been well documented.<sup>1</sup> This nation is the second oldest democracy in the Americas, tracing its democratic roots at least to the late 1840s.<sup>2</sup> Yet, today one can barely pick up a major daily newspaper or tune to a major broadcast news system, in the United States or Colombia, without hearing troubling references to this once heralded model of democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Ronald P. Archer, "Party Strength and Weakness in Colombia's Besieged Democracy," in Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully eds., *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p.164.

In order to stabilize the unrest in the country, former Colombian President Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) made the reduction of guerrillas in the field, criminals in the streets, and “mulas” transporting narcotics overseas a cornerstone of his *Plan de Salto Social* [Social Leap Plan].<sup>3</sup> However, by 1994 the Samper government was paralyzed by allegations of corruption and inefficiency, which led to the government’s inability to respond to the political and social difficulties challenging the nation. These circumstances aggravated the government’s inability to deal with social and political changes through the use of institutions that link the political élites with the masses. But the problems facing Colombia today are more complex and violent than those stated above, and they seem to be threatening the legitimacy of Colombia’s political institutions.

Ronald P. Archer states, “[t]hat democracy in Colombia is in trouble is beyond doubt.”<sup>4</sup> This Latin American country, the fourth largest in South America and populated by almost thirty-seven million people, is facing a myriad of severe social, economic and political problems. The magnitude of the challenge of coping with ever-increasing levels of social violence, civil disorder, corruption, narco-trafficking and insurgency is threatening the very fabric of civil and political society.

Colombia, since the 1940s, has earned its unfortunate reputation as one of the world’s most violent nations.<sup>5</sup> Its lack of rule of law and weak political society has hindered the full democratization of the country. The immediate consequence of a third

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<sup>3</sup> Ernesto P. Samper, “The Time of the People,” *Inauguration Address of the President* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1994), p. 3

<sup>4</sup> Ronald P. Archer, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Jorge P. Osterling, *Democracy in Colombia* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989), p. x.



reverse wave<sup>6</sup> of democracy originating in Colombia could be the threat to the “stability of those Latin American countries that are still in the process of reforming their obsolete political and economic systems and strengthening their democratic institutions.”<sup>7</sup> Opposition forces in countries like Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela could use Colombia’s democratic demise to reverse democracy in those countries. The breakdown of democracy in Colombia could affect democratic institutions throughout the area. This single event – a non-democratic Colombia – would alter the political balance in Latin America and significantly affect current U.S. policy in the region.

By the 1990s, Colombia was a country in political shambles. The impact of over forty years of guerrilla activity, coupled with the relative new phenomenon of narco-terrorism resulted in a significant threat to democratic stability in the country. The guerrillas and drug traffickers undermine the government’s effectiveness, efficacy and legitimacy. Juan Linz tells us that effectiveness is the government’s capacity to implement policies; efficacy, the government’s ability to find solutions; and legitimacy, the moral authority to rule the citizenship.<sup>8</sup> President Ernesto Samper’s (1994-1998) campaign accepted at least \$6 million in political donations from the drug cartels in 1994. The Executive Cabinet under Samper was in shambles due to corruption charges. Today, insurgents control 600 out of 1024 municipalities.<sup>9</sup> The Colombian military is waging a war on two fronts - against the guerrillas and the cartels. Though the armed forces do not

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<sup>6</sup> Huntington explains that a ‘reverse wave’ is when some of the countries transitioning to democracy return to an authoritarian form of government.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Raymond, “Latin America: Guerrilla Offensive Rekindle Militarism,” in FBIS [database on-line] (accessed 11 September 1997), identifier no. FBIS-TOT-97-001-L.

<sup>8</sup> Juan J. Linz, pp. 16-24.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Raymond, p. 6.

have a history of interfering with the government, there is a fear of an upsurge in militarism, due to the mounting frustration the military institution is experiencing in the field.

However, the election of Andrés Pastrana in June 1998 does offer new hope and a window of opportunity. The challenge now becomes to support democracy in such a volatile environment and to develop policies that will strengthen democratic institutions.

Despite four decades of democratic processes, Colombia's political society has yet to fully consolidate democracy. The lack of democratic consolidation exacerbates and accelerates Colombia's downward spiral and renders democracy vulnerable to breakdown. I contend that procedural democracy, as defined by Robert A. Dahl, is necessary but not sufficient for full democratization. The necessary and sufficient elements that would constitute full democratization are the behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional tenets posited by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan in *Problems of Democratic Transitions and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. The thesis argues that Colombia's political society – those people and institutions with control over the political decision making process – is the main culprit in hindering the establishment of full liberal democracy and facilitating a move away from the endemic political violence that plagues the country today.

The thesis will look at three actors in the Colombian political society – political institutions, the military and the guerrillas – with regard to their roles in democratic transition and consolidation. Furthermore, the thesis will explore possible options for

U.S. policy that could assist the Pastrana regime in stabilizing the democratic process in the country.

### C. TERMS AND THEORY

Before discussing the theoretical framework of this thesis it is necessary to define the terms used. What is meant by democracy? What are democratic transition, consolidation, and democratization? When are transition, consolidation, and democratization considered complete?

Theoretically, democracy is

that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.<sup>10</sup>

However, the above definition is too theoretical and this study requires a definition with an operational focus. Robert Dahl posits the most generally accepted operational definition of democracy. He states in *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy* that a "procedural minimum" democracy exists when the following conditions are present: 1) elected officials; 2) free and fair elections; 3) inclusive suffrage; 4) the right to run for office; 5) freedom of expression; 6) freedom of information; and 7) freedom of association.<sup>11</sup> Other authors such as Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry L. Karl (1993), Guillermo O'Donnell (1995), and Adam Przeworski (1992) seem to agree that these are the minimum conditions that must be present before a regime can be called democratic.

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1943), p. 269.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 11.

This minimum standard of democracy can be found in Colombian society today. It is the more difficult standard of 'mature democracy' that Colombia fails to meet. A 'mature democracy' is one in which the behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional framework constrain all actors from seeking an alternative, non-democratic form of government. The above definition of 'mature democracy' is a modification of Linz's and Stepan's work on democratic transition and consolidation. It is generally accepted that an authoritarian regime will pass through three stages before it can be called fully democratic. The stages are liberalization, transition, and consolidation. However, a fourth stage should be added to the process of transition: that of a mature democracy. Table 1.1 displays the four stages and the conditions that must be met before Colombia can be called a mature democracy.

**Table 1. 1. Stages of Democratization**

<b>Liberalization</b>	<b>Transition</b>	<b>Consolidation</b>	<b>Mature Democracy</b>
Reform/Break	Agreement on Procedures Government de Facto Authority State de Jure power	Rules of the Game Mass Participation Institutions	Behavioral Attitudinal Constitutional

Source: Author, adapted from Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 3-6.

The four conditions – liberalization, transition, consolidation, and mature democracy – do not necessarily occur in a sequential fashion, but rather may occur in a simultaneous manner, or overlap. For instance, in Colombia while the political élites were negotiating with the ruling Military Junta in 1957 (liberalization), the political parties were working on the establishment of the rules of the game (consolidation). These stages are ideal types, and some countries never reach mature democracy.

However it is the behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional ideals that secure the survival of democratic regimes and leave them less vulnerable to breakdown.

Breakdown usually occurs when an unsolvable structural or non-structural problem hinders a democratic regime from providing effective, efficacious and legitimate government. A structural problem refers to formational issues that deal with the procedural approach to the democratic formula. For example, the Colombian case is one in which a democracy, based on a two-party system, excludes other political actors. A non-structural problem deals with questions of relationship among the actors. In Colombia, the role played by the political élites and the guerrillas or the interaction between the cartels and the guerrillas are good examples of non-structural problems. These structural and non-structural problems obstruct the government's ability to exercise its authority by limiting its effectiveness, efficacy, and at times challenging its legitimacy.

Figure 1.1 on the next page depicts the sequence of events in Colombian history associated with the country's perpetual search for democratic consolidation. The figure identifies the three actors that will be discussed in this thesis – political institutions, the military, and the guerrillas. These actors could be loyal to the regime; believing that the current system of government is legitimate, as in the case of the Colombian military. The actors could also be disloyal to the government – rejecting the political formula, as in the case of the guerrillas. Or, they could be semi-loyal to the regime – agreeing with the system but rejecting the tactics, as in the case of political parties like *Unión Patriótica* [Patriotic Union] and *Acción Democrática M-19* [Democratic Action M-19].<sup>12</sup>

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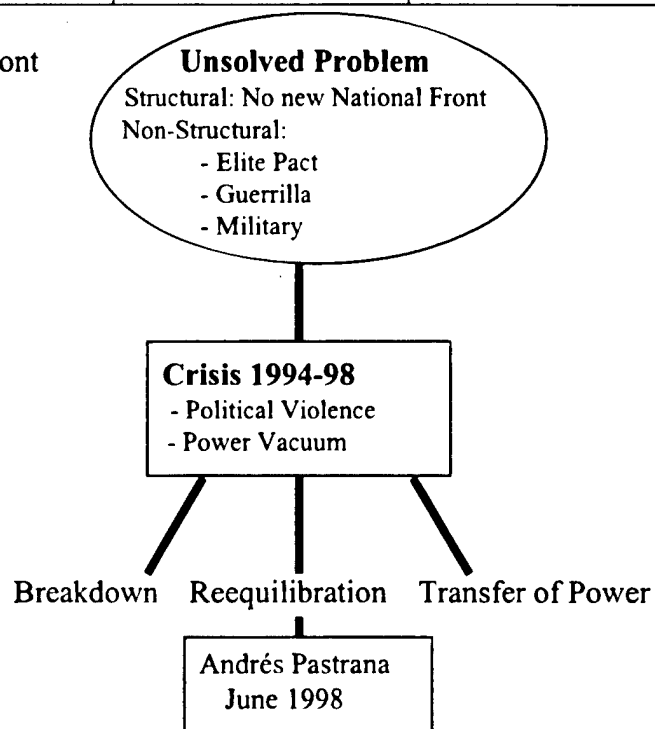
<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

Colombia's lack of democratic consolidation is due in part to the negative impact that the elite pact known as the National Front (NF) had on Colombian society, which is an indicator of a structural problem. That lack of consolidation is also due to the current guerrilla problem and role of the military, a non-structural problem. Each of these actors will be discussed in separate chapters, and exemplify an unsolved structural or non-structural problem in Colombia today, which hinders the development of behavioral, attitudinal and constitutional democratization.

<b>Liberalization</b>	<b>Transition</b>	<b>Consolidation</b>	<b>Democratization</b>
Reform/Break	Agreement on Procedures de Facto Authority/de Jure power of state	Rules of the Game Mass Participation Institutions	Behavioral Attitudinal Constitutional

General Rojas Pinillas  
Military Junta

National Front  
(1958-74)



**Figure 1.1. Colombia's Democratic Transition (1957-1998)**

Linz argues that a government's inability to solve structural or non-structural problems can lead to a crisis, which has three possible outcomes: 1) breakdown – the destabilization or overthrow of democracy; 2) transfer of power – the democratic leadership turns over power; or 3) reequilibration – the continued existence of democratic principles at the same or higher level.<sup>13</sup> In Colombia, a crisis occurred during the government of Ernesto Samper (1994-98). The government's loss of efficacy, efficiency, and legitimacy created a power vacuum in Colombia, which lasted until the completion of his term in August of 1998. The reequilibration period may have started with the election of Andrés Pastrana in June of 1998. However, it is too early to tell what impact the Pastrana government will have in solving Colombia's structural and non-structural problems, or how these will affect the new president's decision making process.

#### **D. METHODOLOGY AND IMPORTANCE**

This thesis is a single case study on the state of democracy in Colombia. It assesses Colombia's current democratization process and the prospect for democracy, applying the framework presented by Linz and Stepan. The country's incomplete consolidation makes it a risk-prone democratic regime. As long as political society fails to move towards full democratization, Colombian democracy will continue to seek reequilibration without ever consolidating.

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. First, it seeks to explain Colombia's incomplete consolidation and its potential for democratic breakdown. The thesis focuses on how the political institutions, the military, and the guerrillas adapt and adjust to

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<sup>13</sup> Juan J. Linz, pp. 50-87.

overcome the political challenges facing Colombia. Second, it attempts to review U.S. policy, and to make recommendations that would assist the Colombian government in stabilizing the democratic process in the country.

#### **E. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

In Chapter II, the thesis examines the extent to which the Liberal and Conservative parties, and the National Front obstructed the development of political institutions in Colombia. That is, it evaluates how this closed two-party system impeded democratic consolidation. What was the impact of the National Front on democracy? What elements of this type of political arrangement contribute to breakdown? The chapter argues that Colombia's troubles with democratization began with the two-party system, deepened with the creation of the National Front, and finally reached a crisis point with the abolishment of the National Front.

Chapter III examines the role of the Colombian military. It explores current civil-military relations to determine whether or not the military has been a positive force in the democratization of the country. This chapter evaluates what influences have shaped the military, which has remained loyal to the democratic way of life.

Chapter IV considers the role played by the guerrillas in Colombian society. The chapter examines the negative impact of over forty years of internal conflict on democratization. Why has part of this disloyal opposition renounced disloyalty and joined the democratic process? Why have others chosen to remain outside the democratic process? The chapter analyzes two relatively new phenomena: the narco-guerrilla connection and the role of para-military units in Colombian society.



Finally, Chapter V offers some conclusions on the current status of democracy in Colombia. How is the Pastrana administration preparing to deal with the immense problems facing the nation? President Pastrana is enjoying an unprecedented level of high credibility and legitimacy, but he must coordinate a coherent national security strategy before the honeymoon is over. The thesis will also examine the implications of a non-democratic Colombia in the region. How would the success of guerrilla forces and drug cartels influence the democratic development of countries such as Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador? This chapter also looks at the role the United States can play in halting the downward spiral in which the Colombian nation finds itself. How can the U.S. avoid becoming an obstacle in the democratization process? The thesis argues this can be accomplished by helping to strengthen the judicial and legislative branches of government and sponsoring political institution building.

#### **F. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

There exists considerable research on democratic transition and consolidation. The multiplicity of studies and approaches makes it difficult to arrive at a consensus. However, most of the studies focus on transition and consolidation, with few considering full democratization. When democratization is measured by behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional elements found in a society, it then becomes more difficult to call a country democratic. Those three factors require that no significant actor, within the country's social, political, or economic elite, believe that any other form of government is suitable

for their society.<sup>14</sup> The question becomes, what kind of democracy – liberal, procedural, electoral – that the United States policy should support. Another limitation of this study is its lack of statistical data, other than that found in the literature, which would add empirical depth of the study.

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<sup>14</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 6.

## II. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

### A. INTRODUCTION

Colombia has maintained the second longest uninterrupted democratic political process in Latin America. Except for a few months in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and four years in the 20<sup>th</sup>, this nation has always enjoyed some form of participatory government.<sup>15</sup> Yet, Colombian democracy historically has been under siege. As stated by Tina Rosenberg in her work *Children of Cain*, “[v]iewed from the outside Colombia today seems like a true democracy: no military coups since 1953; two parties competing for the presidency; peaceful transition between parties. But the political system looks different from within.”<sup>16</sup> It is a democracy plagued by violence, clientelism, and corruption, which even now, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, threatens the stability of the nation. Two civil wars have been fought in the country, *La Guerra de los Mil Días* (1899-1902) and *La Violencia* (1946-1950). The root cause for these conflicts was political – in the former Liberal revolts; and in the latter, Liberal insurgency and resistance. These civil wars are just two examples of Colombia’s violent political and cultural history. Since the late 1800s until the present, this nation’s democracy has been punctuated by periods of limited participation, repression, and violence.

For the purpose of this chapter, a regime is considered democratic if it meets the “minimum procedural” criteria established by Dahl, which was discussed, in Chapter I.

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<sup>15</sup> Jorge P. Osterling, p.xvi.

<sup>16</sup> Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 42.

In terms of institutions and processes, Colombia meets these minimal standards, in that it is a stable functioning democracy, governed by civilian presidents, elected by universal suffrage, with clearly defined civilian rule and civilian authority over the nation's military.<sup>17</sup>

However, due to Colombia's powerful and exclusive political institutions and the violence that plagues society, full democratization has yet to occur.

This chapter argues that Colombia's two-party system, with elections that until recently were controlled by a bureaucratic apparatus, with chronic fraud at the ballot box, and endemic violence, is hardly democratic. Furthermore, it argues that the failure of successive regimes, whether Liberal, Conservative or authoritarian, to consolidate the state, has significantly contributed to the nation's democratic decline.

## **B. LIMITED DEMOCRATIC TRADITION**

Some kind of Conservative or Liberal political party has been central to Colombia's political life for at least a century. In fact, the Liberal and Conservative political élites have been the central organizing mechanism of politics in Colombia since the emergence of the nation in the late nineteenth-century.

On the one hand, the Conservatives show a marked preference for a social and political order in which tradition and religion play paramount roles.<sup>18</sup> Those belonging to this group could be seen as espousing order and hierarchy. This party, which is

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<sup>17</sup> Jorge P. Osterling, p. ix.

<sup>18</sup> Robert H. Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 233.

traditionally middle-class and rural in orientation, advocates the status quo as it emerged from the colonial period. On the other hand, the Liberals are guided by a sense of reason.

They led in the promotion of secular and public education and regard change as desirable. They stress liberty and popular rule under a decentralized government. The Liberals do well with urbanites, and seek to do away with the remnants of social and economic dichotomy inherited from a colonial past. However, the Colombian political party scene is complicated, even today, by the fact that many powerful landowners are Liberals and many merchants and intellectuals are Conservatives. This political crossover breaks with the traditional Latin American Conservative-Liberal division.<sup>19</sup> The crossover occurs because the two parties have very similar institutional platforms and the differences between them were narrowed when the National Front was established.

If Robert D. Putnam is correct that "institutions shape politics,"<sup>20</sup> then the National Front is the structure that shaped Colombian political behavior from 1958 until 1974, when it was formally terminated, and beyond. The National Front, as an institution, was instrumental in limiting democratic development in Colombian politics. Its platform called for the alternation of power between the two political parties, and parity in the assignment of public service employment and appointments to the executive, legislative, and judicial bodies of government. This arrangement effectively reduced and even negated the need for competition between the two political parties, because they were guaranteed equal power in the administration of the nation. In essence, the National

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 235-245.

<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 7.

Front divided the spoils of office among the political ruling class at the exclusion of other political players.

Complicating the country's political landscape is that fact that this two-party system, which has been in existence since approximately 1850, enjoys strong attachments and loyalties from its followers. The Conservatives today seem to have significant political advantage given that the clergy and the military, two powerful allies, seem to have developed a strong affinity for this party. Historically, however, the political relationship between Colombia's Liberal and Conservative factions has been marked by periods of violent confrontation, which has paved the way for the paternalistic and clientelistic political relations that the country experiences today.

This two-party dominance of the Colombian political scene, according to Ronald P. Archer, has the greatest degree of institutional continuity in Latin America. This is largely due to the creation of the National Front (NF) in January 1958. Robert H. Dix argued, thirty-one years ago, that the combination of "patronage mobilization and traditional parties with weak organizational and representatorial structures is hardly unusual in Latin America."<sup>21</sup>

What are unusual and unique characteristics of the Colombian political experience are the roles and levels of institutionalization achieved by the political parties as a consequence of the National Front. The institutionalization of the National Front is the genesis of the current unsolved structural challenges in the Colombian political

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

landscape. For, in sum and substance, the National Front restricted the participation of any other political actor that sought to challenge the two traditional political powers.

### C. THE NATIONAL FRONT: 1958-1974 AND BEYOND

As early as 1869, agreements existed between the liberal and conservative political élite in which the two agreed to cooperate in adopting policies that assured the consolidation of democratic institutions. However, John Higley and Richard Gunther state that this type of élite settlement, which they term *élite pact*, only helps to stabilize the political environment, but does not produce the conditions for the establishment of consolidated democratic regimes.<sup>22</sup> In the Colombian case the élite pact translated into limited political democracy, since its complexity excluded the mass following of the respective parties and neglected the consolidation of the state. The creation of the National Front hindered the development of any political challenge posed by reformists; that is, armed revolution was the sole path available to challenge the political institution which catered to the Conservative and Liberal political élite. As Jonathan Hartlyn observed in his excellent work, *The Politics of Coalition Rule in Colombia*, “[u]nderlying the formation of guerrilla movements in Colombia in each decade was a sense of social justice and political blockage as a consequence of the National Front regime.”<sup>23</sup>

This élite pact responded to two threats in the Colombian political landscape of 1956: first, to the threat of mass mobilization, over which the élites had lost control and had turned to mass violence. Second, to the threat posed by the military government of

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<sup>22</sup> John Higley and Richard Gunther, *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Hartlyn, *The Politics of Coalition Rule in Colombia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 191.

General Rojas Pinillas as it attempted to displace the political parties and perpetuate an authoritarian regime.<sup>24</sup> The National Front, writes Robert H. Dix, “institutionalized the coalition of the nation’s two traditional warring political parties.”<sup>25</sup> Laureano Gomez, one of the principal originators of the National Front, writes in *El Frente Nacional* that “the National Front was born because the greatest enemy of a conservative is not a liberal (nor vice versa) but a dictator.”<sup>26</sup> Clearly, the creation of the National Front was a stopgap measure used to curtail the political violence that tore the nation apart during the period of “*La Violencia*,” from 1948 to 1958. This period that commenced with the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan on 9 April 1948 was the most violent in Colombia’s history. A strange mixture of political and social uprising exploded into a decade of terror in which the final tally was 200,000 dead.<sup>27</sup>

The priority for the National Front was to create political peace and establish some semblance of constitutional order. This, unfortunately, was accomplished at the expense of democratic, economic, and social development. Major General Jose Ibañez Sanchez wrote that the National Front was not fully democratic, because it excluded any political participation beyond the two traditional parties. This bipartisan monopoly

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<sup>24</sup> John A. Peeler, p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> Robert H. Dix, p. vii.

<sup>26</sup> Laureano Gomez, *El Frente Nacional: Sintesis Dictatorial e Historia* (Bogotá: Ediciones Laguram, 1958), p. 16, cited in Robert H. Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 164.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Hartlyn, p. 3.



weakened the control of the state and facilitated the development of clientilism and corruption.<sup>28</sup>

In essence, what the National Front provided was a vehicle through which the political elite could exercise dominance over the social and economic process, promoting their own interests while avoiding social unrest. The National Front assured the ruling regime a too loyal opposition.<sup>29</sup> By design, the National Front obviated political struggle in Colombia, attempted to educate Colombians in the art of political compromise, and created an atmosphere for acceptance of a legitimate opposition.<sup>30</sup> However, this social experiment created a system of government that represented the interests of the élites in the Conservative and Liberal factions. Third actors in the political process could only get on the official party list under the sponsorship of the two main parties. It also created a government with only limited power to influence anyone, because tenuous and fragile coalitions restricted the controlling faction's ability to govern.

If "institutions are shaped by history,"<sup>31</sup> then the National Front was no exception. Factionalism, prevalent in Colombian political culture, weakened the National Front's ability to function. Furthermore, the National Front fell short of accomplishing an ambitious economic reform plan centered on stability, growth and diversification, and regional development. In general, the National Front did little to develop channels for the

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<sup>28</sup> MAJGEN Jose Robert Ibañez Sanchez, *Democracia, Seguridad y Fuerza Pública: Panorama Conceptual Histórico y Legal de Colombia en el Contexto Latinoamericano* (Bogotá: Academia Colombiana de Historia, 1994) p. 209.

<sup>29</sup> Juan J. Linz describes the loyal opposition as being those political forces willing to support the 'rules of the game.' For a more detailed explanation see Linz, 1978, p. 36.

<sup>30</sup> Robert H. Dix, p. 131.

<sup>31</sup> Robert D. Putnam, p. 8.

expression of popular aspirations and to incorporate other social groups into positions of influence and leadership. The dismantling of the institution in 1974 paved the way for other political actors to enter the Colombian political scene. Nonetheless, entrenched party loyalties and the clientelistic nature of Colombian politics hampered the evolution of other political alternatives.

The collapse of the National Front in 1974 spurred competition among the political actors. Yet, because no single political party has been able or willing to capitalize on the mobilization of the middle class, this sector of society remains disconnected from the political process. This middle-class disconnect can be attributed to three factors: 1) lack of organizational efforts from new political parties; 2) massive migration from rural to urban centers; and 3) decrease in the level of political participation.<sup>32</sup> Even today, twenty-four years after the demise of the National Front, a strong argument could be made that even though the power sharing agreement between the political parties is extinct, the alternation of political power between Conservatives and Liberals remains in place. Table 2.1 below, which looks at elected presidents from 1974 to the present, demonstrates that even after 1974, the power sharing arrangement instituted between the two main political actors is the standard outcome of elections.

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<sup>32</sup>Alberto J. Mejia, "The Impact of U.S. De-Certification on Colombian Democracy," (Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1996), p. 61.

**Table 2.1. Colombia's Elected Presidents and Ruling Party, 1974-98**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Elected Presidents and Ruling Party</b>
1974-78	Alfonso Lopez Michelsen (Liberal)
1978-82	Julio Cesar Turbay (Liberal)
1982-86	Belisario Betancur (Conservative)
1986-90	Virgilio Barco (Liberal)
1990-94	Cesar Gaviria Trujillo (Liberal)
1994-98	Ernesto Samper (Liberal)
1998- Present	Andrés Pastrana (Conservative)

Dismantling the National Front revealed the growing rift between the issues and agendas of the political actors and the demands, concerns, and expectations of the country's populace.<sup>33</sup> The issues that the political élites have been unable to resolve are institutionalized violence, rampant corruption in government, and the drug Mafia. Furthermore, the removal of the National Front created an institutional void, in terms of electorate, education, and choice. Until this day, no other institution has filled that void. However, in 1978, when Colombia began to run distinct congressional and presidential elections, the influence of the National Front over the nation's politics began to recede.

Three factors in Colombia's political institutions contribute to the structural problem found in the country's political society: 1) entrenched party loyalties; 2) lack of voter education by the political élite; and 3) the inability of third parties to sustain growth in a closed system. These three factors permitted by Colombia's political élite, as a direct consequence of a pacted two-party political system, do not contribute to democratic consolidation and do facilitate breakdown. Because party loyalists tend to be staunch defenders of the party platform, uneducated voters have a tendency to practice electoralism, and a third party option is not viable.

Furthermore, as with most Latin American nations, interpersonal relations are still more important than formal political rules to the functioning of society. Consequently, Colombian politics are riddled with strong patron-client relations. Given that “the primary goal of a patronage network is to provide benefits to an electoral following,”<sup>34</sup> party leadership in Colombia remains personalistic. That is, people identify with a strong national leader who has supporters in their particular region. Hegemony is established by attacking the opposition’s power base and rewarding supporters. Major General José Robert Ibañez Sanchez in *Democracia, Seguridad y Fuerza Pública*, argues that the tendency to exercise political power in a personalistic fashion is embedded in the *caudillista* [strong man] traditions found throughout Latin America.<sup>35</sup> However, a more compelling argument is that this personalistic style of democracy is the result of the adoption of liberal democratic ideology and theory by a country whose historical, political, social, and economic reality did not permit the proper implementation or development of the model. In short, democracy arrived too quickly.

#### **D. DEMOCRACY...TOO FAST, TOO SOON**

Francisco E. Thoumi argues in *Economía, Política y Narcotráfico* that recent Colombian history is marked by the struggle between the old society and the formation of a new one.<sup>36</sup> Colombia’s colonial heritage, at the time of adoption of liberal democratic tenets, was one of strict hierarchical social structure, rule by legalistic decree and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>34</sup> Ronal P. Archer, p. 187.

<sup>35</sup> MGEN Jose Robert Ibañez Sanchez, p. 64.

<sup>36</sup> Francisco E. Thoumi, *Economía, Política y Narcotráfico* (Bogota: T/M Editores, 1994), p. 73.

Catholicism, which could not sustain the liberal Anglo-Saxon, Protestant ideals of rational administration. This nation was and is today, a Spanish culture in which the bonds of even extended family unity (*compadres, primos y amigos*) [godfather, cousins, and intimate friends] are more important than individual accomplishment found in liberal ideology. Additionally, the work ethic in Spanish culture is significantly different from the Anglo-Saxon Protestant work ethic. In Spanish culture, the immediate group is important, and bonding is a requirement. In negotiations, the process is more important than closing a deal. In contrast, the Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture is marked by individual and impersonal interaction and the closing of the deal is the goal.<sup>37</sup>

Politically, Colombia struggled because the dream of General Simon Bolivar, that of creating and unifying a *Gran Colombia*, vanished. This disintegration of the nation led to the fragmentation of the state and its inability to fortify democratic rule. In the context of a fragmented and weak state, Colombia's political society lacked the cohesion necessary to consolidate any liberal democratic gains. Lawrence Boudon and others argued that "Colombia historically has suffered the consequences of having a weak state, one that has been unable either to establish its legal authority and legitimacy throughout the entire national territory or to gain sufficient autonomy from sectoral interest."<sup>38</sup> The disunity among the political élite manifested itself in social conflict.

Socially and economically, the great *hacendados* [landowner] and urban élite contended for the acquisition of personal wealth and power. On the one hand, the great

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<sup>37</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *Latin America: At War With The Past* (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1985), pp. 9-20.

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Boudon, "Guerrilla and the State: The Role of the State in the Colombian Peace Process," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28 (May 1996): p. 288.

*latifundistas* [estate owner] or *hacendados* fought to protect and preserve their regional powers and traditional economic way of life. On the other hand, the urban élite wanted to move the country rapidly into an era of industrialization and thus centralize power in the greater metropolitan areas. Table 2.2 highlights the rapidity with which the shift occurred in the country wrought by rapid modernization. In less than twenty years, Colombian society, moved from being rural-based to urban-based due to the swift pace of modernization caused the by rapid industrial growth. However, this rapid industrialization growth was based on import substitution industrialization (ISI), which made economic growth increasingly dependent on direct foreign market fluctuations.

**Table 2.2. Colombian Economic Distribution (% by Sector)**

Year	Agriculture	Industry	Service Sector
1960	50.1	19.5	30.4
1980	34.3	23.5	42.2
1987	20.7	28.5	50.8

Source: Francisco Thoumi, *Economía, Política y Narcotráfico* (Santa Fe de Bogota: T/M Editores, 1994) pp.7-8; and *Colombia: A Country Study* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1990) p. 156.

The National Front did usher in a period of economic growth as showed in Table 2.3, especially during the 1967-1972 period. However, this economic growth allowed the political élites to forego making fundamental institutional changes that would have assisted in strengthening democratic institutions. Furthermore, other market and economic factors such as, a strong coffee market could have influenced the 6.03 percent annual growth in Gross Domestic Product during this period.

**Table 2.3. Colombian Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>GDP (%)</b>
1950-56	5.23
1956-67	4.57
1967-72	6.03
1973-75	2.30
1976-80	5.40
1981-89	3.20

Source: Francisco Thoumi, *Economía, Política y Narcotráfico*, Santa Fe de Bogota: T/M Editores, 1994, p.13-15.

Another indicator of the impact of rapid modernization on the Colombian social fabric was the improvement in the area of public education. Table 2.4 reveals over a 50 percent drop in the country's illiteracy rate in just twenty years. It was impossible for Colombia's socioeconomic structure to absorb the influx of the rising middle class, because the economic and political élites reaped most of the benefits.

**Table 2.4. Colombian Educational Indicators (%)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Illiteracy Rate</b>	<b>High School Graduates</b>	<b>University Graduates</b>
1960	27.1	11.9	01.8
1980	12.2	44.0	10.6

Source: Francisco Thoumi, *Economía, Política y Narcotráfico*, Santa Fe de Bogota: T/M Editores, 1994, p. 9.

Quality of life indicators are also a strong indicator of Colombia's rapid modernization and are summarized in Table 2.5. It was extremely difficult for the government to provide society with the minimum services needed to support its development. Rapid modernization resulted in the disenfranchisement of a whole sector of Colombian society.

**Table 2.5. Quality of Life Indicators (% of service to rural sector)**

Year	Water	Electricity	Sewage
1951	28.8	25.8	32.4
1985	69.7 (89.8)*	78.2 (95.0)	77.0 (93.6)

\* Availability of services for urban areas.

Source: Francisco Thoumi, *Economía, Política y Narcotráfico*, Santa Fe de Bogota: T/M Editores, 1994, p. 8.

From all the previous data, it is possible to surmise that Colombia's rapid rate of modernization did not facilitate the entrenchment of democratization. In fact, the early adaptation of liberal democratic principles, without modifying them to suit their own developmental reality, aided in the development of a dysfunctional democracy. That is why authors like Michael Burton, Richard Gunther, and John Higley argued, in 1992, that these factors often lead to nothing more than the establishment of *pseudo democracies*. Such democracies are characterized by political and economic elite domination, exploitation of the popular class and outright exclusion of certain political options.<sup>39</sup> Juan Gabriel Tokatlian supports this analysis in a more recent examination of democracy in Colombia. He concluded that Colombia's democracy is a non-liberal democracy – characterized by the lack of the rule of law, effective safeguards against the violation of fundamental rights, with no strict separation of powers, and on the border of collapse.<sup>40</sup>

Colombia's rapid modernization served to disrupt the social and political order, pitting the rural and urban elite in violent confrontation, and exhausting the resources of the state. Huntington discussed this 'modernization-violence' phenomenon some thirty

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<sup>39</sup> Higley and Gunther, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, "Colombia: Una Democracia Iliberal?" *El Tiempo*, 21 July 1998, sec. 1A, p. 17A.



years ago. He argued that rapid modernization tends to that produces violence and political disorder.<sup>41</sup> In Colombia, the political institutions developed under the National Front were overwhelmed by the demands of rapid modernization.

#### **E. DEMOCRATIC DEGRADATION**

One may wonder whether there is or has ever been democracy in Colombia. Jorge P. Osterling quotes the late Jaime Bateman (founder of the guerrilla group M-19) as stating that

it is paradoxical, brutally paradoxical that we should have to opt for war - the most authoritarian and least democratic procedure - in order to impose political pluralism and democracy.<sup>42</sup>

By the end of the 1970s, Colombia's political house was in shambles. The National Front, now a defunct institution, had created a political system that favored compromise over intrepid action. Linz cautioned that "in a democracy, leaders depend, particularly in a crisis, on the support of party organizations rather than on the electorate."<sup>43</sup> However, in Colombia, his caution had been disregarded in favor of a system that catered to a clientelistic relationship between the electorate and the political actors. Colombia faced what Samuel Huntington called political decay; a situation in which there is

an actual decline in the ability of the government to deal with change through the failure of institutions such as parties to provide effective links between the élites and the increasingly politicized masses. Since the

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<sup>41</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 39-47.

<sup>42</sup> Jorge P. Osterling, p. xv.

<sup>43</sup> Juan J. Linz, p. 53.

society lacks law, authority, cohesion, discipline, and consensus...in short, political institutions are weak and social forces strong.<sup>44</sup>

Legitimacy, as defined by Linz “is the belief that in spite of the shortcomings and failures, the existing political institutions are better than any others that might be established, and they therefore demand obedience.”<sup>45</sup> Colombia has had several governments of questionable legitimacy; such as, the government of General Rojas Pinillas (1953-1957) and the Military Junta (1957-1958). More recently the question of legitimacy manifested itself most strongly in the Ernesto Samper government (1994-1998). No Colombian presidency has been more under siege. The Samper government faced a serious crisis of legitimacy stemming from continuous guerrilla activity and the alleged financial contributions from the cartels to Samper’s political campaign. The government’s concern with the issue of legitimacy was so compelling that President Samper, during his 1994 inaugural address, recognized the pressing need to regain the state’s legitimate monopoly over its own armed forces. The Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas (FARC) [Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces] used the allegation to openly challenge the legitimacy of the Samper regime and his commitments to the narco-traffickers who financed his presidential campaign. Yadira Ferrer maintained that the FARC’s plan to block elections is a “clear indication of the guerrilla’s rejection of the peace initiatives proposed by President Samper, since FARC considers his government illegitimate.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “Political Development and Political Decay,” *World Politics* 27 (April 1965): 386-430.

<sup>45</sup> Juan J. Linz, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> Yadira Ferrer, “Guerrillas Threaten to Disrupt Colombia’s Elections,” *The Black World News*; available from <http://www.IPS.GlobalInfo;Internet>; accessed 8 August 1997.

Clearly, the political violence created by several groups of guerrilla forces operating in Colombia serves, as Linz would argue, as strong indicators of and contributing factors to democratic breakdown.

Effectiveness, another element of democracy according to Linz, is seen as the capacity of a government to implement the policies formulated and to achieve the desired results.<sup>47</sup> In a recent discussion group at the Naval Postgraduate School on 19 February 1998, Carlos Sereceres argued that the Colombian government not only lacks a national campaign strategy, but also lacks the central authority and national leadership to implement such a strategy, if one existed. Others like Jonathan Hartlyn and Lawrence Bouden posit that Colombia has traditionally lacked the ability to gain sufficient authority and legitimacy to implement government policy as a consequence of weak state cohesion. The Samper regime has failed to seek the consolidation of the state and develop the tools to implement Bogotá's policies.

The Samper government was also hindered by the continual turnover in the Executive Cabinet, highlighted with the 1997 resignations of the Communication Minister and the Minister for Mines and Energy, both under allegations of wrongdoing. Other resignations came from the Ambassador to Britain, after she accused the Samper regime of a loss of credibility, and from the Foreign Minister. These incidents, as well as the 1996 firing of the Army Chief of Staff for the Colombian Army and serious accusations of impropriety, can all be seen as indicators of the regime's lack of effectiveness. General Ricardo Emilio Cinfuentes' resignation was an especially severe

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<sup>47</sup> Juan J. Linz, p. 72.

blow to the administration, for this officer, highly regarded within the Colombian military establishment, is on record as stating that his conscience, his principles, and his convictions do not permit him to support the president of the republic.<sup>48</sup> These situations caused the Samper administration to focus on tangential problems rather than on the agenda items of the government.

Another yard stick used by Linz to measure the impact of a political system is efficacy:

the capacity of a regime to find solutions to the basic problems facing any political system that are perceived as more satisfactory than unsatisfactory by aware citizens.<sup>49</sup>

In the area of efficacy, the analysis of past Colombian regimes also reveals shortcomings. The nation continues to be in a state of virtual siege, which has lasted on and off for more than sixty years. The traditional use of violence to accomplish political goals seems imbedded in the political culture. Henry Raymond writes that “the policy of supporting the military when the government and civilian society are dangerously weak – in a country devastated by violent conflict – merely stimulates militarism and war.”<sup>50</sup>

## **F. CONCLUSION**

Colombian political institutions have hindered, rather than promoted, democratization of the nation. The current conflict is rooted in Colombia’s political past, which pits the nation against the consequences of rapid modernization. According to

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<sup>48</sup> Pablo Rodriguez, “Samper Crisis Widens, Top General Resigns, State of Emergency Extended,” Agence France Presse; LEXIS/NEXIS [database on line]; accessed 11 September 1997.

<sup>49</sup> Juan J. Linz, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> Henry Raymond, p. 3.

Archer, "The traditional parties are still divided and weakly organized and have shown little capacity to react to the changes in the political environment."<sup>51</sup> Colombia's two-party system is a reflection of the country's hierarchical social pattern; they provide a means of top-down control rather than effective political expression, which ultimately inhibits the consolidation of democracy.<sup>52</sup> The National Front served to institutionalize and consolidate the power of the political and economic elite. Although it did serve to usher in a political period relatively free from violence, its exclusionary nature sowed the seeds of current instability.

Colombia's democratic survival depends on its political *élite* consolidating the state and restructuring an exclusionary two-party system to constrict the social-political arena in which the disloyal opposition operates. This social-political fissure, which the Colombian disloyal opposition exploits, is the gap that exists between what civil society expects the government to deliver and that which the government provides. In order to fully consolidate democracy, Colombia must close the gap between those disenfranchised sectors of civil society and the political *élite*.

Putnam states that "good democratic government not only considers the demands of its citizenry (that is, is responsive), but also acts efficaciously upon these demands (that is, is effective)."<sup>53</sup> If this is true, then the current crisis condemns the process of democratic consolidation in Colombia to failure unless significant structural and non-structural modifications are carried out. Thus, until an equitable debate and dialogue are

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<sup>51</sup> Ronald P. Archer, p. 199.

<sup>52</sup> Robert H. Dix, p. 222.

<sup>53</sup> Putnam, p. 63.

established between the warring parties, one which addresses the political, social, and economic structural imbalances, the establishment of a cohesive democracy is unfeasible.

### III. THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY

"En Colombia, que es tierra de las cosas singulares,  
dan la paz los militares y los civiles dan guerra."  
Gregorio Gomez, *Sociología Política Colombiana*

#### A. INTRODUCTION

Colombian columnist Clara Nieto Ponce de Leon, writing in *El Espectador*, points out that "the military do not need a coup in order to exercise power; the government – more debilitated than ever – will give them free rein."<sup>54</sup> The government denies giving the military forces a free rein and has in fact reasserted its leadership in the handling of officers disgruntled over concessions to guerrilla groups in the peace process. There is no doubt that the armed forces enjoy the support of both the business and political sectors in the war to eradicate guerrilla violence and drug traffic. But, after four decades of fighting guerrillas, the armed forces are still in search of a national and military strategy, developed by the nation's civil and political leadership, which will bring a peaceful solution to the conflict.

This chapter will explore the current state of civil-military relations in Colombia. Its primary argument is that civil-military relations in Colombia have eroded sufficiently to be a source of concern to the political and military leadership of the nation, further exacerbating Colombia's delicate democratic situation. Secondly, as the internal security of the country becomes more tenuous, the military is gaining more prerogatives<sup>55</sup> as it focuses on internal security issues. The focusing of the military on internal roles and

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<sup>54</sup> Henry Raymond, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> In essence, the military is expanding its sphere of interest and influence in the Colombian political and civilian landscape. For a more comprehensive explanation on this issue see Alfred Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) Chap.7.

mission only precipitates the politicization of the military. Linz cautions against democratic governments losing control over their armed forces through politicization. Finally, it examines whether or not the continuation of the current level of political and criminal violence in the country is the catalyst that will drive the armed forces into a higher state of politicization – a dangerous proposition for democracy.

The chapter will focus on how the roles played by the National Front, the political regime, U.S. military aid, and budgetary restrictions have contributed to heightening the tension between civilian and military actors in the Colombian political scene. It will also examine other significant factors, such as the continuous decay of the country's political élite, the military's lackluster performance against the guerrilla threat, and the role played by the United States as an external actor. It will conclude with an appraisal of and recommendations for halting the deterioration of civil-military relations in Colombia.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the Colombian military overthrew a constitutionally chosen president on four occasions: 1830, 1854, 1900, and 1953. For Latin America, an area plagued by military coups and military junta types of government, this speaks highly of the Colombian armed forces and the control exercised by the political authorities over them. Costa Rica is the only country, of thirty-four in the region, that has not been ruled by an authoritarian regime. The Colombian anomaly could be a direct result of a "semiconscious policy by the Colombian upper class to keep the military in its place and prevent any challenge to civilian rule."<sup>56</sup> Today, civil-military relations in Colombia, although shifting negatively, have not reached the point

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<sup>56</sup> Robert H. Dix, p. 295.



were they are in crisis and the military could be considered a threat to the democratic process. This chapter argues that in Colombia, the military remains loyal and could be a positive force in the full democratization of the country.

#### **B. CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS: *AYER Y HOY***

Although it is possible to analyze civil-military relations in Colombia using the Linz parameters of effectiveness and efficacy, Alfred Stepan provides an even better framework. In his work, *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone*, Stepan establishes a matrix of eleven prerogatives that serve as excellent indicators of civil-military relations in any country. The lower the military scores on these prerogatives, the greater the civilian control. The higher the military prerogatives, the lower the civilian control.<sup>57</sup> Linz, Stepan, Huntington, and others seem to agree that as civilian control of the military diminishes, so do the prospects to establish full democracy.

Table 3.1 depicts how civil-military relations have evolved in Colombia. The periods represented were chosen because they are significant in Colombian political history and they impact civil-military relations. These periods are – the Gen. Gustavo Rojas Pinilla and Military Junta regime (1953-1958); the 1958 to 1974 era of the National Front; the implementation of the 1991 Constitution and the establishment of a Ministry of Defense (MOD) in the same year; and the 1998 election of President Andres Pastrana.

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<sup>57</sup> Alfred Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), Chapter 7.

**Table 3.1. Military Prerogatives: The Colombian Case**

Prerogatives	1953-1957	1958-1974	1991	1998
1. Constitutionally sanctioned independent military in political system	High	Moderate	Low	Low
2. Military relationship to the Chief Executive	High	Moderate	Low	Low
3. Coordination of Defense Sector	High	High	Moderate	Low
4. Active-duty participation in the Cabinet	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low
5. Role of Legislature	High	High	Moderate	Moderate
6. Role of senior career civil servants or civilian political appointees	High	High	Moderate	Low
7. Role in intelligence	NA	High	Moderate	Moderate
8. Role in police	High	High	Moderate	High
9. Role in military promotions	High	High	Moderate	Moderate
10. Role in state enterprises	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate
11. Role in legal system	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low

Source: Author's assessment, based on Alfred Stepan. *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 95-99.

Military political power, in Colombia, reached its apogee with the government of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957). As the political élite began to recognize Rojas Pinilla's attempt to build a political base through the military's use of a "pueblo-armed forces alliance," they felt politically threatened.<sup>58</sup> This single factor, the political elite's desire to protect their exclusive domain over government, led to the creation of the National Front and the gradual erosion of military prerogatives. As Table 3.1 shows, military prerogatives were high before the establishment of this elite pact, which is usually the case under an authoritarian regime. The establishment of the National Front, which also marked the return to civilian government, moderately reduced the military's

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<sup>58</sup> Gonzalo Sanchez, "The Violence: An interpretative Synthesis," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda and Gonzalo Sanchez eds., *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1992), p. 108.

prerogatives and its sphere of influence, thus commencing the return of the military to civilian control. Under the National Front, only six of the prerogatives were high, the rest were moderate. By 1991, none of the military prerogatives were high; eight are moderate and three are low. By 1998, four of those military prerogatives had moved from moderate to low, but two had moved in the opposite direction (one from low to moderate, and one from moderate to high). Although the prerogatives have not been weighted, one can argue that over the last forty-five years, military prerogatives in Colombia have declined substantially over time. The most problematic prerogative in 1998 is that of the military's role in law enforcement, which remains high.

Four variables have shaped civil-military relations in Colombia today. First, as Table 3.1 depicts, was the creation of the National Front, which sought to protect the interest and power of the political elite. Second, was the impact of the 1991 Constitution. Third, was the establishment of a ministry of defense in 1991, which in time became responsible for coordinating the activities of the defense sector. The last variable was the attitudinal shift that occurred under the embattled Presidency of Ernesto Samper.

### **C. THE MILITARY: TRANSITION OR TURMOIL**

While the Congress and the Executive have done little or nothing to address the current state of the nation, the Colombian Armed Forces have served the country's political forces faithfully and professionally for over 60 years. Even today, as Colombia is experiencing an undeclared internal war on two fronts – the guerrilla movements and the well organized drug cartels – the military remains supportive and loyal to the regime.

However, Richard Maulin in 1973 wrote that “[t]he professionalism of the military has not kept them out of politics. Rather it has given the armed forces a strategic political good – the capacity to influence fundamentally the outcome of internal political conflict which – the contenders seek to diminish.”<sup>59</sup> This internal conflict is generated by the onslaught of violence, both political and criminal, produced by the guerilla forces, the drug cartels, and the paramilitary forces which seem to operate unchecked in the country.

The guerrilla problem is a national security issue. Colombia’s Left has often sought violent confrontation as a solution to social, economic and political problems. The Left has sought to weaken the state by undermining one of its basic functions, that of providing security.<sup>60</sup> This course of action by the guerrillas required the state to address social, political, and economic disenchantment through political and military solutions. At the same time, the drug cartel and paramilitary problem is a conflict of internal security. This conflict will only be solved by strengthening the rule of law and those sectors of political society (the police and judiciary system) responsible for internal security.

Nevertheless, in Colombia as in other countries in Latin America, the military plays an important role in the maintenance of internal order. This role of guardians of internal order has been one of several factors in the shift of civil-military relations in

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<sup>59</sup> Richard Maulin, *Soldiers, Guerrillas and Politics in Colombia* (Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1973), p. 113.

<sup>60</sup> Francisco E. Thoumi, p. xix.

Colombia, since, according to Wendy Hunter “strong civilian control is difficult to sustain when the armed forces are oriented mainly toward internal conflict.”<sup>61</sup>

It is not uncommon in Latin American countries for the armed forces to be involved, to one degree or another, in arenas that do not necessarily deal with defense. Argentina and Chile provide good examples; in the former it is maritime transportation, while in the latter it is mining. Military involvement in non-defense activities enables them to generate funding to augment their operational budget.

Table 3.2 reflects the degree to which the Colombian military is involved in the internal matters of the country. This high level of engagement diverts the military from its primary constitutional role. This involvement is one of the most significant factors detracting the military from achieving full operational control of the guerrilla situation.

**Table 3.2. Colombian Armed Forces Operational Commitments (per personnel)**

Sector	Army	Navy	Air Force	Total	(%)
Hydrocarbons	18,617	1,192		19,809	13.7
Energy	4,283	72		4,355	3.0
Communications	900	79	76	1,775	1.2
Transportation	5,855		21	5,876	4.0
Mining	1,920	300		2,220	1.5
Aerospace	1,854		73	1,927	1.3
Operations	60,394	10,509	2,058	72,961	50.5
Service	28,140	2,807	5,189	36,136	25.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>121,963</b>	<b>14,959</b>	<b>7,417</b>	<b>144,339</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: José Luis Cadena Montenegro, “Eficiencia del Ejército de Colombia: Hipotesis Económicas y Políticas” (Master’s Thesis, Universidad de los Andes, 1998) p. 129.

Half of the total force is dedicated to military operations, and half is dedicated to activities related to civil or political enterprises. Non-defense activities generate an

<sup>61</sup> Wendy Hunter, *State and Soldier in Latin America: Redefining the Military's Role in Argentina, Brazil and Chile* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1996), p. vii.

independent source of funding, which is usually used to augment operational and maintenance budgets of each service. These funds are used by the services to alleviate the limitations caused by the reduction in funding at the national level. With half of the armed forces engaged in non-defense related activities, the government's ability to project and use force is diminished. Furthermore, these income-producing activities generate a degree of autonomy, which impacts the balance of civil-military relations.

The dispersion and misuse of the armed forces, as an institution, contributes to the shift in civil-military relations in the country. Because the military is used to providing services that other institutions of the state should provide, governmental institutions are weakened and the consolidation of the state stifled. This circumstance, not only contributes to the politicization of the military by the incumbent government, it also squanders the military's combat power. This is a military confronting its greatest challenge – that of providing the regime with the needed leverage to negotiate a settlement – and it's hampered not only by operational failures, but by commitments that should be fulfilled by other sectors of society; in this case, by the business or entrepreneurial sector.

#### **D. POLITICAL SOCIETY**

Robert H. Dix discusses a wide range of factors in explaining Colombia's armed forces political behavior in *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change*. The one variable he fails to fully explore is the role of political society. That is, the exclusionary role-played by the National Front in Colombian politics. This unique institutional arrangement was able to effectively block the politicization of the military by excluding

them and many other groups from the political process. The architects of the National Front understood the danger posed to the democratic regime if the military was allowed to stay in politics after the authoritarian rule of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957) and the transitional government of the Military Junta that governed between 1957 and 1958. The creation of this élite pact between Conservatives and Liberals prevented the military, as an institution, from displacing the political parties and perpetuating an authoritarian regime. In essence, the political élites co-opted the military. This co-optation of the military by the civilian élite granted military officers broad privileges and virtual autonomy over military matters.<sup>62</sup>

This type of civilian control is what Huntington would call subjective civilian control. Subjective civilian control is characterized by civilian groups maximizing their power by controlling or regulating the activities of the military; thus, minimizing the military's influence in politics. Through what in essence becomes the "buying off" of the military, the civilian political élite gains control of the military. Huntington argues that the type of civilian control that optimizes civil-military relations is objective civilian control – civilian control achieved by the professionalization of the officer corps.<sup>63</sup> In the Colombian case, two types of subjective civilian control are used – civilian control by governmental institution until 1974 and control by Constitutional form after 1991.

From the late 1950s until 1974 the National Front, as a governmental institution, was crucial to harmonizing Colombian politics. In essence, this institution served as an

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<sup>62</sup> John Otis, "Colombian Army Stuck in Quagmire Against Insurgency," The Houston Chronicle Publishing Company; LEXIS/NEXIS [database on line]; accessed 20 February 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 80-83.

arbiter between the Conservative and Liberal political elite, thus negating the need for the military to interfere in the political scene, as happened in so many other Latin American countries. Constitutional control was achieved through the Colombian Constitution of 1991, which defines the constitutional roles and mission of the military in terms of security and defense. Until this constitution was written, the role of the military had been clearly defined in the *Código Militar Del General Santander*, which stated that the fundamental mission of the Armed forces was to: “defend the national independence; maintain public order; and uphold the constitution and national laws.”<sup>64</sup>

The 1991 Constitution redefined the role of the military in articles II, III, IV and XXC. These articles have been interpreted by the military to imply that the armed forces will: (1) defend Colombian sovereignty; (2) protect and defend Colombian citizens; (3) participate in the protection of natural resources; and (4) execute the state’s monopoly in the use of force.<sup>65</sup> The current constitution has assisted in casting the military in a role that focuses on issues of internal security, thus, perpetuating the military’s role in protecting internal order.

This fundamental departure from the *Código Militar* tasking of maintaining internal public order – a role more appropriate for security forces – to maintaining internal security, implying the protection from internal threats to the regime, is significant because it grants the military a greater sphere of influence.

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<sup>64</sup> MGEN Jose Roberto Ibañez Sanchez, p. 159.

<sup>65</sup> José Luis Cadena Montenegro, “Eficiencia del Ejército de Colombia: Hipotesis Económicas y Políticas” (Master’s Thesis, Universidad de los Andes, 1998), pp.80-83.



According to Wendy Hunter, military participation in civic and developmental roles contribute to create a positive image for the military, but it undermines the development of civilian institutions and contributes to a greater military role in government.<sup>66</sup> In Colombia, the military's involvement with civic and developmental programs in the country, has served to improve the image of the military. However, an expanded involvement in these activities undermines the Colombian government in terms of efficacy and efficiency.<sup>67</sup> This could lead to erosion of civil-military relations, as civil society would perceive the regime as being unable to meet, through the use of civil institutions, the social, economic, and security objectives of the population.

One can conclude that as the violence in Colombia increases and the military is called upon to participate in missions to protect internal order, the armed forces will gain more prerogatives and democratic institutions will continue to weaken.

#### **E. THE UNITED STATES VARIABLE**

Other factors that play a significant role in the current state of civil-military relations in Colombia are military professionalism and the reluctance of the political élite to sponsor military solutions to domestic problems. Both of these are to some degree influenced by early U.S. participation in Colombian military and political culture, and require examination.

Before U.S. military assistance commenced in the early 1940's, the Colombian armed forces were mainly organized civil militias. These militias were loyal to strong

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<sup>66</sup> Wendy Hunter, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> For a more in depth explanation see Juan J. Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

regional caudillos, which used the force to support a particular political party or to serve as private armies. Military reform between 1924 and 1941 was conducted under the guidance of Swiss and German military missions, and focused on themes of reorganization and education, but without much success.<sup>68</sup> The professionalization of the Colombian armed forces started in earnest when the government of Eduardo Santos (1938-1942) accepted the first U.S. military training teams. Edwin Lieuwen points out that this *acercamiento* [rapprochement] between both nations' militaries helped to professionalize the Colombian military in two ways. First, it provided an influx of U.S. military aid. Second, it allowed for the later participation of a Colombian battalion in the Korea conflict, which stimulated the army's sense of nationalism and gave it a sense of mission.<sup>69</sup>

Colombia has been an active recipient of U.S. military aid, in its various forms – Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Deployment for Training (DFT), Military Training Teams (MTT) and International Military Education and Training (IMET) – since the late 1940s. The amount of aid increased in the late 1980s, as the United States heightened its focus on counter-drug operations and identified Colombia as a Tier I country.<sup>70</sup> However, the amount of direct military aid to the Colombian armed forces is currently severely limited. For example, in fiscal year 1997 the amount of U.S. aid received by the Colombian military was only \$13 million dollars; roughly 11 percent of the total \$199 million dollars

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<sup>68</sup> MGEN Jose Ibañez Sanchez, pp. 174-179.

<sup>69</sup> Edwin Lieuwen, *Arms and Politics in Latin America* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1960), p. 27, cited in Robert H. Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 299.

<sup>70</sup> Tier I countries are those countries that are considered highly critical to the success of U.S. counter-drug strategy – Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador.

in anti-narcotics money contributed by the United States to Colombia during the fiscal year.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, U.S. aid is restricted to units directly involved in counter-drug operations and can not, by U.S. statute, be used for other types of operations.

Nevertheless, U.S. economic contributions, military-to-military contacts and professional education initiatives do not guarantee that the Colombian military will abstain from interfering in politics. For instance, the Brazilian experience with the return of its military from the European theater in World War II argues that professionalization and U.S. military aid is not sufficient to prevent the military from participating in politics. In the Brazilian case, the increase in the professionalism of the armed forces caused by their participation in the European theater of operations seemed to have precipitated the institution taking part in government. Alfred Stepan argues in *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil*, that officers that participated as members of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force developed unique political attitudes and beliefs that other officers of the military, and Brazilian society in general did not share.<sup>72</sup> Brazil's close military ties with the United States, in which the latter provided significant education, financial aid, and training to Brazilian officers, played a significant role in the military's involvement with politics.

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas T. Vogel, Jr. and Thomas E. Ricks, "Colombian Army Loses Ground in Drug War: Fight Against Guerrillas is Hampered by Charges of Human Rights Violations," *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 June 1998, 8A.

<sup>72</sup> Alfred Stepan, *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 236-247.

The U.S. de-certification of Colombia seems to indicate that other factors, in addition to military aid, need to be present to increase the professionalism of the armed forces. These factors include, but are not limited to a comprehensive national security strategy and national defense plan developed by civilian authorities, which contribute to the establishment of clear roles and missions for the armed forces. It could be argued that U.S. de-certification does not reflect direct censure of Colombia's Armed Forces, but a critique of the Colombian government's ineffectiveness in supporting U.S. national counter-drug strategy. However, de-certification does highlight the armed forces' inability to disrupt the guerrilla-narco connection, which speaks to the military's operational ability, due in part to the inability of the Colombian political élite to establish a national strategy.

Twenty-five years ago, Richard Maulin stated that U.S. military aid served two objectives: first, to raise the military's effectiveness in counter-insurgency operations and internal security missions; and secondly, to promote the military's contribution to social and economic progress. The performance of the military to date has fallen short in both areas.

#### **F. THE INTERNAL CONFLICT**

Today the insurgency problem continues to plague Colombia, and social and economic problems seem even more acute. Antonio Caballero, writing in *Semana*, directly blames the military for the increase in subversive acts in the country. He wrote,

They [the military] are in fact the principal cause for the increase. For decades Colombia's government has given the military a free hand to put an end to subversion and the subversion has merely increased.<sup>73</sup>

Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil have had to confront guerrilla threats.

However,

the repression of the Colombian left and the magnitude of its losses [over 30,000 left wing militants, activist and sympathizers killed] are unparalleled in modern Latin American history.<sup>74</sup>

The argument could be made that the guerrillas in Peru, Argentina, and Brazil operated in a different era and under a different type of regime. Nonetheless, in all cases the military had to focus internally, which produced dire institutional consequences – mainly their active politicization.

The proposition that a military with open-ended and ambiguous internal responsibilities leads to the weakening of societal institutions holds true, regardless of the era or regime type. Use of the armed forces in other countries in Latin America has already demonstrated that the dependence on the military for the maintenance of internal order is damaging to political and civil society. The internal orientation of the Colombian military has contributed to create a negative image of the armed forces. A poll conducted by *El Tiempo* in 1997, found that 41 percent of those questioned had a negative opinion of the military and 57 percent believed the armed forces were on the defensive.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Henry Raymond, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Jorge G. Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p.116.

<sup>75</sup> *El Tiempo*, 31 August 1997 cited in Jose Luis Cadena Montenegro, "Eficiencia del Ejército de Colombia: Hipótesis Económicas y Políticas" (Master's Thesis, Universidad de los Andes, 1998), pp 176-180.

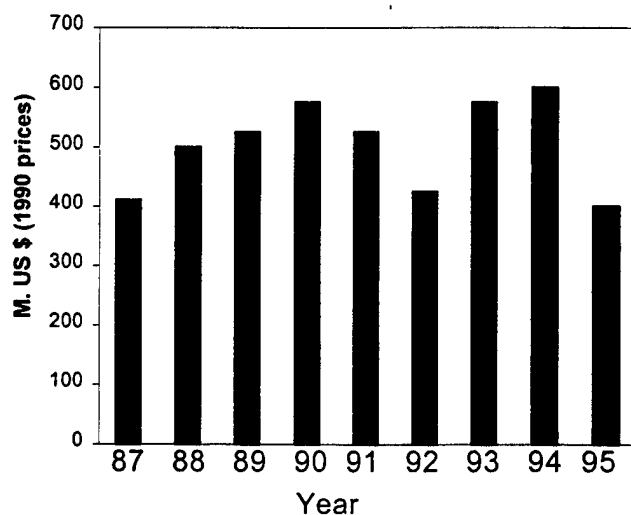
Furthermore, by the late 1980s, it was obvious that the Colombian military had failed to gain control over both the subversive forces and the drug cartels.

The military's involvement with and limited success in curtailing the guerrilla violence has an impact on civil-military relations for three reasons. First, there is the inability of the Colombian government to postulate a clear national security strategy, with the appropriate political and military components. Second, the civilians are less trusting of the military's ability to actively pursue operational prerogatives. Finally, civil society perceives that the military is unable to meet the security objectives of the population. These three factors combine to deprive the government of much needed leverage to curtail the opposition's operations and has led to the erosion in civil-military relations. Another factor that has had a negative impact on civil-military relations in Colombia is the severe reduction the armed forces have experienced in defense spending.

An examination of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database on Colombia's military spending from 1986 to 1995 indicates that based on military expenditure, operational readiness is not on the rise for the Colombian military. The operating budget for the Colombian armed forces has decline since 1993. The budget was 525 million dollars in 1993, 600 million in 1994, and 400 million dollars in 1995.<sup>76</sup> In 1995, this translated to 3.4 percent of the country's gross internal product or approximately five hundred dollars per service member.

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<sup>76</sup> SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, "Columbia, Military Spending 1986-96," available from [www.sipri.se/projects/milex/expenditure/Colombia.html](http://www.sipri.se/projects/milex/expenditure/Colombia.html); Internet; accessed 8 September 1998.



SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, "Colombia, Spending 1986-96."

**Figure 3.1. Colombia, Military Expenditure 1987-96**

Budgetary reductions incurred by the armed forces have made them non-combat effective, which threatens the institution's ethos - its professionalism. In interviews conducted by José Luis Cadena Montenegro, senior level army officers highlight how budgetary constraints have hindered field operations.<sup>77</sup> While the military's budget has been reduced, the guerrilla forces have considerable amounts of monies and sophisticated equipment to draw on, which may lead to disaster.

Table 3.3 shows that by 1997 defense expenditure had increased to 5.0 percent of the national budget. However, this figure represents only 2.9 percent of the gross internal product. This increase only ranks Colombia sixth in national defense expenditure among selected countries in the region. This relative low expenditure in security does not

<sup>77</sup> José Luis Cadena Montenegro, pp. 157-168.

translate into operational victories in the field and as stated above, is one of the main reasons cited by military leaders for their operational failures.

**Table 3.3. Percentage of National Budget Spent on National Defense, 1997**

Country	%
Peru	38.6
El Salvador	18.5
Guatemala	13.9
Venezuela	13.6
Ecuador	13.6
Colombia	05.0
Cuba	02.7
Brazil	01.9

Source: Jose Luis Cadena Montenegro, "Eficiencia del Ejército de Colombia: Hipótesis Económicas y Políticas" (Master's Thesis, Universidad de los Andes, 1998) p. 129.

Table 3.4 reflects that with the 1995 operating budget the Colombian armed forces end strength was only 160,193 on active duty. The Colombian Army comprises 81.8 percent of the total force and is in most instances its the primary operating force. The Colombian Navy and Air Force, 11 percent and 7 percent respectively, compose the remainder of the force. Officers are usually drawn from the middle class and all must be graduates of one of the service academies. The enlisted population is composed of conscripts drawn from the eligible population.

**Table 3.4. Colombia's Active Duty Force Distribution (1995)**

Service	Personnel on Active Duty (in hundreds)
Army	131,114
Navy	17,893
Air Force	11,186
Total	160,193

Source: Jose Luis Cadena Montenegro, "Eficiencia del Ejército de Colombia: Hipótesis Económicas y Políticas" (Master's Thesis, Universidad de los Andes, (1998) p. 129.



However, Colombia's middle and upper class generally does not send its sons to combat. The majority of its forces are composed of conscripts that serve for periods of 12 or 18 months, depending on the conscript's education level. In fact, a formal two-tier draft system is in place. One tier is composed of those conscripts that have high school education. These are usually urban middle class conscripts that serve in jobs ranging from menial labor (stewards, drivers, etc.) to simple administrative positions for a period of eighteen months. They are usually assigned to safe metropolitan garrison jobs. Given that the local units conduct military training (instead of one basic training center), many of these recruits return home after the training day is over. Thus, the conscript is never far removed from his family support group. They rarely, if ever, see duty in the designated combat zones.

The other tier is composed of those conscripts with a minimum education that are usually assigned to combat duty for a period of twelve months. These are usually rural and lower class conscripts of low educational backgrounds (6th grade) that serve their tour of duty in combat arms specialties – mostly infantry. The upshot of the two tier system is that the conflict has yet to directly touch the sons of the middle and upper classes.

#### **G. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The analysis of civil-military relations in Colombia reflect a "pattern of control in which civilians respect military autonomy over operational matters in exchange for

voluntary military subordination to civilian authority on other matters.”<sup>78</sup> The pattern is experiencing severe strain. The civilian élites’ use of subjective civilian control, which originated with the creation of the National Front, has been successful in co-opting and politicizing the armed forces. However, it is no longer effective in dealing with Colombia’s current political challenges. The Andrés Pastrana government could assist in developing initiatives that would solidify civil-military relations in Colombia, moving them closer to an objective civilian control model.

### **1. The Political Society Initiative**

The state could start by clearly elaborating a set of roles and missions that delineate the function of the armed forces. It is the responsibility of the political élite to draw precise parameters and activities for the military in accordance with and in support of the Colombian constitution. Initial steps have been taken to provide clear guidance to the military by the new Minister of Defense, Gilberto Echeverri Mejia. His *Proyecto de Ley de Seguridad y Defensa Nacional* establishes four pillars for an effective national security and defense strategy – respect for human rights, solidarity, unity, and planning.<sup>79</sup> This will be the first time since 1968 that civilian authority attempted to codify the role of the security forces in the country. The commission that assisted in drafting the new law felt that:

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<sup>78</sup> Don M. Snider and Miranda A. Carlton-Carew, “The Current State of U.S. Civil-Military Relations: An Introduction,” in Don M. Snider and Miranda A. Carlton-Carew eds., *U.S. Civil-Military Relations: In Crisis or Transition?* (Washington D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1995), p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> Gilberto Echeverri Mejia, *Proyecto de Ley de Seguridad y Defensa Nacional* (Bogotá: Imprenta y Publicaciones de las Fuerzas Militares, 1997), pp. 20-46.

we cannot continue acting to exclusively solve short term problems. The dispersion of our resources and the constant changing of our goals bring to a stand still all efforts of the state.<sup>80</sup>

This law, although charting a course, falls short of establishing a clear end-state and apportioning the necessary resources to meet Colombia's security needs. Policy without a budget is not policy at all. In a highly legalistic society it is just more political rhetoric. If the government chooses to direct the full attention of its 'monopoly on the use of force' to solve the current crisis, then it should adopt a national policy that would accomplish its mission. Colombia can accomplish this mission if it first develops, then implements a clear national strategy and dedicates the resources to realize such a strategy.

This national security policy should contain at least two factors. First, it must include the political will of the current regime to re-claim its legitimacy throughout the nation. In short, the current regime needs a strategy that consolidates of the state. This can be accomplished if the state provides the services it is supposed to provide. Second, the military must take the fight to the enemy and win to make it more costly for the insurgents, and to gain the leverage needed by the political elite.

## **2. The Military Initiative**

The Colombian military must take an offensive role and change the perception that the guerrillas are winning the war. The military must shed its garrison mentality, re-orient its combat power to the affected zones, and overcome the psychological paralysis inflicted by media and human rights groups. It must institute policies that promote unit cohesion and combat effectiveness. It should end the formal two-tier conscription policy

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-12.

and move towards an all-volunteer force. This would initially be more costly, but it would help develop a more professional force. Furthermore, recruit training should be centralized to standardize initial training objectives and follow-on assignments should be made on merit, not social standing. As part of a restructuring regimen, the military should remove itself from commitments in areas unrelated to national security. Removing the military from non-defense related activities could increase warfighting capabilities of the Colombian armed forces up to 50 percent. Additionally, higher combatant and supporting headquarters elements (Division and below) must deploy away from the safety of their garrisons and position themselves where they can influence the action. And lastly, but critical to the military's operational success, is that communications, intelligence, and the mobility infrastructure must be significantly enhanced.

In summary, the armed forces in Colombia support the political system and are under firm governmental control. The military is not in a position to act as a main protagonist in any move to stifle the continual development of democratic institutions. Yet, *Noticias Mejicanas* (NOTIMEX) has reported, and former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, Myles Frachette has confirmed, that civilians approached the U.S. Embassy in Colombia in order to explore relations with the U.S. in case of a coup.<sup>81</sup> The Colombian military may be an ever-increasing supporting actor in the breakdown of democracy,

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<sup>81</sup> "Government Condemns US Official's Remarks on President Samper," British Broadcasting Corporation; LEXIS/NEXIS [database on line]; accessed 11 September 1997.

especially as the level of frustration continues to grow over its inability to stem the increase in guerrilla and cartel activity.

The violence in Colombia is beyond a strictly military solution; military action in isolation will only serve to exacerbate the nation's problem. Furthermore, the tension between civil and military élites would continue to intensify unless the current regime frames a solution to the insurgency problem based not only on the use of military force, but also on social, economic and political justice.



## IV. GUERRILLAS: THE NEW ÉLITES

### A. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters focused on Colombia's political problems and how they impacted the effectiveness, efficacy, and legitimacy of the government in terms of full democratic consolidation. The thesis has argued that the magnitude of the challenges facing the Colombian regime today seem to be obstructing the consolidation of democracy and facilitating its breakdown. The focus of the previous chapters has been on assessing the impact of those actors loyal to the regime – political society and the military.

This chapter analyzes the impact the disloyal or semi-loyal opposition has had upon the Colombian political landscape. Linz defines the disloyal opposition as those actors who seek, through violent means, to corrupt and discredit the whole political system, and the semi-loyal opposition as those actors that in principle agree with the political system, but show a strong disagreement with the tactics employed by the ruling faction. Furthermore, Linz cautions that between the two, the most difficult threat to identify is the semi-loyal opposition.<sup>82</sup>

This chapter, will assess the impact guerrilla forces, the disloyal opposition "*par excellence*" in Colombia have upon civil society at large and in political society in particular. In short, it will examine the impact that forty years of internal conflict has had

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<sup>82</sup> Juan J. Linz, pp. 27-38.

upon Colombia. This chapter will also explore the narco-guerrilla connection and the role-played by the para-military units in Colombian society. An in-depth study of the current narco-guerrilla and para-military units' roles in Colombia is beyond the scope of this thesis and are topics worthy of much more effort than the cursory review they receive in this work.

The puzzle that frames this chapter, is how Colombia's traditionally weak state with an exclusionary political system contributed to creating the conditions in which the government lacks the leverage to reach a negotiated settlement with the guerrillas. Historically, the Colombian state has been unable to deliver basic public services, foster economic prosperity, or exercise its legal functions. Strong regional actors have filled this void, with a tendency of creating para-statal organizations in the regions they control.<sup>83</sup> In many cases, these organizations are viewed as the only legitimate authority, especially in the rural regions of the southern and eastern sections of the country.

It should be possible to formulate a strategy based on political, social, and economic reforms that could contribute to isolating Colombia's disloyal opposition. The two previous chapters highlighted some of the challenges that limit the formulation of a strategy that does not consider changes across the full economic, social, and political spectrum. However, the difficulty is that the Colombian guerrilla situation and the current negotiation process give rise to fluid and dynamic situations, which make developing a coherent strategy complex.

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<sup>83</sup> Lawrence Boudon, "Guerrillas and the State: The Role of the State in the Colombian Peace Process," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28 (May 1996): p. 280.



## B. DISLOYAL, SEMI-LOYAL OPPOSITION

The threat to the political survival of a regime comes from either reformists or revolutionaries, as demonstrated by the cases of Brazil (1964), Argentina (1973), and Mexico (1994). In Colombia, since 1958, the threat has been from revolutionaries. "The Colombian guerrilla movement pre-dates the Cuban Revolution by at least a decade, with three stages: (1) the period dominated by the liberal guerrillas (1949-1953); (2) the period marked by communist guerrillas (1955-1958); and (3) the emergence of ideologically diverse groups in the wake of the Cuban revolution (1962-1991)."<sup>84</sup> The post 1991 stage has been a period of reduced ideological rhetoric and more of illegal economic diversification (especially narco-trafficking), and the consolidation of gains wrought by it.

On the one hand, creation of the National Front did ameliorate the political violence of the period between 1958 and 1974. However, it did not eliminate the underlying reasons for social conflict – which were and are the economic, political, and social disenfranchisement of the marginalized sectors of society. On the other hand, it was extremely effective in excluding not only civil society from the political decision making process, but it excluded other élites as well. Élites excluded from the political process were forced to play outside normative democratic rules and considered armed revolution the only path available to bring change.

If élites are defined "as persons who are able, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations, to affect national political outcomes regularly and

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<sup>84</sup> Jorge G. Castañeda, p. 75.

substantially,”<sup>85</sup> then by definition the Colombian Left qualifies, at the very minimum, as new élites. Although, it could be argued that in its initial stages the guerrilla movements in Colombia were far from being élites, the evidence supports the observation that by 1962 these groups wielded considerable political and economic power. Thus, they sought to transform an exclusionary political system, which catered to Conservatives and Liberals, by the use of violence. Given that Colombia’s closed political system allowed no legal avenues for inclusion unless sponsored by the two main political parties, the only course left for those outside the system was to seek violent change. The rest of this chapter describes how those who choose change by violent means have come to control significant political, economic, and social power.

### C. THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

Ever since the success of the Cuban revolutionary movement, Latin America as a whole and Colombia in particular have experienced some type of leftist activity. Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley in *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America*, establishes five conditions that he asserts must prevail for a leftist movement to succeed in Latin America. They are 1) peasant support, 2) adequate guerrilla strength, 3) divided and corrupt elite, 4) cross-class alliance, and 5) withdrawal of U.S. support.<sup>86</sup> These conditions, he asserts are necessary and sufficient to cause a shift to a leftist regime as the

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<sup>85</sup> Michael Burton, Richard Gunther and John Higley, “Introduction: Elite Transformations and Democratic Regimes,” in John Higley and Richard Gunther, *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>86</sup> Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America* (Princeton, 1992), p. 305.

author demonstrated in his comparative analysis of the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua.<sup>87</sup>

Table 4.1 applies his findings to the current Colombian situation.

**Table 4.1. Conditions That Favor Guerrilla Success in Colombia**

<b>Condition for Success</b>	<b>Rating 1961-1991</b>	<b>Rating 1991-1998</b>
1. Peasant support for the guerrillas.	Moderate to High	Moderate
2. Adequate guerrilla military strength.	Low	Moderate to High
3. Divided and corrupt ruling elite.	Low to Moderate	Moderate to High
4. A cross-class alliance against the regime.	Low	Low
5. Withdrawal of U.S. support for the regime.	Low	Low

Source: Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 302-326; and various news briefs.

The assignment of low, moderate, and high ratings to the factors, a modification of Wickham-Crowley's path-breaking work, helps the reader visualize the current Colombian situation. The rating provides a quick assessment of the contemporary situation in Colombia. Furthermore, it is a good indicator of the areas where the guerrillas are strongest in political terms. It is interesting to note that three out of the five conditions (peasant support, guerrilla strength, and corrupt ruling elite) are rated moderate or higher. Conditions four and five (cross-class alliance and U.S. support), which are low, could permanently shift under certain conditions, such as Colombia being once again decertified by the U.S. or by the withdrawal of U.S. aid, due to a shift in U.S. national drug or security strategy. The loss of U.S. support could cause resentment within Colombia's social classes precipitating new alliances.

In fact, this situation already occurred in 1996, when Colombia was the first democracy to be de-certified by the United States. And again in 1997, when Colombia was de-certified, but sanctions were not imposed because Colombia was deemed 'vital to

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 302-326.

U.S. national interests. The de-certification of 1996 and 1997 (without sanctions) produced great animosity, both politically and economically, between the two nations. The political and economic sanctions had two severe consequences.

First, was the loss of regime legitimacy – de-certification decreased Colombia's government legitimacy and weakened its position in the international forum.<sup>88</sup> Second, was an increase in guerrilla activity. Guerrilla activity rose due to a surge of nationalism. Therefore, one can conclude, based on those factors examined, that if left unchecked by the Colombian or international community, the Colombian guerrillas are likely to succeed. This all leads to great uncertainty within the country.

What is certain is that throughout the years Colombia's Left has experienced a metamorphosis. If the pattern of the disloyal opposition in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s was the use of violence for political gain from within the state, the pattern of violence since the 1960s can be referred to as the use of violence for political gain directed against the state.<sup>89</sup> The paradigm shift to the belief that "socialist revolution could come about and be victorious only through armed struggle, as opposed to the traditional 'peaceful paths' previously favored by the Latin American left,"<sup>90</sup> was a consequence of the success of the Cuban Revolution. This is the strategy used by groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), National Liberation Army (ELN), Peoples' Liberation Army (EPL), Ricardo Franco Front, Quintin Lame Indigenous Self-Defense Command, and a host of other politically active movements in Colombian politics.

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<sup>88</sup> Alberto J. Mejia, p. 36.

<sup>89</sup> Ronald P. Archer, p. 167.

<sup>90</sup> Jorge G. Castañeda, p. 72.

Of these, FARC and the ELN, are the most significant and continue to pose a serious threat to Colombian political stability. FARC and ELN have rejected recent peace proposals from the current regime. The *Departamento Nacional de Planeación* (DNP) [National Planning Department] reports that "FARC and ELN are now 15 times greater than in 1981; they were firmly established in 173 *municipalidades* as of 1985. Today, these figures have increased to 600 of the 1,024 *municipalidades* in the nation."<sup>91</sup> This is a net increase of 39 percent in the sphere of influence of these organizations. The DNP reports that FARC and ELN are economically wealthier than the armed forces. For 1995, FARC and ELN are reported to have collected over 2 billion dollars in extortion and kidnapping royalties, with an additional 900 million dollars from dealings with the drug cartels. FARC and ELN are strongest in Caqueta, Guaviare, Meta and the Putamayo Departments. These are rural-based warfighting organizations whose members are better paid and trained than a regular army conscript.

In 1964, Fabio Vasquez Castano established the Marxist ELN, structured on the Cuban Revolution model. Manuel Marulanda Velez officially established the FARC in 1966 as the armed wing of the Colombia's Communist Party.<sup>92</sup> Their Marxist-Leninist platform still advocates massive land and wealth redistribution, as well as, greater government spending on social programs. However, FARC's investment in land, transportation and other enterprises in connection with the drug trade has forced a shift to operational capitalism. ELN, while following a similar agenda as FARC, focuses on

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<sup>91</sup> Henry Raymond, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> *Colombia: A Country Study* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1990), pp. 306-307.

nationalization issues, especially with respect to the oil industry.<sup>93</sup> Michael Radu and Vladimir Tismaneanu state that, of the two, ELN is more directly concerned with national politics and the concept of armed struggle.<sup>94</sup> These two organizations accounted for over ninety percent of all guerrilla activity during the period of 1978 to 1994 as shown in Figure 4.1. They also control of significant amount of resources (\$42 million).

Table 4.2 displays the growth of the guerrilla problem in Colombia. The total number of guerrillas operating across the nation has grown significantly, from about 2,240 in 1978 to 10,600 in 1994; a net increase of 373.2 percent.<sup>95</sup>

**Table 4.2. Guerrilla Manpower Growth in Colombia**

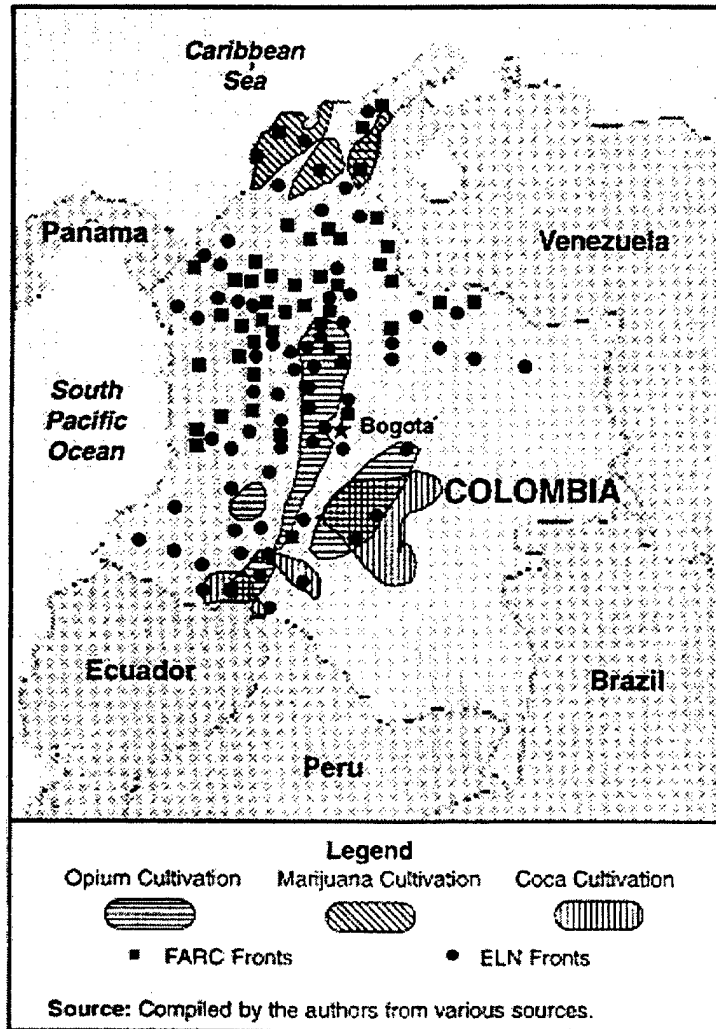
Group	1978-1982	1982-1986	1986-1990	1990-1994	Total Increase (%) (1978-1994)
FARC	600	2200	1800	1000	466.6
ELN	40	1570	800	550	1557.8
EPL	250	1050	-150	-700	4.5
M-19	- 450	900	0	100	- 86.6
Net Total	440	5720	2450	950	373.2

Source: Jesus E. La Rotta M., *Las Finanzas de la Subversión Colombiana: Una Forma de Explotar La Nación* (Bogotá: Ediciones Los Ultimos Patriotas, 1996), p. 61.

<sup>93</sup> Eileen Bradley and James L. Zackrisson, "Colombia Sovereignty Under Siege," *National Defense University Strategic Forum*, Number 112, May 1997, pp.1-2.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Radu and Valadimir Tismaneanu, *Latin American Revolutionaries: Groups, Goals, Methods* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1990), pp. 149-162.

<sup>95</sup> Jesus E. La Rotta M., *Las Finanzas de la Subversion Colombiana: Una Forma de Explotar la Nación* (Bogotá: Ediciones Los Ultimos Patriotas, 1996), p. 61.



Source: James L. Zackrison and Eileen Bradley, "Colombia Sovereignty Under Siege," National Defense University Strategic Forum, No. 112, May 1997, p. 5.

**Figure 4.1. FARC and ELN Area of Operations**

Not only are FARC, ELN, and other groups a threat to democratic consolidation, they also extract a real cost in terms of Colombia's economic stability. *Semana*, an independent newspaper, reported that the Colombian economy lost 18.4 billion dollars in 1994, approximately 3.4 percent of Colombia's GDP, due to guerrilla activity.<sup>96</sup> In a recent report, the National Planning Department (DNP) stated that Colombia's long-

<sup>96</sup> Eileen Bradley and James L. Zackrison, pp. 2-5.

running war with leftist guerrillas claimed more than 17,000 lives at a cost of about 12.5 billion dollars between 1990 and 1994.<sup>97</sup> During this same period it is estimated that 17,624 Colombians were killed as a consequence of guerrilla actions. Of these deaths 9,450 were civilians, 5,710 were guerrillas, and 2,464 were members of the state's security forces. Fifty-four of every one hundred deaths related to guerrilla violence are civilians, while thirty-two percent and fourteen percent are guerrillas and security forces personnel respectively.<sup>98</sup>

In a different study conducted by the DPN between 1987 and 1992, it was reported that on the average the country experienced 20,030 murders per year, of which 97 percent are never solved.<sup>99</sup> This makes Colombia the most violent democracy in the world. The government's inability to deal effectively with this threat raises questions about its capability to properly provide security for the masses. Hector Aquilar Camin, writing for *El Proceso* magazine, states that it is necessary to strengthen the state's coercive powers because, without political stability and public safety, democracy will be nothing more than a form of fragmentation and discord.<sup>100</sup> However, caution must be exercised before strengthening the state's coercive power. For an increase in the use of coercive force without a coherent and cohesive political strategy will most certainly exacerbate the current wave of violence. That the current regime is seeking to address some of the political imbalances is evident; but it is early to see the impact.

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<sup>97</sup> Henry Raymond, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> José L. Cadena Montenegro, p. 25.

<sup>99</sup> MGEN José Robert Ibañez Sanchez, pp. 404-405.

<sup>100</sup> Henry Raymond, p. 9.



Unfortunately, the desire to achieve fundamental changes in Colombian society has not been matched by the resources needed to implement those changes. For example, according to the National Defense Council, combined income sources yield an average income of \$70,000 per guerrilla, compared to \$900 dollars per soldier in the Army.<sup>101</sup> Even if one-tenth of this asymmetrical economic relation is true, it is a strong indicator that the government lacks the resources to meet the needs of its society. However, as in most insurgency situations, it is difficult to differentiate between monies and deaths generated by random acts of criminal violence and politically motivated violence such as extortion, kidnappings and drug protection service.

Two facts concern the state. First, that even under governments that have actively sought a negotiated settlement with the Left, the guerrillas have grown in relative terms. This indicates that the guerrilla organizations seem to use periods of negotiation to reconstitute and intensify operations. This creates a dilemma for the state – how does it pursue negotiations in order to close the social-political gap without an increase in violence. Second is the negative growth of M-19, which is explained by its movement from disloyal opposition to semi-loyal opposition under a peace agreement sponsored by the Virgilio Barco Vargas government in 1989.

John Higley and Richard Gunther write that:

the efforts to deal with guerrilla movements have been schizophrenic, alternately emphasizing repression and a search for a negotiated settlement that would permit the integration of these movements into national political life.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>102</sup> John Higley and Richard Gunther, p. 105.

On the one hand, Colombia's political elite has failed to set the appropriate conditions to gain peace through negotiations and, thus, have contributed to the destabilization of the current regime. On the other hand, the guerrilla groups seem to use the negotiating process as a period of consolidation and thus creating the perception of negotiating only when it serves their interest.

The first period of negotiation was initiated during the presidency of Belasario Betancur Cuartas (1982-1986). He was able to create an atmosphere of peaceful co-existence by issuing two decrees: Ley 35 and Ley 49.<sup>103</sup> This culminated in the creation of the *Comisión Nacional de Verificación* [National Verification Commission] and the *Comisión De Diálogo* [Dialogue Commission] which were instrumental in the creation of a vehicle for political expression for the Left: the Unión Patriótica Party. This period is followed by what some consider the most successful period of peace negotiations in the country, those conducted by the Virgilio Barco Vargas government, which culminated in the legitimization of M-19. In the late 1980s, dramatic changes in the international arena caused a loss of economic backing for the guerrillas, forcing them to seek new alliances with the Colombian drug cartels. By the end of 1990s, efforts to seek a negotiated settlement stalled because of a high degree of guerrilla criminal involvement. They reached their nadir during the government of Ernesto Samper.

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<sup>103</sup> For more in depth explanation see Jesus E. La Rotta M., *Las Finanzas de la Subversión Colombiana: Una Forma de Explotar la Nación*. p. 53.

The Barco administration, capitalizing on the debacle created by the takeover of the Palace of Justice in 1985,<sup>104</sup> did move to demobilize the country's insurgencies. FARC and ELN refused to participate, but M-19 and EL accepted the government's terms.<sup>105</sup> The violent actions taken by M-19 during the Palace of Justice operation negatively impacted the guerrilla group and derailed the peace accords.

As a guerrilla movement:

M-19 made its first appearance on the Colombian political scene in 1974 and the group was regarded as one of Cuba's main partners in the export of revolutionary ideology and drugs.<sup>106</sup>

However, M-19 has been effective in joining the political mainstream as Acción Democrática M-19 (AD-M19) and assuming the role as semi-loyal opposition. In essence AD-M19 became a political force operating from within the system; AD-M19 is an example of Linz' observation that "agreement in principle and disagreement on tactics is a frequent indicator of semi-loyalty."<sup>107</sup> The M-19 shift was possible because the organization was offered extremely good political terms by the regime, which supported its prior desire not to be excluded from the drafting of the 1991 Constitution. In short, the government used the leverage created by the promise of participation in the creation of a new political framework in order to raise the stakes.

However, this actually makes the AD-M19 more dangerous, because they now can pursue a legal process in conjunction with continual guerrilla support to achieve their

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<sup>104</sup> In 1985, M-19 took over the Place of Justice, and the government responded with undue force. In the fire fight that ensued various government officials died, as well as a majority of the Supreme Court justices. A cadre of the M-19 was massacred.

<sup>105</sup> Ronald P. Archer, p. 197.

<sup>106</sup> Jorge G. Castañeda, p. 112.

<sup>107</sup> Juan J. Linz, p. 33.

aims. AD-M19 won 12.5 percent of the votes in the 1990 presidential elections and 26.8 percent in the 1990 constituent assembly elections,<sup>108</sup> but their leaders have been unable to capitalize on these gains.

Polls taken in Colombia in early 1991 showed that a great number of Colombians (58.5 percent) believed M-19 would attain power, and its leader and former candidate Antonio Navarro Wolff was deemed the Colombian politician most likely to become president in the decades of the nineties.<sup>109</sup>

However, AD-M19 and Union Patriótica (UP), the party that represents FARC's political interest, are unable to consolidate due Colombia's entrenched two-party system. An analysis of the May 1998 election results reflect just how powerful these political institutions are. In the first round of voting the Conservative and Liberal parties reaped 81 percent of the votes. The combined electoral support for the AD-M19, UP and other minor parties was only 19 percent. These parties made no significant showing in the presidential race and of 263 seats in the Colombian Congress their members were elected to 27, approximately 10 percent. In contrast, the Liberal Party controls 156 seats (59.3 percent) and the Conservative Party 80 seats (30.4 percent) of the congress.<sup>110</sup>

#### **D. THE PARAMILITARIES**

The reaction from the Right to the increase in violence from the Left and the inability of the government to establish its legitimacy by enforcing the rule of law, has been the creation of paramilitary groups. These groups were originally created under a

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<sup>108</sup> Juan J. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does it Make a Difference?" in Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 210.

<sup>109</sup> Jorge G. Castañeda, p. 115.

<sup>110</sup> The Electoral Web Site (Elections in Colombia); available from <http://www.agora.stm.it/election/colombia.htm>; Internet; accessed 29 October 1998.

Presidential Decree (Decreto 3398) and Law 48 as a counterinsurgency tool by the state. Originally intended to be self-defense forces, they evolved to become armed organizations with close ties to military intelligence units and police forces. Designed as military type organizations, these units were originally trained and equipped to assist the armed forces in their counterinsurgency efforts. However, it was only a matter of time before a weak state would lose control of these groups. Now they have become the private army of the great landowners and drug-traffickers. These groups, called *grupos de justicia privada* (private justice groups), function solely for the personal benefit and profit of its members.<sup>111</sup> They are mainly comprised of unemployed workers, retired military, and plain criminals, and are trained by national or international mercenaries.<sup>112</sup>

Under the pretense of self-defense, protecting the population and fighting the guerrilla threat, they now are responsible for an increase in violence. These groups focus on a variety of criminal activities, such as assassinations, kidnappings, money laundering and robberies. The Colombian armed forces consider their activities as destabilizing as those of the guerrillas.<sup>113</sup> The activities of these groups add to the already institutionalized violence that is tearing the country by dispensing their own form of justice under the appearance of protecting the democratic system. Their participation in Colombia's violent history has not assisted in dampening the Left's operational capacity.

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<sup>111</sup> *Guía de Estudio: Curso de Estado Mayor Escuela de Guerra* (Bogota: Departamento de Ejército, 1998), pp. 154-165.

<sup>112</sup> Jose Cadena Montenegro, pp.31-36.

<sup>113</sup> *Guía de Estudio: Curso de Estado Mayor Escuela de Guerra*, p.154.

## E. TWO STATES, ONE NATION

Guerrilla forces continue to increasingly avoid direct force on force confrontation with government authorities, even though the guerrilla forces have grown in number. Carlos Restrepo wrote recently that, directly or indirectly, guerrillas exercised significant influence in 600 of Colombia's 1002 municipalities. FARC's operational units are in control of over 60 percent of the country. He further states that "guerrillas have focused their energy on controlling municipal governments in order to compensate for their lack of a national political agenda."<sup>114</sup> Although FARC does not directly participate in government, sources such as *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo* report that they control local budgets and closely supervise the activities of mayors and other government officials. Guerrilla groups have succeeded in establishing a presence among the population more effectively and in a broader fashion than civilian authority.

The above situation fundamentally creates two Colombias, one influenced by the government, mainly the urban centers, and the other influenced by the guerrilla forces, mainly the rural sectors. In essence, for those areas in which the state is weak, "[t]he guerrillas are the *de facto* state, even though the real state may maintain a presence *de jure*."<sup>115</sup> This way the guerrilla forces have been able to strengthen their attack on democracy, create political instability, stifle social development, and inflict higher economic cost in the country. In fact, they have been responsible for former President

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<sup>114</sup> Yadira Ferrer, p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> Lawrence Boudon, "Guerrillas and the State: The Role of the State in the Colombian Peace Process," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28 (May 1996): 290.

Samper declaring states of emergency, fundamentally forcing him to invoke his constitutional powers in the name of national security.

Former President Samper believed that the use of force is a necessary condition for dialogue to be useful. He stated that "dialogue per se leads nowhere, and force exercised in an arbitrary manner leads to brutality."<sup>116</sup> However, Samper's political problems prevented his government from developing a strategy that would lead to peace. Furthermore, this aggressive attitude was viewed by the guerrillas as a lack of a coherent peace policy by the state and as an impediment to negotiations between the warring factions. In a FARC-EP declaration, the guerrilla forces stated that the government's position with regard to the use of force obstructed peaceful democratic action.

Given that neither FARC nor ELN recognize the legitimacy of the state, they, in the role of a disloyal opposition, seek to reject its political rule by the use of coercive powers. According to Linz, this intransigent attitude challenges the state's authority to guarantee the civil liberties of all citizens within the territorial boundaries, which is of particular importance in a functioning democracy.<sup>117</sup>

Furthermore, FARC-EP is seeking to enter the peace process and in a recent publication 'The Search for Peace, A Nation's Yearning' recognized their cease fire and peace agreements signed with the Betancur's administration in 1984. The hurdle at this moment seems to be FARC's failure to recognize the legitimacy of the Samper administration for reasons stated earlier. However, with the recent election of President

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<sup>116</sup> Ernesto P. Samper, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> Juan J. Linz, p. 61.

Andres Pastrana this obstacle should no longer be a consideration. Yet, in the first few months of the Pastrana regime guerrilla activity has increased. This may be a clear indication that the guerrillas are not prepared to negotiate seriously with any regime.

On the military front the guerrillas seem to have gained parity and some would argue an edge. They have failed to transform their military gains into political capital. Groups like FARC and ELN, to date, have been incapable of taking advantage of the traditional parties' weaknesses and defects. Archer takes it one step further, writing,

the subversive movements in Colombia have in fact marginalized the non-traditional electorate through the use of repression and imitation of other foreign revolutionary movements.<sup>118</sup>

Factionalism has also had a detrimental effect on the left's ability to consolidate political gains. A more tangible source of the general weakness of the opposition in Colombia has been sectarianism, isolationism, and bickering among themselves.<sup>119</sup> The current inability of the regime to find a solution to the problem of armed disloyal opposition has, as Linz postulated, increased the level of violence now present in the nation.

#### **F. PEACE: AN ELUSIVE TARGET**

Although it is too soon to tell, the current round of negotiations, initiated by the Pastrana government in Germany in August of 1998, has shown little results, due to the government's lack of negotiating leverage. Lack of political, military and social leverage has forced the government to cede in some important strategic areas. These include the

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<sup>118</sup> Ronald P. Archer, p. 196.

<sup>119</sup> Robert H. Dix, p. 291.



promise to recognize the guerrilla groups that join the negotiations as political actors, even as they continue the de-militarization of certain municipalities and restrict military operations.<sup>120</sup>

The public centerpiece for the current government's position is the granting of pardons to the belligerent parties under Section II, Article 201, which states that "the government may grant pardons for political crimes, in accordance with the law, and inform the Congress after the exercise of this authority."<sup>121</sup> Unlike amnesty, which prohibits the prosecution and punishment, a pardon only prohibits punishment. Furthermore, the country's penal code (Ley 418 de 1997) states that

pardons cannot be granted to persons who have committed atrocious, ferocious or barbaric crimes, terrorism, kidnapping, genocide and homicides not within the realm of combat.<sup>122</sup>

Because guerrilla activities and criminal activities, beyond those normally associated with revolutionary movements, are intertwined in the Colombian situation, the pardons could have a negative impact on normal criminal procedures. In short, use of this particular tool by the government weakens the Judicial Branch and threatens the rule of law.

To date, the government has ceded major strategic concessions with little or no cessation in activities by the guerrillas. This can lead to only two conclusions: 1) the government's position is so weak that they are willing to mortgage the state; and 2) that the guerrilla movement in Colombia has long ceased to be concerned with social,

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<sup>120</sup> "Gobierno Reconocera Status Político a la Guerrilla," *El Nacional*, 3 September 1998 [newspaper on-line]; available from <http://el-nacional.com/eln030998/pa2s3.htm>; Internet; accessed 11 September 1998.

<sup>121</sup> "Indulto: Tan Ancho Como Tan Largo," *El Espectador*, 15 September 1998 [newspaper on-line]; available from <http://www.elespectador.com/9809/15/genotici.htm>; Internet; accessed 15 September 1998.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

political and economic reforms for the marginalized sectors of society. Unfortunately, both conditions hold true. The government, due to the historic weakness of the state, is unable to reclaim its legitimacy, and the guerrillas are unwilling to exchange their illicit economic enterprises for political legitimacy.

## **G. THE NARCO CONNECTION**

The involvement of the Colombian guerrilla in acts of violent illegal activities is multifaceted, spanning from extortion to assassinations to drugs – all extremely lucrative. Thus, deciphering the Colombian political puzzle would not be complete without examination of the relationship between the drug cartels and the guerrillas and its impact on Colombia's social and political system, to include the evolution of the guerrilla organizations into the drug trade.

As stated before, the magnitude and complexity of the narco-guerrilla problem merits separate attention, and is an analysis beyond the scope of this study. However the relations between the cartel and guerrillas, and the cartel and political parties, are such a significant part of the Colombian political scene, that one is compelled to address this symbiotic relationship.<sup>123</sup>

The cartels support their actions on a social and political – base by forming political parties, buying newspapers, absorbing the cost of social projects – and have been successful influencing those sectors where the state and the traditional élites are least effective.<sup>124</sup> For example Pablo Escobar, before his untimely death, ran and was elected

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<sup>123</sup> Alberto J. Mejia, pp. xii-xvi.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.

to Colombia's House of Representatives in 1982. Barrio Pablo Escobar, a subdivision of 360 homes, stands as a tribute to the drug-lord's philanthropy in Medellin.<sup>125</sup> In essence, the established order in Colombian society is not only threatened by revolutionary appeals, but by the well-financed clientelism of the drug organizations.<sup>126</sup> Eric G. Pernet, in his article '*Universidad: Geopolitical y Crisis Institucional en Colombia,*' recognizes that the Colombian economy is faced with the convergence of three of the most profitable enterprises today: oil, weapons, and drugs.<sup>127</sup>

It is no secret that the impact of the drug trade is being felt at the highest levels of political, economic, and civil society. The past Samper government was thrown into crisis by charges that his 1994 campaign received \$6 million dollars from the Cali drug cartel.<sup>128</sup> This scandal contributed to the U.S. de-certification of Colombia in March 1996. The threat to government stability from narco activities caused the Samper regime to declare states of emergency on several occasions during its term to protect public order and stabilize state institutions.

Colombian authorities have had some success in reducing the activities of the Medellin and Cali Cartels. Cartel members have responded to this success with a declaration of war on the regime, using bombings and assassinations. The terrorist-like actions being employed by groups such as 'The Extraditables' adds to the violence

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<sup>125</sup> Tina Rosenberg, pp. 68-70.

<sup>126</sup> John Higley and Richard Gunther, p. 107.

<sup>127</sup> Erick G. Pernet, "Universidad: Geopolitical y Crisis Institucional," *El Colombiano*, 9 May 1996 [newspaper on-line]; available from <http://www.sistecol.com/@elcolombiano/9605/09/jo2.htm>; Internet; accessed 11 September 1997.

<sup>128</sup> Carol Giacomo, "U.S. Calls for Probe of Tapes, Rueters World Service; LEXIS/NEXIS [database on line]; accessed 11 September 1997.

already being spread by the guerrilla forces throughout the country. The void left by the loss of the cartels' top bosses has crippled cartel operations and opened the door for increased guerrilla activity in the narcotrafficking business.

Increased guerrilla activity in the trade of illicit drugs – marihuana, cocaine and heroin – can be separated in seven phases. In each phase, the organization's role in the production, transport, and distribution of the product has deepened. The most active organizations are FARC and ELN. However, other groups and some criminal elements also participate to one degree or another. Table 4.3 depicts the seven phases that have led to the Colombian guerrilla controlling all facets of drug production, from cultivation to internal and external commercialization of the product.<sup>129</sup>

Today the guerrillas control significant portions of all narcotics operations. The *El Espectador*, in 'La Guerrilla, Nuevo Imperio Narco,' reports that, as of July 1996, FARC and ELN forces controlled ninety percent of all internal illicit drug commerce.

**Table 4.3. Phases of Guerrilla Drug Operations**

Phase	Condition
I	Protection and extortion services for the Cartels.
II	A protection and extortion service at processing sites, runways and of raw materials.
III	Protection and extortion of production, transport and commercialization of precursor chemicals.
IV	Development of transport services and infrastructure.
V	Investment in cultivation sites, in support of cartel and own operations.
VI	Establishment of processing sites.
VII	Establishment of their own production, processing, transport and distribution network.

Source: Jesus E. La Rotta M., *Las Finanzas de la Subversión Colombiana: Una forma de Explotar La Nación* (Bogotá: Los Ultimos Patriotas, 1996), pp. 197-198.

<sup>129</sup> Jesus E. La Rotta M., p.199.

Furthermore, it is estimated that the guerrillas' control seventy-five percent of the area used in the cultivation of marijuana, coca or poppy.<sup>130</sup> This information is not surprising, because, with the end of the cold war and the initial move to peace under the Betancur government, guerrillas had to turn to alternative means of financial support. One factor that caused this shift was that their primary source of financial and political support, the Soviet Union and Cuba, were experiencing radical transformations. Another reason, given by Jesus E. La Rotta M., was that the guerrillas believed that it was riskier to continue with kidnappings and extortion, since these activities had been outlawed by the peace accords.<sup>131</sup> What is surprising, however, is that now the guerrillas have the ability to control an internal market that produces over \$150 million dollars of profit a year.<sup>132</sup> The guerrillas are effective and efficient in generating a profit from narco-trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, and other illegal activities. Table 4.4 shows the success the guerrilla forces have experienced in generating revenue. These funds are usually used to acquire the accoutrements of war, thus prolonging the status quo of continual violence.

Once again, the government finds itself under siege - its legitimacy lost as its members fall victim to the latest narco-related political scandal. Its effectiveness is continual decline as the government is unable to defeat the guerrilla force, and allegations

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<sup>130</sup> MGen. Jose Ibañez Sanchez, p. 420.

<sup>131</sup> Jesus E. La Rotta M., p. 212.

<sup>132</sup> Eric G. Pernett, p. 2.

**Table 4.4. Guerrilla Revenue (1991-1994) in Millions of Dollars**

Activity	1991	1992	1993	1994	Total
Drug-Trafficking	147,074	134,273	149,247	177,040	607,634
Robbery and Extortion	95,707	87,079	96,896	136,477	416,159
Kidnapping	64,099	58,000	45,922	116,730	284,751
Other Activity	25,244	22,883	39,608	86,041	173,776
Total (by year)	332,124	302,235	331,673	516,288	1,482,320

Source: José Luis Cadena Montenegro, "Eficiencia del Ejército de Colombia: Hipótesis Económicas y Políticas" (Master's Thesis, Universidad de los Andes, 1998) p. 28.<sup>133</sup>

of drug money in government coffers are made. The regime's efficacy has been nullified due to the inability of the government to define and carry out an agenda. Furthermore, the Colombian security forces lack the resources and material that would permit a credible assault on the war on drugs.

#### **H. DEVELOPING A STRATEGY**

This gives rise to a new Colombian reality, that of an unscrupulous criminalized Left pitted against a civil, economic, and political society that seems to lack the fortitude, leadership and resources to stem the tide of violent onslaught.

As an initial step in developing a national strategy that would assist in solving both the political and criminal problems, the Colombian government should delineate clear strategic goals. These goals could serve as targets in the development of policy by various political, civil and economic actors. This should be followed by the regime dedicating the resources needed to achieve the goals in a coherent fashion. The Colombian government has a variety of policy options, based on their appreciation of the

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<sup>133</sup> The original data was expressed in Colombian pesos. The author has converted those figures into U.S. dollars by using the exchange rate published by the International Monetary Fund in the *International Financial Statistic Journal* of 1995.

threat. The following section presents three such options: 1) the Radical Solution; 2) the Two Problems, Two Solutions; and 3) the One Problem Solution.

### **1. The Radical Solution**

Political and economic élites accept that the state is unable to consolidate and establish its legitimacy in the regions under guerrilla control and cede these to the guerrillas, in essence, granting legitimacy to the guerrilla forces and creating two Colombias. Although this approach sounds radical, it would in essence be the fastest way to achieve a temporary and transient peace. Temporary, because the new guerrilla-state would in all possibility be some type of narco-leftist regime. Transient, because no Colombian ruler would want his presidential legacy to be the losing of approximately half the country's territory. Nor would civil, economic or military society be willing to knowingly create a new state that would pose a direct threat. Therefore, armed conflict would follow.

The new state would most likely be authoritarian. Its authoritarian, nature given the current world dynamics, is almost certainly doomed to failure. Given that, its main economic source would be the illicit production, processing, transshipment and sale of illegal narcotics, it would in all certainty become a pariah state, thus creating instability in the region and cause for intervention from the international community. In short, this would elevate the problem to the international arena, which has more tools at its disposal than the current Colombian regime.

However, this approach would allow for Bogotá's centrist government to be able to focus on that region in which the state has legitimacy. It would be able to exercise

authority by collapsing its scarce resources and manpower in areas that are essential to the state. Security forces could then proceed to establish the rule of law and bring adequate forces to bear on solving the criminal violence, which now affects the region. The political and economic élites could develop a strategy that would address the social and economic inequalities within the new territory. The Colombian armed forces would acquire an external mission of providing security for the new and reduced state, a role they could accomplish without considerable reorganization, since most of their forces are west of the Cordillera.

## **2. Two Problems, Two Solutions**

This course of action calls for the splitting of Colombia's dilemma into two different problems. The first, would be the guerrilla problem, with its fundamental roots in social, economic and political inequalities. The second, would be the drug problem and all the criminality attached with it. This is fundamentally the current institutional approach. It is the institutional approach because it allows for the support of the United States in terms of the drug war, while allowing for U.S. deniability in support of the counter-guerrilla effort.<sup>134</sup>

If this approach is to succeed, then the current Colombian regime must aggressively develop a strategy that isolates the two problems. In the guerrilla case, it has to focus on developing and executing a policy that would make the cost of operations to the guerrilla forces extremely high. It should begin by militarily reclaiming those areas

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<sup>134</sup> Schemo, Diana J., "In Colombia, Accord Comes Without Peace," *The New York Times*, 28 June 1998, sec. Week in Review, p. 5.



over which the guerrilla exercise control, supporting those military operations with social, political and economic programs that reinforces the legitimacy of the state. Specific social programs should include agrarian reform, educational reform and improvement in basic services. Political reforms have to address the exclusion of those sectors of society that are composed of the rural sector and urban poor, as well as seeking a political formula that would include the participation of the current leftist movements. In the area of economic reform, the current regime needs to undermine the subterranean economy that is composed of *sicarios* [hired assassins], security enterprises and transient workers, which undermines primary sources of income. Once the marginalized sectors of society begin to see the effects of the state's efforts, the reasons to support the current *Left* will disappear.

In order to deal with the narco-trafficking problem, the state must reinforce the internal security apparatus assisting in re-establishing the rule of law. The current regime does not count on the support of a strong Judicial Branch. Jorge G. Castañeda in *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War*, highlights the importance of the Judiciary by stating, "an independent judiciary is of utmost priority in building and consolidating democratic rule."<sup>135</sup> The autonomy and integrity of this single institution is critical to the democratic process because it provides the vehicle by which the rule of law is implemented. However, the Colombian Judiciary is often the object of criticism

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<sup>135</sup> Jorge G. Castañeda,, p. 385.

because of its failure to deal "effectively with common criminals, guerrillas, and narcotraffickers."<sup>136</sup>

The principal institution, the Judicial Branch, should receive extra resources and training. This institution's budget, which at its highest point was 3.7 percent of the national budget (1983), has seen a steady decline in resources. Since 1987 it has held steady at 2 percent, in fact declining in real terms.<sup>137</sup> By means of comparison, the legislative and executive branches received approximately 27 percent.<sup>138</sup> The government's low investment translates into only 38 percent of the caseloads being processed by the courts. A major factor in why criminal activity and private security is high is this lack of prosecution; given that this is a judicial system where judges still conduct their own investigations. Therefore, Colombia needs to develop and implement extensive judicial reforms; in order to cope with the criminality associated with the drug trade.

### **3. The One Problem Solution**

In this scenario the guerrilla and the drug problem are viewed as one and the same. In fact, the preceding section has offered substantial evidence that supports this argument. The initial ideological basis for the existence of Colombia's guerrilla movement has been transformed by the organizations' near-monopoly of the drug trade. FARC, ELN and others are more concerned with the survival of their monopoly and the economic profits it generates than in any process of negotiation. By their involvement in

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<sup>136</sup> Jorge P. Osterling, p.341.

<sup>137</sup> Francisco E. Thoumi, p. 89.

<sup>138</sup> Tina Rosenberg, p. 43.

criminal activity they have forfeited any rights granted to combatants. Therefore, the strategy is simplistic in nature – go after the guerrilla organizations with the full combat power of the state's security organizations. This has to be tempered with social and political reforms, because inequalities still exist. The state should endeavor to consolidate its position, thus gaining moral and political authority, while denying the guerrilla forces the very source of their strength – the terrain and some popular support. This program would be very similar to the successful Civil Action Operations conducted by the United States Marine Corps during the Vietnam era. It combines security, social development, infrastructure development and political education to deny the enemy of precious resources.

## **I. CONCLUSION**

It is conjecture to know for certain whether the guerrilla forces in Colombia are ready for a peaceful settlement. Guerrilla groups are so dominant in certain areas that it is very difficult to hypothesize what social, political and economic reforms would lure them into serious negotiations. What is certain is the fact that the current regime lacks the leverage to force a negotiated solution. Therefore, it is imperative for the state to seek a strategy that will make the cost and the risk associated with guerrilla activity extremely high. This strategy has to include not only a clear military end-state, but also strong social, political and economic reforms. At this point in the process the rebels seem to hold a distinct advantage – not numerical, but strategic. Any settlement that grants extraordinary prerogatives to the guerrillas or worse yet, creates two separate Colombias, is unacceptable to Colombians and the international community.

Furthermore, Colombia's democratic consolidation depends on the ability of the political élite to solve this political dilemma. They have to close the social-political gap that is tearing the country apart. Failure in this endeavor could very well mean the loss of the Republic.

## V. CONCLUSION

### A. PROSPECTS FOR FULL DEMOCRATIZATION

The argument that democracy in Colombia is at risk, is nothing new to policymakers, scholars and regional experts of Latin American affairs. Linz, Stepan, La Rotta, Thoumi and others all have reached the same conclusion – that democracy in Colombia, barring major political, social, economic, and military reforms, is on the verge of collapse. There is ample evidence that high levels of corruption, domestic violence, institutional decline, and political disintegration in Colombian society are the principal motives for the “erosion of democracy.”<sup>139</sup> The erosion of the political elite’s legitimacy, efficacy, and effectiveness to govern has directly contributed to the increase in political violence and a weakening of the state.

It is not new that Colombia needs to address significant problems within its political institutions in order to solidify its democratic gains, or that the country’s political society needs to develop a national strategy that would lead to the establishment of full democratization. Nor, that the strategy should include elements that would address the structural shortcomings of Colombia’s political institutions and assist in the consolidation of the state.

What is new in this work, is the discussion of the potential breakdown of democracy in Colombia within the framework of legitimacy, effectiveness and efficacy

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<sup>139</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, pp. 392-393.

provided by Juan Linz, while specifically examining Colombia's structural and non-structural problems. Using the above discussion as a departure point, we can confirm that the current Colombian regime is in the process of breakdown as a democratic institution. It may be, as John A. Peeler points out, that "we are witnessing a process of deconsolidation, of slow-motion breakdown."<sup>140</sup> However, some may argue, as does this thesis, that democratic consolidation never occurred. Although the basic tenets for consolidation – rules of the game, mass participation and political institutions – have been present, Colombia lacks the behavioral, attitudinal and constitutional requirements for full democratization. Colombia's political élites, to use Linz's words, has shown "a tendency to blame the accumulation of problems on neglect by a previous regime, rather than on the intractability of social reality."<sup>141</sup>

Colombia's structural problems, its political institutions, have hindered rather than promoted democratization. Two of these institutions – the Conservative and Liberal party – exercised a monopoly on the division of power in the political arena. This has resulted in the exclusion of other political actors, which have turned to the use of violence as a form of political expression.

The non-structural problems – the guerillas and the cartels – seek to destroy the democratic process through the exploitation of fissures within a weak state. Colombia's problems in respect to the guerrillas and the cartels are twofold: 1) the threat to national

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<sup>140</sup> John A. Peeler, p. 329.

<sup>141</sup> Juan J. Linz, p. 41.

security produced by the insurgency; and 2) the violent problems associated with the drug trade, which is a matter of internal national defense.

To address the national security problem, the state must develop a coherent economic, social and political strategy. A strategy that focuses exclusively on military operations exclusively is destined to failure, given that the Colombian insurgency has the capability of operating in the political, social and economic arenas.<sup>142</sup> In order to make headway in the national defense problem the strategy must seek to strengthen the judicial process.

However, this is all easier said than done, because the state seems to lack the cohesiveness and fortitude necessary to prevail. Too many factors make it weak – a judicial system that is corrupt, an uneven distribution of political and economic power, and a failed policy of peaceful co-existence. In short, the new regime's objective should be to develop a strategy that frees the country of its vicious circle, a cycle of weak government and armed violence, which leads to breakdown – which in turn, produces more violence.<sup>143</sup> Until the state develops a coherent national policy and directs the resources necessary to implement such policy, the insurgency and cartel problem will only continue to increase, especially in those areas where the presence of the state is weak.

The most radical solution would be to move away from the current ineffective presidential system to a parliamentary system of government. This system would allow

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<sup>142</sup> MajGen Jose R. Ibañez Sanchez, p. 415.

<sup>143</sup> Tina Rosenberg, pp. 24-25.

for proportional representation of all political factions and insure the participation of those excluded from the current two-party format. A parliamentary government would assist in generating true competition, in developing coalitions, and increasing the likelihood of the participation of the disloyal opposition. It would also reduce entrenched party loyalties. However, it is very unlikely that a shift to parliamentarism will occur. This is due to two factors: 1) the current political élite would be forced to abdicate considerable amount of political power; and 2) the United States political system is presidential and Latin American countries have viewed it as the model in the region.

Another structural solution would be to empower local government with the authority and means to provide the basic social services of government in areas where the disloyal opposition presence is strongest. This would contribute to heightening the visibility of government, enhancing its effectiveness and efficacy. This would also promote the consolidation of the State. Initially this policy would require an increase in the presence of security forces in order to regain regime leverage and regime control. However, as the government regains credibility, the role of security forces in the areas affected could diminish.

## **B. IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY**

The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee is not blind to the fact that Colombia is “a restricted democracy that has been corrupted not just by drug traffickers, but by the power of the political class.”<sup>144</sup> The breakdown of democracy in Colombia

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<sup>144</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. 1996. Corruption and Drugs in Colombia: Democracy at Risk. (Washington, D.C.: GPO), p. 7.



could affect democratic institutions throughout the area, specifically the weak nations in the Andean Ridge and Venezuela, as well as cause severe instability to the already weak economies of the region. Furthermore, insurgent groups in Peru, Venezuela and even Mexico could orchestrate similar breakdowns by imitating the Colombian model. U.S. policy would have to be significantly altered to reflect the new political situation if Colombia fails to reestablish strong democratic institutions.

The military aid provided by the United States, no matter how minimal, gives the Colombian military the means by which to protect some of its autonomy, but has failed to meet its objective of increasing military effectiveness in promoting internal security and social and economic progress. This is due to the fact that a significant amount of military aid is slated solely for use in counter-narcotics operation. The United States must make a basic decision. This decision is whether to attack the Colombian drug and guerrilla problem as strictly an internal problem, in which case it should only support the military through normal Foreign Military Sales. The other option is to view Colombia's problems as an external threat and bring the full support of its resources (manpower, monetary, military and technological) to bear upon the problem. General Manuel Jose Bonett, of the Colombian Army, believes that increased U.S. military assistance might turn the tide in favor of the Colombian government.<sup>145</sup> The Colombian armed forces are not seeking U.S. personnel to fight their war. However, alone and without serious American support, they are doomed to failure. This may mean direct U.S. military involvement in Colombia's

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<sup>145</sup> Global Intelligence Update, "Colombian Rebels Threaten Latin America's Stability and Economic Promise," available from <http://www.stratfor.com>; Internet; accessed 20 July 1998.

insurgency and drug trafficking problems, something U.S. policymakers are most anxious to avoid.

The record of the United States, in terms of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, leaves plenty of room for argument. However, the choices left to Washington policymakers are not all sub-optimal. Policies should focus on strengthening the 'Colombian State,' its legal institutions and the military. In addition, the U.S. should seek to develop confidence-building measures, such as modifying the U.S. drug certification process, in order to foster a more equitable relationship between the two nations.

### **C. EPILOGUE**

Challenges to the Colombian regime go beyond those addressed in this thesis. They include problems of social disintegration, lack of identity, and penetration of violence into the very fiber of the country's social conscience. Colombia will continue to show signs of democratic breakdown until civil and political society are able to achieve an equitable solution to the country's myriad problems. In the short run, it must aim its efforts to solving the issues of narco-trafficking, guerrillas and social violence. One can infer – and the current literature demonstrates – that what the Colombians want is political, economic and social stability, provided by an effective, efficient and legitimate national government. Colombia as a country and Colombians as a people deserve nothing less.

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