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Dennis M. Rempe Mr.
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**THE PAST AS PROLOGUE?
A HISTORY OF U.S. COUNTERINSURGENCY
POLICY IN COLOMBIA, 1958-66**

Dennis M. Rempe

March 2002

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FOREWORD

This monograph is the final supplement to a special series stemming from a major conference entitled “Implementing *Plan Colombia*: Strategic and Operational Imperatives.” The Dante B. Fascell North-South Center of the University of Miami and the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College cosponsored the conference. The conference clarified issues relating to *Plan Colombia*, focused the debate, and provided a forum for mutual learning.

In this monograph, the author outlines the history of U.S. counterinsurgency policy and the recommendations made by U.S. Special Survey Teams in Colombia from 1958-66. The monograph comes at a time when the United States seriously is considering broadening its policy toward Colombia and addressing Colombia’s continuing internal war in a global and regional context. Thus, this report provides a point of departure from which policymakers in the United States and Colombia can review where we have been, where we are, and where we need to go.

The Strategic Studies Institute and the North-South Center are pleased to offer this monograph as a contribution to the national security debate on Colombia within the United States and abroad. The results of that debate will be critically important to the promotion and protection of U.S. national interests in the region and the rest of the world.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

DENNIS M. REMPE is a consultant for an engineering firm. He served as an infantry officer in the Canadian Armed Forces (Reserve) and was a member of the Canadian National Team-Military Pentathlon. Mr. Rempe has written numerous articles on counterinsurgency, intelligence, and foreign international defense, including “Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics: U.S. Counterinsurgency Efforts in Colombia, 1959-65”; “An American Trojan Horse? Eisenhower, Latin America, and the Development of U.S. International Security Policy, 1954-60”; and “The Origin of International Security in Colombia: Part I, A CIA Special Team Surveys *La Violencia*, 1959-60.” Most recently, he completed a chapter entitled “The Information Challenge in the Global Security Environment” for the forthcoming Edwin G. Corr, Robert H. Dorff, and Max G. Manwaring edited volume, *The Search for Security: A Forward Strategy for the 21st Century*. He is currently completing “The Origin of International Security in Colombia: Part II, Containing *La Violencia*—‘Nuts and Bolts’ Counterinsurgency, A CIA Special Team View—1960.” Mr. Rempe is completing his Ph.D. on U.S.-Colombian internal security issues at the University of Miami’s School of International Studies.

SUMMARY

The author examines the history of U.S. counterinsurgency policy in Colombia from 1958-66. He points out that as early as 1958, the United States sent a Special Survey Team to Colombia to make recommendations for Colombia in dealing with its ongoing internal war. Subsequently, other teams made additional recommendations. The author concludes that strategic-level recommendations have been rejected by both Bogota and Washington. Many tactical and operational-level military recommendations have been accepted and implemented, but with limited success. Lessons learned over the past 40 years indicate that (1) solutions to the continuing violence in Colombia require a cooperative and integrated strategy that addresses the political, economic, social, as well as military dynamics of the problem; but, (2) while there is exclusively no military solution, counterinsurgency operations remain a key element to solving Colombia's violence problems.

THE PAST AS PROLOGUE? A HISTORY OF U.S. COUNTERINSURGENCY POLICY IN COLOMBIA, 1958-66

Introduction.

Colombia's internal security situation has reached a critical juncture. That nation's three concurrent wars against narco-trafficking, paramilitary, and insurgent groups¹ have produced a state of near cataplexy in the administration of President Andres Pastrana. Gradually this paralysis has given way to an attempt at a more cohesive and comprehensive strategy—*Plan Colombia*—aimed at ending decades of political violence.

Though comparisons should not be too tightly drawn, the contours of the debate today are reminiscent of and informed by an earlier era in Colombia's history known as *La Violencia*—the Violence. In its latter phase, 1958-66, similar concerns regarding guerrilla violence, government legitimacy, military capabilities, and security assistance dominated bilateral relations between the United States and that South American nation.²

In this monograph, the author examines U.S. counterinsurgency policy during this latter phase of the *Violencia* period, offering an historical analysis that has implications for policymakers confronting the current crisis in Colombia. He investigates the key role played by the United States in constructing Colombia's unconventional warfare capabilities, analyzing how U.S. policy initiatives expedited the ability of Colombia's security forces to undertake offensive counterinsurgency operations in an effort to liquidate bandit-guerrilla organizations and restore stability to the countryside. Ultimately he establishes the unique role played by the United States in facilitating the development of all aspects of Colombia's internal security infrastructure in order to contain "one of

the world's most extensive and complex internal wars of this century."³

La Violencia: The Historical Context.

Relations between the United States and Colombia in the field of national security began to expand as a result of World War II and Colombia's geostrategic proximity to the Panama Canal. This relationship intensified as the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) engaged in cold war. Though Colombian policymakers supported U.S. global strategy, internal crisis consumed them for almost 2 decades.

In the early afternoon of April 9, 1948, an assassin shot and killed populist Liberal Party leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in central Bogotá. Shortly thereafter a crowd seized Gaitán's killer and beat him to death. They then dragged the corpse to the front of the Presidential Palace and hung it in a public street. Uncontrolled violence followed, resulting in the deaths of some 1,400 people over a 2-day period, before security forces regained control. In the countryside, near civil war followed the so-called Bogotazo.⁴

The broader, historical reasons for the Bogotazo and the violence that ensued lay within the dynamics of social and political life in Colombia. A social structure had developed based on ownership and use of land. *Latifundista* institutions formed to support this structure, while values, beliefs, and attitudes associated with it remained practically unchanged from what can be described as a "peasant order."⁵

The two traditional parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, dominated politics. While leadership of these parties came from the upper economic and social strata of the society, the intense rivalry that developed expressed itself at all levels of Colombian society. Traditional political antagonism coupled with social and

economic dislocation fuelled violence that, particularly in rural areas, “had the characteristics of a blood feud.”⁶

Generally speaking, the *Violencia* era is broken down into four periods.⁷ Increasing political instability characterized Phase I (1946-April 9, 1948) as the Liberal party under Alberto Lleras Camargo split its left and right wing constituencies, losing power to a minority Conservative government led by Mariano Ospina Pérez. Out of power for nearly 16 years, the Conservatives utilized the new opportunity to fill patronage positions throughout the country with party supporters, exacerbating existing political enmities. The assassination of Gaitán on April 9, 1948, produced the Bogotazo, the most visible expression of these simmering internal tensions.

Phase II (Bogotazo-June 13, 1953) saw the bloodiest period of insurrection, with guerrilla warfare spreading in Colombia from the Llanos into Tolima. Both Liberal and Conservative campesinos organized into guerrilla self-defense groups in rural areas to protect themselves against partisan attacks.

As the Conservative government lost control over the situation, partisan use of the National Police, and to some extent of the Army, increased, tarnishing those institutions and further mobilizing the Liberal peasantry against the regime.⁸ As violence reached unprecedented levels, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla stepped in to overthrow the government and install a military dictatorship. For his actions, he was, as one Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) document described it, “hailed as a deliverer” throughout the country.⁹

Phase III (June 13, 1953-May 10, 1957) coincides with the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship. The regime successfully initiated amnesty programs to quell the violence that had engulfed the country. However, as progress toward restoration of constitutional processes stalled, corruption increased, lingering violence met with repression, and guerrilla warfare once again began to spread.

Fearing a return to previous levels of bloodshed and pushed by Rojas' attempts to create a political "Third Force" movement, Liberal and Conservative leaders reached bipartisan agreement to form the *Frente Nacional* (National Front) government—a plan to alternate the presidency and split power between the two parties every 4 years. On May 10, 1957, a 5-man military junta displaced Rojas, forcing him into exile and ushering in the final phase of the *Violencia* era.¹⁰

This final phase—Phase IV (August 1958-1966)—encompasses the first two National Front governments of Liberal Lleras Camargo and Conservative Guillermo León Valencia. It witnessed an extensive collaborative effort between the United States and Colombia in developing the latter's internal security apparatus, ultimately yielding the most successful counterbandit/counterguerrilla operations of that time in the Western Hemisphere. Although this "officially" ended the *Violencia* era, bringing a greater measure of stability to that nation, problems rooted in this period continue to plague Colombia to the present.

Special Survey Team in Colombia.

Colombia inaugurated the new National Front system of government in August 1958. Founded on an alternation plan that split power between the country's Liberal and Conservative parties for a 16-year period, it offered an opportunity to end a decade of terror, internecine political warfare, and military dictatorship brought on by Gaitán's assassination. Plagued by ongoing guerrilla-bandit problems, the National Front's first president, Alberto Lleras Camargo, sought internal security assistance from the United States.

In response to this request, the Eisenhower administration assembled a Special Survey Team to investigate Colombia's internal security situation. Under State Department direction and with Department of Defense (DoD) support, the CIA fielded a team of specialists

with wide-ranging irregular warfare experience in Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

CIA officer Hans Tofte headed a team that included Colonel Napoleon Valeriano (Philippine and U.S. Army), Major Charles T. R. Bohannon, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph T. Koontz, Colonel Berkeley Lewis, and Lieutenant Bruce Walker. They arrived in Colombia on October 26, 1959, and remained for 2 months, meeting with political and labor leaders, military commanders, jailed bandit and guerrilla fighters, and several guerrilla chieftains, logging over 23,000 kilometers in an attempt to survey the violence problem.

On January 27, 1960, the Special Team completed a preliminary report, summarizing its findings of the security situation in Colombia. The report outlined the critical problems of current, active (primarily bandit), and potential (primarily communist guerrilla) violence. The team estimated that violence had taken more than 250,000 lives—10,000 alone between 1958 and 1959—while displacing more than 1.5 million people from farms and homesteads in the countryside.

The inability of security forces to take effective action compounded this grave situation. The Army remained garrison-bound; security forces lacked any kind of information, public relations, or psychological warfare capabilities; and the population despised the National Police. Military and civilian intelligence organizations had proved ineffectual.

Public opinion toward government, justice and law enforcement agencies, and security forces oscillated between distrust and outright hatred after more than a decade of brutal internal war. Communist forces, though not an immediate threat, had the potential to exploit the existing situation and already controlled several rural enclaves, organizing armed militia groups into *autodefensa* (self-defense) units.¹¹

In the team's opinion, the personal prestige, ability, and integrity of Lleras Camargo constituted the key element and asset in any effort to rebuild a broadly supported democratic government in Colombia.¹² Long-term solutions to the violence problem could only be undertaken through major structural changes in the social, economic, and political system of that country.

Recognizing the need to utilize Lleras' influence and authority in any immediate bid to control the violence, the Special Team recommended the following six-point program to the Colombian government.

1. Found a special counter guerrilla combat force from Lancero units within the Colombian Army.

2. Institute an effective military intelligence service and reorganize the civilian *Servicio de Inteligencia Colombiana* (Colombian Intelligence Service [SIC]).

3. Establish an effective government public information service with a covert psychological warfare capability.

4. Initiate a so-called "attraction" program, coordinated through a Civil Affairs (G-5) section of the Armed Forces, in an effort to rehabilitate public opinion of Colombia's security forces.

5. Reorganize, train, equip, and deploy the National Police and rehabilitate their public image.

6. Emphasize national development and rehabilitation programs, particularly land settlement and government-community welfare ("self-help") projects.¹³

U.S. national interests required that Colombia, given its strategic Caribbean location, not be allowed to sink into turmoil and revolution that might lead to a government hostile to the United States. Consequently, an emergency U.S. aid program that offered assistance and guidance to the Lleras administration best served that national interest. Both materiel and appropriate personnel were

needed to support objectives outlined in the six-point program for Colombian action.¹⁴

On May 25, 1960, the Special Team presented its final report to Secretary of State Christian Herter. This detailed review and analysis of Colombia's multifaceted violence problem reinforced and elaborated upon the findings proffered in the preliminary report. Echoing Lleras Camargo's concerns, the team identified current, active violence as the most critical, short-term problem facing the new National Front government.

Primarily criminal in nature, this was the work of bandit gangs committing acts of murder, rape, and "economic terrorism" in coffee-growing and cattle-raising regions. Led by *violentos* (violent ones) nurtured in the brutality of the period, these gangs operated as quasi-guerrillas, raiding and maintaining rudimentary intelligence networks throughout their areas of operation and establishing spheres of influence that promoted a rapid growth in black-market activities, aided by intermediaries and purchasers of illicit produce.¹⁵

The team judged that the Colombian government could eradicate these groups more easily because, unlike real guerrillas, they lacked ideological motivation and popular support. Lancero units, guided by qualified advisors and supported by a functioning intelligence service as well as basic psychological warfare and civic action programs, could alleviate this problem relatively quickly. By employing counterguerrilla methods to "capture, kill, or adequately discourage bandits and outlaws," the team estimated that current, active violence could be quelled in 10-12 months.¹⁶

As to overcoming the second, more substantial obstacle of potential violence—a problem not easily remedied by a single action—the team was less sanguine. To bring long-term stability to Colombia required wide-ranging reform of that country's social, political, and economic system. Military solutions were secondary and largely a derivative of nation-building efforts that would entrench a

broadly respected, democratic society.¹⁷ Their stark appraisal: short of “genocide or bankruptcy” no military solution to the problem of potential violence existed.¹⁸

The Lleras administration faced the “rock-bottom, elementary issue” of reestablishing confidence in government among Colombia’s demoralized population. Restoring public faith in the government’s ability to maintain peace required it to reduce current, active violence, develop political stability based on democratic processes, and ensure equitable solutions to basic social and economic needs.

It could only achieve internal stability by coordinating military and law-enforcement activities with ongoing efforts to eliminate widespread social, political, and economic injustice. The “cardinal principle” to achieving this goal in Colombia was the development of a true democratic government, reflecting the will of the majority of its people while concomitantly protecting minority rights.¹⁹

But the team did not minimize the extent of Colombia’s social ills, recognizing the magnitude of the dilemma faced by any Colombian government, even one led by a person of Lleras’ stature. These problems included a large rural population displaced from the land or onto tracts too small for productive use (minifundia); widespread illiteracy in the countryside; racial inequality; the highest rates for diseases such as typhoid, typhus, yellow fever, small pox, and leprosy in the Western Hemisphere; and an entrenched political oligarchy, serving only the interests of the elite. Critical shortages of food, housing, medical services, and education had contributed to what can only be described as a revolutionary situation among “have-nots.”²⁰

In Colombia, efforts to suppress violence, promote effective labor organizations, develop extensive social welfare and rehabilitation services, resettle displaced persons, and stabilize the economy remained necessary components to establishing internal stability. Lleras attempted to do this by supporting land resettlement and

malaria suppression programs, improving educational facilities, undertaking judicial reform, and promoting government initiatives to expand industrial and agricultural productivity as well as infrastructure improvements to transportation and communications facilities.²¹

But countering insurgents requires a coordinated political-military posture that incorporates a full spectrum of social, economic, and psychological components into any security strategy.²² Though Lleras had taken important first steps, the Special Team offered a list of new programs—many of them focused on reorienting Colombia’s security forces to an internal security mission—that it deemed essential to developing the kind of comprehensive strategy needed to achieve lasting stability.

Key elements included regaining public trust in the Armed Forces by focusing military efforts on the problem of active violence; establishing competent national intelligence and public information agencies; enlarging rehabilitation efforts; and improving national tax structures as well as government administration and operations. Finally, the team recommended that Lleras initiate an antisubversive program either “partially or wholly clandestine, to discredit or eliminate by legal means those anti-democratic forces seeking for their own benefit, or for the benefit of a foreign power, to impede or prevent the establishment of a stable, popular, democratic government.”²³

The Special Team also identified another vital component to any successful political-military strategy designed to counter internal instability in Colombia: U.S. support. Emphasizing “quasi-covert” assistance to augment and reorient Colombian stabilization efforts, the team envisioned “special temporary aid” in the form of both materiel and advisory personnel.

Specialists with experience in counterguerrilla, information, and psychological warfare, intelligence and

counterintelligence, civic action and rehabilitation programs, and police operations would focus on both short-term antiviolenace activities and long-term measures aimed at ameliorating the root causes of potential violence. In short, they would concentrate their efforts towards reorganizing Colombia's conventionally oriented security forces. The team recommended that these advisors be fitted into the existing Country Team framework on a temporary basis under the supervision of a senior advisor acting as special assistant to the U.S. Ambassador.²⁴

In an effort to deflect "interventionist" charges, the Special Team also advocated the use of third-country nationals—contracted to the Colombian government under "cover" arrangements but actually under covert U.S. control—as advisors to security forces engaged in guerrilla-bandit suppression operations. Non-U.S. personnel, they reasoned, brought experience and training not readily available in the United States and offered additional propaganda value by demonstrating "international solidarity and support of U.S. objectives." As to material aid, the team suggested "sterile" equipment, stripped of U.S. markings and supplied through alternate military aid channels. Total U.S. costs for this special temporary aid were estimated at less than one million dollars.²⁵

In the final analysis, the Special Team report offered a "blueprint" for prosecuting the war against internal violence in Colombia. This blueprint—weighted as it was in the short-term towards securing the stability of the Colombian state—did not neglect long-term solutions centered on legitimate, democratic governance. Its wide-ranging counterinsurgency strategy encompassed those military, economic, and sociopolitical elements vital to the success of any nation-building effort.

Ultimately policymakers in Colombia and the United States narrowed the focus of this strategic proposal, concentrating too heavily on military solutions at the

expense of broad social reform. Nonetheless, the Special Team's contribution was a benchmark strategy for combating revolutionary insurgency and revitalizing a structural reform process that might have led to deeper democratization in Colombia.

Internal Defense during the Early National Front Period.

In 1961 the new Kennedy administration completed Eisenhower's policy reorientation towards Colombia, placing it on a firm internal defense posture. The administration utilized a bifurcated policy of military and socioeconomic assistance—counterinsurgency coupled to the Alliance for Progress. This dual-track model remained in place under Lyndon Johnson, though with less commitment, given the exigencies imposed by growing U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

The administration revived earlier plans to develop a special counter guerrilla team deployed from helicopters and the Colombian armed forces received a “special impact shipment” of approximately \$1.5 million worth of military hardware in late 1961 to enable *Orden Público* (Public Order) missions. This included a variety of vehicles, communication equipment, and small arms meant to equip and mobilize the specialized ranger-style unit that became prototypical in the campaign against rural violence and uncontrolled banditry in the countryside.²⁶ It also included the first shipment of helicopters, an aircraft that proved “a major, even crucial, element in the struggle against violence.”²⁷

For the Kennedy administration, this special shipment became the first tangible effort to assist Colombian military forces in their struggle against internal violence and led to a vastly expanded internal security effort under Military Assistance Program (MAP) support.

The Yarborough Team.

In February 1962 Brigadier General William P. Yarborough led a U.S. Army Special Warfare Center team to Colombia in a follow-up study to the Special Survey team's report. The Yarborough team's primary objective was to study the violence problem, evaluate the effectiveness of the Colombian counterinsurgency effort, and make recommendations that would allow the effective deployment of a U.S. Counterinsurgency Military Training Team (MTT).²⁸

During a 12-day mission, the team toured areas encompassing four of Colombia's eight brigades. In its final evaluation, it concluded that lack of central planning and coordination had seriously affected all levels of the counterinsurgency effort in Colombia. Fragmentation of resources; lack of essential communications, transportation and equipment; reliance on static outposts; and improper use of military personnel in civil capacities placed the army on the defensive and allowed both subversive and bandit elements to acquire the initiative.

Inadequate collation and dissemination of intelligence at both an army and national level further hampered internal security operations, as did the lack of counterintelligence training. Civic action and psychological operations programs remained sporadic, no properly delineated relationship existed between the army and National Police, and broader social, political, and economic problems existed for which resolution seemed remote.²⁹

The team recommended that the Colombian government institute corrective measures, including greater collaboration among the DAS, National Police, and armed forces in the fields of intelligence and counterintelligence; coordination and standardization of programs structured to a national counterinsurgency plan; and improved transportation and communications equipment.³⁰ At brigade level, they believed it essential to garrison fixed

outposts with state police in order to facilitate increased army mobility, prioritize action areas, intensify antibandit propaganda, equip and maintain troops for rapid reaction and night operations, and conduct joint, inter-brigade operations.

Armored buses filled with soldiers or police in civilian clothing could be covertly introduced into the transportation system, and operational zones isolated through curfews, civilian registration programs, and other populace control measures. Finally, exhaustive interrogation of captured bandits and guerrillas using sodium pentathol and polygraph was needed in order to gather intelligence information on hostile groups.³¹

The Yarborough team also recommended that the United States provide guidance and assistance in all aspects of counterinsurgency. To establish proper antiviolence plans, requirements, and operations, the team envisioned the deployment of MTTs for psychological warfare, civic action, air support, and intelligence, as well as five Special Forces A-teams that would work concurrently with the battalions of the four brigades most seriously engaged with guerrillas and bandits.

Finally, concerned by the political instability surrounding the transfer of power from Lleras to Valencia, the Yarborough team presented its final report to the Kennedy administration's Special Group (Counterinsurgency) with a secret supplement. The team believed that, in view of the economic and political environment in Colombia, "positive measures" should be instituted if the internal security situation deteriorated further. This would require civilian and military personnel clandestinely selected and trained in resistance operations, in order to develop an underground civil and military structure.

This organization could then undertake "clandestine execution of plans developed by the U.S. Government toward defined objectives in the political, economic, and military fields."³² While pressuring for reforms, it would

also undertake “counter-agent and counter-propaganda” functions as well as “paramilitary, sabotage and/or terrorist activities against known communist proponents.”

If such a structure already existed, the Yarborough team declared, it should be deployed immediately against communist elements. The team suspected that “the Rurales operating in the Llanos are CAS [Covert Action Staff] directed through DAS in Colombia.” This being the case, they believed it a “step in the right direction” as long as CAS had “positive leadership influence” over the security force.³³

Although the use of U.S. Special Forces A-teams in a direct combat role “was not favorably considered by the Colombian Minister of War, COMUSMILGP [Commander U.S. Military Group], or the United States Ambassador,”³⁴ the Colombian government did make maximum use of U.S. MTTs in the period following submission of the Yarborough report.³⁵ To facilitate internal security programs in Colombia and throughout the other American republics, the Latin American Special Action Force (1st Special Forces, 8th Special Forces Group) was stationed in the Canal Zone in August 1962.

This force provided the majority of mobile training teams (MITs) used in support of internal defense. Numerous MTTs involved in a broad range of instruction went to Colombia in the decade after the Yarborough team, teaching everything from supply, engineering, sanitation, and other civic action projects; to intelligence, counterinsurgency, psychological warfare, and special operations. In fact, more MTTs went to Colombia during this period than any other country in Latin America.³⁶

Overall, the Yarborough Team report represents the beginning of a drift in U.S. policy towards a more militarized approach to Colombia’s internal security problems. Less focused on a broad, nation-building strategy, it is, nonetheless, notable for promoting components—professionalization of security forces, collaborative intelligence structures, development of rapid reaction

capabilities—critical to the tactical and operational success of any counterinsurgency plan.

Also notable is that U.S. policymakers resisted the temptation to “Americanize” Colombia’s conflict through the introduction of Special Forces combat teams directly onto the battlefield. Unlike Vietnam, decisionmakers pursued an indirect policy that played to America’s strengths: economic and military aid, training of security forces, technical assistance, and logistical and intelligence support. Not only did this policy prove judicious from a domestic political standpoint, it ensured Colombian solutions to Colombian problems while furthering U.S. Cold War interests.

Plan LAZO.

After the Yarborough and Special Survey team reports, a Colombia Internal Defense Plan evolved that was designed to integrate military efforts with the economic, social, and political aspects of the internal security problem. Approval of this plan came from the highest levels of the Kennedy administration.

In May 1962 . . . Ambassador [Fulton] Freeman established the Country Team Task Force to consider recommendations for an antiviolence program. The recommendations of this task force were handcarried by the Ambassador to Washington in June, 1962, where they were presented to Special Group (CI). The Special Group shortly thereafter approved the recommendations as the Colombia Internal Defense Plan. In August, 1962, the recommendations and the implied offer of U.S. assistance to implement them were presented to President Valencia and the Minister of War. Upon their concurrence, the way was cleared for close cooperation between the United States Country Team and the Colombian Government on an antiviolence campaign.³⁷

During this same time period, Commanding General Ruiz Novoa, Generals Rebeiz and Fajardo, Colonel Alvaro Valencia Tovar, and a dozen other Colombian Army, Air

Force, and National Police officers—all supported by a U.S. Counterinsurgency MTT—prepared the Colombian military response to the violence problem. Known as Plan LAZO (“snare” or “noose”), it called for broad civic action programs within violence zones and an improved antiviolence apparatus coupled with military action that would target leading bandit elements and suppress and eliminate guerrilla forces. Ultimately, it would become the basis for additional counterinsurgency plans, including more sophisticated ones involving joint operations such as the Colombian Armed Forces (Joint) Counterinsurgency Plan of 1964-66.³⁸

Plan LAZO’s primary components were:

- Tightening and integrating the command structure of all forces engaged in public order missions to clearly establish military responsibility for all operations;
- Creating more versatile and sophisticated tactical units capable of successful unconventional warfare operations;
- Expanding the military’s public relations and psychological warfare units to improve civilian attitudes toward the army’s public order mission; and,
- Employing the armed forces in tasks intended to contribute to the economic development and social well-being of all Colombians, especially those subjected to guerrilla-bandit activity.³⁹

The Colombian army implemented Plan LAZO in July 1962. One of its primary objectives was to “eliminate the so-called “independent republics” created by leftist insurgents and some bandit elements in the upper Magdalena Valley.⁴⁰ Within these insurgent enclaves, U.S. intelligence estimated that 11 communist guerrilla groups of approximately 1,600 to 2,000 men remained active, aided

by the *Partido Comunista Colombiano* (Colombian Communist Party-PCC). The PCC attempted to both organize and strengthen these enclaves, establishing militia units in an effort to direct and control bandit and former Liberal-guerrilla paramilitary capabilities.⁴¹

Another 29 noncommunist guerrilla groups of approximately 4,500 men continued to exist primarily in the southern and central departments of Colombia. Remnants of the fighting since the assassination of Gaitán, these groups continued to maintain arms and remained unresponsive to government actions to improve social and economic conditions in their areas unless coordinated through former guerrilla leaders.

Though largely inactive, they remained a potential threat to the government should the National Front system fail and partisan violence escalate in the countryside. Finally, somewhere between 90 and 150 bandit gangs totaling over 2000 men were reported as active primarily in the coffee-rich Cauca Valley region. Operating in a highly individualistic, though quasi-guerrilla, fashion, these groups maintained intelligence nets throughout local rural communities. U.S. intelligence concluded that organization and operational coordination had increased; but interbandit rivalry continued to cause clashes, and attempts by the PCC to control these gangs had, at that point, achieved little success.⁴²

In conjunction with military civic action programs, targeting these bandit gangs and communist enclaves became the primary focus of the Colombian army as Plan LAZO progressed. As pacification in some violence-plagued departments took hold and area commanders determined “that control had shifted in their favor,” they employed a classic technique vital to the long-term success of any counterinsurgency plan: “The army then organized civilian self-defense units (*autodefensa*) and directed them to relieve army units of some patrolling and local garrisoning.” Within urban centers, security forces initiated a comparable

program the following year as a “wave of kidnapping had created apprehension among the wealthy.”⁴³

Communications and civil defense early warning networks played an important role in linking these *autodefensa* units to security forces under Plan LAZO. At the national level, the U.S. Army Mission and Colombian Ministry of Government prepared a plan in November 1962 for a communications network in the Llanos-Amazonas regions.⁴⁴ The new system allowed military, police, and border elements to utilize the system for security purposes, while simultaneously allowing the central government to maintain closer links with its territorial areas. By 1965 plans existed to expand the communications net into isolated regions along Colombia’s Pacific coastline.⁴⁵

At the departmental level, the Colombian government established rural civil defense early warning radio nets with local community support. These nets were utilized in violence-afflicted regions as a means of gathering intelligence and providing early warning against bandit or guerrilla attacks. Colombian security forces described each net as a “Federation,” with subscribers contributing \$200 for radio equipment that brought two-way communication down to individual farm level. Authorities intended the system to link battalions in I, III, VI, and VIII Brigade areas to local authorities and the civilian populace, as well as local and National police and the air force.⁴⁶

Supported by groups that had suffered considerable economic dislocation in the violence, eleven separate networks existed in the spring of 1965. These included coffee cooperatives along the Cauca River in Caldas, Valle, and Tolima; agricultural groups in the sugar growing region of Cauca and cotton growers in Magdalena, and other armed agricultural groups along the central Magdalena River Valley from Bolivar; and the major oil extraction and refining area of Santander to Huila. Each net consisted of up to 100 citizen-band radio sets distributed to farms, civilian defense centers (net control stations), and military civil

defense monitor and repeater locations. Based on the success of the original nets, Colombia's security forces scheduled another 47 for installation in the 1966-68 period.⁴⁷

It is clear that Plan LAZO was an ambitious and innovative counterinsurgency strategy that reflected the security interests of the Colombian state. With its inception, counterviolence measures became more determined as security forces increasingly aimed their operations towards destroy and capture missions.⁴⁸ Despite earlier U.S. concerns regarding Colombian military capabilities, the Armed Forces took to counterinsurgency with alacrity. Late 1962 saw 75 percent of Colombia's military forces engaged in some form of antiviolence measures.⁴⁹

Equally important is the fact that Plan LAZO incorporated civic action and civil defense in conjunction with counterinsurgency operations in an effort to win popular support. By engaging Colombia's rural—and urban—population, security forces denied radical groups the ability to develop the kind of widespread, clandestine civilian infrastructure vital to the successful prosecution of revolutionary "People's War."

Acción cívica militar.

Decisionmakers in both Washington and Bogotá supported rehabilitation programs for Colombia's civilian population as an integral component to their antiviolence policy. Early in the National Front period, the Lleras government instituted rehabilitation commissions and *Equipos Polivalentes* ("Welfare Teams") to coordinate civilian efforts at ameliorating conditions wrought by the *Violencia* and to reestablish stability in violence-affected departments.

At the national level, rehabilitation commissions attempted to track programs in designated zones, coordinate relief efforts (particularly for abandoned

children), assist refugees in finding employment, seek solutions to land title problems, and promote colonization of unused land.⁵⁰ In an attempt to provide credit to displaced peasants seeking to reestablish farms, the Lleras government made extensive use of social security ministries, banking institutions such as the *Credito Agrario*, religious organizations, the Red Cross, and U.S. assistance through Public Law (PL)-480 surplus provisions.

At the community level the administration dispatched 30 Welfare Teams, each composed of a doctor, nurse, several agrarian technicians, an engineer, veterinarian, home economist, and occasionally a public administrator. The government used these special impact teams as advisors in community development efforts, particularly project-oriented, small-scale undertakings that utilized agrarian credit assistance and co-op style local labor to build rural schools, mills, medical facilities, or “model farms.”⁵¹

Welfare Teams produced “the best kind of propaganda favorable to the long-term objectives of the [administration],” establishing a government presence in rural communities previously outside existing national structures. Despite this fact, “partisan politics” impeded rehabilitation efforts as did “lack of funds, lack of personnel, and perhaps most of all, [a] lack of appreciation among certain elements of the ruling class in Colombia, of the magnitude and the critical importance of these needs.”⁵²

At the same time, Colombian military officers began to show heightened interest in the concept of *acción cívica militar*—military civic action. In 1958 Louis J. Lebet, French economist and clergyman, produced a report on development conditions in Colombia in which he proposed to use the military, by virtue of its institutional coherence, as an agent of social change. Lebet called for:

. . . the optimal utilization of the armed forces to assure harmonious development, particularly in what refers to the more rapid establishment of infrastructure, for the preparation of technicians at different levels for the purpose of exploiting the

territory, and for the cultural elevation of the whole. Stated in another form, the armed forces of a developing country not only have a defensive function: they should also be, according to the eminent French rural economist, Jean Marious Gatheron, “a creative army.”⁵³

Ruiz Novoa, nominated as Commanding General of the Colombian Army in 1960, strongly advocated the use of Colombia’s armed forces “as agents to mend the national social fabric and to develop the social infrastructure.” Ruiz believed that destroying guerrillas was simply not enough—the army must also “attack the social and economic causes as well as the historic political reasons for their existence.”⁵⁴

Civic action efforts remained sporadic until April-September 1962, when the Colombian military, working with the United States Country Team, developed an “impact” program for violence-afflicted regions. A U.S. Civic Action MTT positively evaluated the plan later that year and projects outlined within it—road construction and maintenance, education, health care centers, and communications networks—“came to embody the core” of the Colombian civic action effort in the early National Front period. Informal programs ran throughout much of that following year until Presidential Decree No. 1381 established the *Comité Nacional de Acción cívica militar* on June 24, 1963.⁵⁵

Road construction fostered by MAP and MTT support began in June 1963, and over the next several years the Colombian government initiated gravel surfaced routes in the violence-ridden departments of Huila, Cauca, Caldas, Valle, Cundinamarca, Santander, and Tolima. Providing access to both civil and military traffic, maintenance and construction of “farm-to-market” and penetration roads had a direct effect on the suppression of violence in these areas.⁵⁶

Beginning in February 1964 the Valencia administration, supported by MAP and Agency for International Development (AID) funding, established 19

health care centers in an attempt to reach approximately 100,000 people in rural areas particularly impacted by the *Violencia*. That same year, the Colombian air force and navy—again with MAP support—developed a “Flying Dispensary” to reach colonists and indigenous populations in remote regions by aircraft and two “Floating Dispensaries” along the Putumayo and Magdalena rivers.⁵⁷

In communist-influenced regions or areas controlled by *violentos*, the Colombian army also undertook civic action programs such as construction of water wells and potable water systems, literacy training programs, development of youth camps, and construction of rural schools, as well as dispensaries to provide dental treatment and medicine. In one instance, a dispensary established in an area of Caldas became instrumental in turning the populace against the leader of a local bandit gang.⁵⁸

Simultaneously, U.S. support for community action groups and public safety programs in Colombia began under the Alliance for Progress. Though not directly under U.S. military control, this assistance did provide community development funds at the local level, while also providing aid to both the National Police and DAS in order to improve training, administration, operations, communications, and public relations.

In sum, the Valencia administration, with extensive U.S. support, implemented civic action programs within the context of Plan LAZO as a means to improve internal security throughout the countryside. Rural development projects alleviated factors contributing to violence, opening areas to greater pacification efforts by security forces and projecting state power into regions long ignored by successive governments in Bogotá.

Civic action allowed security forces to overcome “the traditional suspicion of the military held by the people in the violence regions,” improving intelligence and support for internal security operations.⁵⁹ In that sense, civic action became a means not only for building physical

infrastructure, but also for denying Colombia's human infrastructure to insurgent organizations.

In the long run, however, the failure of successive Colombian administrations to build and maintain an effective state presence in the countryside allowed insurgent forces to regain momentum. Ultimately, the ensuing security vacuum also gave rise to the privatization of civil defense in the form of paramilitary forces.

Building Colombia's Intelligence Structures.

Intelligence is critical to the successful conduct of counterinsurgency operations. But by its very nature, irregular warfare:

. . . place[s] new demands on conventional concepts of intelligence. . . . In counterinsurgency, underground and guerrilla targets are elusive and transitory, and the life cycle and usefulness of intelligence are brief. . . . In conventional warfare intelligence is not primarily concerned with individuals, whereas in counterinsurgency activities it focuses on individuals and their behavior patterns. The identity and whereabouts of the insurgents are usually unknown and their attacks are unpredictable. The underground lines of communication and the areas of underground logistical support are concealed from view. It is to these highly specific unknowns that counterinsurgency intelligence must address itself.⁶⁰

In Colombia, the Rojas regime perpetrated a classic litany of abuses—"resorting to torture, concentration camps, and indiscriminate aerial bombing"⁶¹—characteristic of a government ill-prepared to meet an underground enemy. By the time the U.S. Special Team arrived in Colombia, it found an intelligence apparatus that still remained unprepared for the exigencies of counterinsurgency operations.

The team noted that President Lleras received no intelligence briefing, the civilian SIC had proved inefficient and incompetent, the intelligence section of the National

Police (F-2) suffered from training deficiencies, lack of direction, and no clear mission, while military intelligence as it existed provided little more than “classified news reporting.”⁶² It recommended extensive U.S. intelligence support, both civilian and military, in order to increase the effectiveness of Colombia’s intelligence organizations.

Lleras sought to alleviate some of these deficiencies by instituting the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (Administrative Department of Security-DAS) in place of the deactivated SIC. The DAS performed intelligence and counterintelligence functions and coordinated countersubversive actions among all security forces, while the F-2 section of the National Police concentrated on antibandit (criminal) measures. The mandates of these two agencies were ostensibly delineated by political versus criminal acts of violence, but the interrelated nature of violence within the Colombian context often made it difficult to differentiate between them.⁶³

Interest in developing an effective military intelligence program increased as more Colombian officers recognized the need for timely and accurate intelligence in maintaining public order. They supported the U.S. idea of establishing a broad intelligence course for Latin American military personnel in Panama, and, beginning in 1960, the Colombian army filled its quota in each class in an effort to expand this program. However, difficulties arose in assigning personnel to duties on their return as the army lacked a proper intelligence infrastructure.⁶⁴

U.S. efforts to institute a more effective military intelligence organization in Colombia began in earnest with a two-man U.S. Intelligence MTT in February 1961, followed by a second, three-man Intelligence MTT in May 1962 and a permanent Mission intelligence advisor. The first team was not completely successful,⁶⁵ but it did establish a base for intelligence operations that became increasingly more effective after the adoption of Plan LAZO by the armed forces. In the same period, the United States

initiated plans to deploy a Psychological Warfare MTT to Colombia and made course spaces available for officers at both the Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and the Canal Zone in psychological operations and counterresistance training.⁶⁶

The second U.S. Intelligence MTT proved more successful. It gave several short-term training programs for interrogators, mobile intelligence groups (*grupos móviles de inteligencia*), and Localizadores teams (*grupos inteligencia de localizadores*—intelligence hunter-killer teams). Colombia's armed forces used hunter-killer teams, composed of 25 veteran officers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and civilians (heavily armed), trained to operate in the field for long periods of time, and to fight and penetrate hostile groups as well as work with informants.⁶⁷

Perhaps the most notable military aspect of Plan LAZO, however, was the adoption of counter guerrilla warfare techniques that highly depend on sophisticated intelligence-gathering and analysis.

. . . Army tactical units acquired a “comando localizador,” or unconventional warfare shock group, which clandestinely killed or captured guerrilla and bandit leaders. In addition, Mobile Intelligence Groups (*grupos móviles de inteligencia*) were attached to all major operating units. Their activities seem to have included counter guerrilla work similar to the comando localizador, as well as information-gathering.⁶⁸

These tactics brought security forces continued success against urban radical groups, killing or capturing nearly two dozen people largely associated with the United Front of Revolutionary Action (FUAR) and “Workers-Students-Peasants” Movement (MOEC), and against rural bandits and guerrillas, killing 388 in 1962 alone.⁶⁹ Attacking the leadership structures of guerrilla-bandit groups splintered organizational cohesion and led to a 20 percent increase in deaths attributable to the military's aggressive new tactics. Casualty ratios went from about even to 7:2 in favor of Colombia's security forces.⁷⁰

In 1963 the Colombian armed forces developed and issued Internal Security Directive 001. Addressed to all three military services, the National Police, and DAS, it called for cooperation through a Joint Operations Center (JOC) and the establishment of an intelligence agency that would consider both military and national intelligence requirements.⁷¹ Although the Valencia administration did form a central intelligence committee consisting of the three military services and the National Police, no “substantial progress towards the establishment within the Colombian Government of an interagency intelligence committee which could coordinate intelligence produced by all agencies having a collection capacity” was made by mid-1964.⁷²

However, the Colombian Armed Forces did create a Military Intelligence Battalion to undertake combat intelligence, counterintelligence, and special operations. Fielded to assist in coastal surveillance and internal security operations against infiltration of agents, “provocateurs,” arms, and propaganda, it was also used to find, destroy, or eliminate communist and extremist activities through a network of clandestine agents.⁷³ Finally, the United States provided vehicles, radios, and other equipment to II Brigade in the Guajira area in an effort to establish a surveillance-intelligence net that could monitor Colombia’s northern coast for “subversive agents and contraband.”⁷⁴

In sum, despite national-level deficiencies, U.S.-supported reorganization of Colombia’s intelligence organizations played an integral part in the containment of the violence problem. Enhanced intelligence capabilities “proved a key factor” in helping security forces to halve the level of violent death—especially of civilians—in the countryside from the pre-National Front period.⁷⁵ Reorienting Colombian intelligence to an unconventional mindset facilitated the ability of that nation’s security forces to deal with both the overt and clandestine components of insurgent organizations, that is, both

main-line guerrilla units and their underground support structures.

Although the transformation remained incomplete, Colombia's intelligence organizations became adept at performing their counterinsurgent function and provided timely information that helped to curtail the kinds of combat excesses that might have ignited widespread support for a revolutionary movement that could destroy the existing state. In short, intelligence proved to be a force multiplier, critical to the successful conduct of counter-insurgency operations in Colombia.

Operation *Marquetalia*.

Even prior to the inception of Plan LAZO, the Colombian government deemed action against the communist-influenced independent republics essential to internal security. While most of these regions remained relatively passive, causing little interference in government affairs,⁷⁶ they did gradually develop shadow governments ruled by skilled Marxist guerrilla leaders unresponsive to control from Bogotá.⁷⁷ Early in the National Front period, Lleras Camargo attempted a two-track policy against these guerrilla zones. The administration attempted both to encourage peasants to participate in rehabilitation programs while eliminating guerrilla leadership that resisted government efforts to gain local support.⁷⁸

This was the case in 1961 when guerrilla leader Manuel Marulanda Vélez (*Tiro Fijo*) declared a "Republic of Marquetalia." The Lleras government, fearing that a Cuban-style revolutionary situation might develop, launched a surprise attack against the area in early 1962. Although unsuccessful in driving irregular forces from their stronghold, the army did establish several outposts in the area.⁷⁹ Ironically, Marulanda began his guerrilla career in the early *Violencia* period with other Liberal irregular forces that later combined with communist fighters from the same area prior to the formation of the National Front.⁸⁰

The Colombian government accelerated probing actions against the enclaves after the development of Plan LAZO, adopting a U.S. counterinsurgency methodology that included:

- Counterguerrilla training for security forces, initiation of civic action programs, recruitment of informers, and infiltration of security personnel into guerrilla groups.
- Conducting psychological operations in order to establish control over the civilian population.
- Initiating operations to blockade specific areas and isolate guerrilla groups from their sources of support and intelligence.
- Utilizing in-place informers and infiltrators to splinter the internal cohesion of the guerrilla groups and conducting ongoing offensive counterinsurgency operations, coupled with psychological warfare to destroy guerrilla units and liquidate leadership cadre.
- Reconstructing operational zones economically, socially, and politically under the auspices of U.S. aid programs.⁸¹

For Colombia's security forces, 1964-65 proved pivotal years in the struggle against the enclaves. On May 18, 1964, the Valencia government launched Operation MARQUETALIA against Marulanda's guerrilla forces, using a combined arms approach that included heavy artillery, air force bombing, and infantry and police encirclement of suspected guerrilla villages.⁸² Some 3,500 men swept through designated combat zones, while 170 elite troops were airlifted into Marulanda's hacienda redoubt in an attempt to trap the guerrilla leader.⁸³ The government recruited Paez Indians with notable success

against the guerrillas as scouts and guides through difficult terrain.⁸⁴

Security forces drove most of the guerrillas—including Marulanda—out of the Marquetalia area, though they escaped the army cordon and fled to the neighboring “republic” of Río Chiquito. On July 20, 1964, Marulanda and other guerrilla leaders from the Tolima-Cauca-Huila border areas met in the First Southern Guerrilla Conference. Declaring themselves “victims of the policy of fire and sword proclaimed and carried out by the oligarchic usurpers of power,” the new coalition called for “armed revolutionary struggle to win power.”⁸⁵ Composed originally of both communist and noncommunist bandit and irregular forces, this southern guerrilla bloc, with some financial and political aid from the PCC, consolidated its command into a unified group known as the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-FARC).⁸⁶

The modern mythology of the FARC promotes the idea that Operation MARQUETALIA was a defeat for the Colombian state.⁸⁷ Nothing could be further from the truth. Ernesto “Ché” Guevara, in reference to Marquetalia, declared that the existence of a “self-defense zone when it is neither the result of a total or partial military defeat of enemy forces, is no more than a colossus with feet of clay.” Its recapture by security forces, “. . . will have a major effect: a great victory for the bourgeoisie, a great defeat for the ‘Castro-Communist revolution.’”⁸⁸ As Régis Debray noted in his response to Guevara, the recapture of Marquetalia forced the FARC back to the first stage of mobile guerrilla warfare.⁸⁹

Thus, in contrast to policymakers today, security-minded officials in Washington and Bogotá during the early National Front period considered the existence of strategic base areas that might become a staging ground for insurgent strike forces simply unacceptable. They directed Colombia’s armed forces to respond with relentless

counterinsurgency campaigns against rural bandit-guerrilla groups coupled with ongoing operations against urban terrorists. By 1966 this strategy brought an end to the existence of the “independent republics,” significantly reduced previous levels of intense violence throughout the nation, and restored a semblance of stability to that country after nearly 20 years of internecine warfare.

Conclusion—Lessons Learned?

What lessons can be derived from this historical analysis that would lend themselves to policymakers facing the current crisis in Colombia? Contemporary problems defy easy categorization as the unintended consequences of past policy failures have transmogrified this struggle from its “standardized” Cold War template to a post-modern internal conflict that grafts “autonomous”⁹⁰ sources of financing—kidnapping, extortion, narco-tax—onto classic Maoist-style insurgency. Nonetheless, historical reflection does offer observable landmarks that might guide policy.

- Colombia need not become “Another Vietnam.” It is not an exaggeration to say that without the support of the United States during the early National Front period, Colombians could not have contained the *Violencia* so effectively nor “found themselves at a stage where they could seriously contemplate [its] elimination.”⁹¹ The infrastructure established by Colombians in collaboration with the United States during this period—psychological operations and civic action capabilities, inter-regional communications and civil defense networks, and an intelligence supported counterinsurgency apparatus—proved essential to a nation that appears plagued by “permanent and endemic warfare.”⁹²

Equally important is the fact that U.S. policymakers opposed direct involvement in Colombia’s internal security problems. Then, as now, it remained a conflict for which Colombians ultimately needed to find their own solutions, though this did not connote U.S. disengagement from its

ally. On the contrary, it meant comprehensive support at the highest levels of U.S. Government without conjunctively Americanizing the conflict through the introduction of combat forces. Ultimately, recognition of mutual security interests ensured at least a short-term solution to the violence problem that proved beneficial to both nations.

Today, much rhetoric is expended on providing long-term solutions to the current crisis in Colombia through a broad sociopolitical strategy. But from an historical perspective, it is apparent that policymakers have once again narrowed their focus to a short-term, militarized approach. For the United States, policy remains mired in a supply-side approach to the war on drugs, while Colombians must deal with a multifaceted violence problem where the “drug issue is only one piece of a larger strategic puzzle.”⁹³

In order to once again establish a sphere of mutual security interests between the United States and Colombia, policymakers must move away from the stale debate over sprayed hectares and captured kilograms. They must move instead towards the true center-of-gravity of the current crisis: the struggle for state stability and the need to capture the hearts and minds of Colombia’s human topography.

- The violence in Colombia requires an integrated strategy that addresses the social, economic, political, and military dynamics of the problem. The origin of modern U.S. internal security policy in Colombia can be traced back to the CIA Special Team survey of 1959. Their final study offers insights relevant to Colombia’s current internal security situation. Concerning the nature of the violence problem, a clear distinction emerged between criminally motivated violence versus the more complex phenomena of “potential” violence posed by insurgent groups. A comprehensive and integrated strategy was required to eradicate the latter threat.

In this regard, the team correctly emphasized the need to rebuild a brutalized populace's belief in government and restore political stability through democratic processes and wide-ranging reform of Colombia's social, political, and economic infrastructure. Although its members clearly viewed Colombia's dilemma through a Cold War prism, the Special Team's lasting contribution to a broader understanding of the *Violencia* era lay in the recognition that military force alone would prove insufficient in solving that nation's complex violence problem.

While they did advocate military engagement and the discriminating use of force against guerrilla-bandit gangs, they also recognized that a prerequisite of successful counterinsurgency operations was an integrated politico-military policy. Their key nation-building strategies continue to resonate: professionalizing the armed forces, curbing excesses in combat and building respect for human rights, improving social and economic conditions for a marginalized peasantry, and fashioning competent, widely trusted, government institutions.

Unfortunately, in the long run, policymakers in both the United States and Colombia chose to narrow the focus of the Special Team's wide-ranging counterinsurgency strategy. Ultimately, they failed to recognize that counterinsurgency is not a military strategy, it is a political strategy with a derivative military component. The larger nation-building concept envisioned in the original Special Team report was supplanted instead by a narrow operational focus on liquidating guerrilla-bandit groups.

Thus by emphasizing security and order over development and democratization, by focusing primarily on military repression of radical actors rather than a long-term commitment to civic action and the amelioration of structural factors that exacerbated internal tensions, policymakers ensured containment—but not resolution—of the violence problem.

- Important fault-lines in the domestic organization of the Colombian state—structural discontinuities that remain apparent to the present day—augmented the violence problem. In Colombia, political mobilization of the population after World War II eroded the structure of a society already burdened by regional differences, elite control over the institutions of power, and a certain cultural acceptance of violence. Inefficient and partisan security forces further aggravated this volatile situation.⁹⁴ Issues of land distribution, a widening gap between rich and poor, polarized political loyalties, and a political system inadequately prepared to adapt to changing expectations, the spread of new ideas, and the uneven impact of modernization further exacerbated internal tensions. As for the judicial system, as one Colombian Minister of Justice declared, “justice was not operative in Colombia.”⁹⁵

While the first two National Front governments did enact reforms that substantially reduced social grievances and political dissent throughout the country, retrenchment of Colombia’s political elite after 1966 rekindled these same tensions. In response to failing oligarchical control, new urban radical and rural insurgent organizations emerged, promoting armed struggle and revolutionary alternatives to the existing political system.⁹⁶

The lack of political will to reform Colombia’s social, economic, and political system ensured that the National Front system became a means for conducting “interoligarchical relations,”⁹⁷ rather than a system of government dedicated to building a fully-functional, democratic society. For policymakers today, this means facing many of the same structural weaknesses that have plagued the Colombian state throughout much of its history.

- While there is no exclusively military solution, counterinsurgency operations remain a key element to solving Colombia’s violence problems. The efficacy of U.S.-Colombian counterinsurgency efforts during the latter

phase of the *Violencia* period must be evaluated from both a short and long-term perspective. In the first instance, reconstituting the government under the National Front system allowed Colombian policymakers to generate security and development strategies to contain the *Violencia* and avoid a wider social revolution.

But even if Bogotá had dealt more effectively with that nation's social grievances in the long run, the dynamic of revolutionary warfare—that is, the manifestation of “an alternative political body”⁹⁸ in the form of an organized insurgent movement such as the FARC—requires an ongoing commitment to a counterinsurgency strategy that neutralizes the ability of any underground organization to seize power. This commitment has been lacking in successive Colombian governments to the present day.

The dynamic of insurgency leaves only three basic options open to the state: (1) destruction of the insurgent organization; (2) a negotiated settlement that incorporates ex-guerrilla fighters into the body politic; or (3) unresolved, ongoing low-intensity conflict. In Colombia, option three prevails. The failure of the Pastrana peace initiative coupled with the growing strength of the FARC presages either state collapse or a wider conflict under a new, hard-line government. The fact that U.S. officials have publicly declared that “the political stomach [in Washington] for going into the counterinsurgency business is zero,”⁹⁹ means a continued mismatch of strategic interests between the two countries that threatens any long-term solution to the current crisis in Colombia.

- Security of the Colombian state is not necessarily commensurate with the security of its citizenry. More than 50 years after the murder of Gaitán, Colombia continues to survive largely under conditions of widespread internal violence. Today, problems revolve around the issues of narcotics trafficking, insurgent warfare, and the decay of the Colombian state. The response is *Plan Colombia*: a policy initiative that attempts to combine counter-narcotics

and institution-building strategies with a negotiated settlement to that nation's long-running insurgent war.

Fixated on the drug war, policymakers in the United States—working in tandem with their Colombian counterparts—need to refocus their efforts towards the following interconnected policy agenda. First, a multilateral, cooperative approach to countering the narcotics problem is required that deals with issues concerning consumption as well as production; decouples national security from the wider spectrum of social, economic, and political issues between Colombia, the United States, and other nations in the region; and lastly, has as its primary focus a strategy based on harm reduction.¹⁰⁰

Second, in the short-term, policymakers must secure the stability of the Colombian state. A fundamental manifestation of a modern state is its “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force,”¹⁰¹ but Colombia today, in counterpoint to this classic definition, endures instead under conditions of “multiple sovereignty.”¹⁰² Given the dynamics of the armed conflict in Colombia, a situation now exists between government, insurgent, and paramilitary forces in which:

. . . (1) competing interest groups are so violently opposed on highly salient issues that their differences cannot be reconciled within the current political system, and (2) two or more competing groups have sufficient resources—political, financial, organizational, military—to establish “sovereignty” over a substantial political or military base, and thus to seek to achieve their goals by force.¹⁰³

Conditions of multiple sovereignty will force Colombian policymakers to counter these threats to state stability using some variation of the following, basic, two-track policy. First, they must concentrate security efforts on neutralizing the clandestine infrastructure and military power of insurgent groups; and, secondly, they must conjoin counterinsurgency operations with legal, state-sponsored,

internationally monitored, civil defense groups—an effective and proven “force multiplier”¹⁰⁴—in order to eliminate the power vacuum that has allowed paramilitary forces to expand exponentially.

In the long run, policymakers must focus their efforts towards building a more democratic and inclusive society in Colombia, constructing a policy which recognizes that achieving state security “is not synonymous with the security of the nation.”¹⁰⁵ At this present juncture, ensuring state stability is vital, but an equal, long-term commitment to democratization, social reform, institutional development, and economic progress is needed to ensure that Colombia’s problems are finally resolved from a human security perspective.¹⁰⁶

ENDNOTES

1. Gabriel Marcella and Donald Schulz, *Colombia’s Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1999, p. 3.

2. Elements of this chapter are copy-edited or drawn verbatim from Dennis M. Rempe, “Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics: U.S. Counterinsurgency Efforts in Colombia, 1959-1965,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Winter 1995, pp. 304-327; “An American Trojan Horse? Eisenhower, Latin America, and the Development of US Internal Security Policy 1954-1960,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring 1999, pp. 34-64; and “The Origin of Internal Security in Colombia: Part I-A, CIA Special Team Surveys, *La Violencia*, 1959-1960,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Winter 1999, pp. 24-61.

3. Russell W. Ramsey, “Critical Bibliography on *La Violencia* in Colombia,” *Latin American Research Review*, No. 8, Spring 1973, p. 3.

4. “National Intelligence Estimate: NIE 88-65-Prospect for Colombia,” July 9, 1965, in *Declassified Document Quarterly Series, DDQS*, Vol. 14, 1988, Microform 003075, Washington, DC: Carrollton Press, 1989, p. 3. In Colombia, the *Bogotazo* is referred to by its date, *neuve de abril* (Ninth of April), and those who took part are known as *nueveabrileros*.

5. Orlando Fals Borda, "The Role of Violence in the Break with Traditionalism: The Colombian Case," paper given before the Fifth World Congress of Sociology-1962, File 228-01 Permanent: HRC Geog G Colombia 400.318, Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History-Colombia File, circa. 1965, Tab A, p. 1. (Hereafter cited as *Colombia Document*, CMH Archive.)

6. National Intelligence Estimate: NIE 88-65-Prospect for Colombia, July 9, 1965, *DDQS*, p. 3.

7. Ramsey, "Critical Bibliography on *La Violencia* in Colombia," pp. 3-4; James L. Zackrison, "*La Violencia* in Colombia: An Anomaly in Terrorism," *Conflict Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Fall 1989, pp.6-7. See also Russell W. Ramsey, "The Modern Violence in Colombia, 1946-1965," Ph.D. Thesis, Gainesville: University of Florida, 1970. This work is published in Spanish as *Guerrilleros y Soldados*, Bogotá: Pressa Tercer Mundo Editores, 2000 (2nd Ed.).

8. Report of the Colombia Survey Team, "Part I-Colombian Survey, April 1960," Charles T. R. Bohannon Papers, Box 11, File #-Part I, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Chapter 2, "The Violence Problem," pp. 2-8 thru 13; Ramsey, "Critical Bibliography on *La Violencia* in Colombia," p. 4. (Hereafter the following are cited as Bohannon Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, HIA; Report of the Colombia Survey Team (RCST); Colombian Survey (CS); Recommendations for Colombian Action (RCA); Recommendations for U.S. Action (RUS). The basic report of the Colombia Survey Team is broken into three parts. Part I details the actual survey of the Colombian situation from October through December 1959 and includes a preface and nine chapters: Chapter 1, Introduction to Colombia; Chapter 2, The Violence Problem; Chapter 3, The Military Establishment of Colombia; Chapter 4, National Police; Chapter 5, The *Lanceros*; Chapter 6, Intelligence; Chapter 7, Information and Psychological Warfare; Chapter 8, Relief and Rehabilitation; and Chapter 9, Communism in Colombia. Chapter and paragraph numbers, rather than page numbers, are given throughout Part I of the survey, and citation will follow this convention. For instance, if paragraphs 17 through 27 of Chapter 2 are used, they will be cited as 2-17 thru 27. Nonconsecutive paragraphs will be cited as 2-17, 19, etc. Part II details Recommendations for Colombian Action (RCA) and Part III, Recommendations for U.S. Action (RUS). Page numbers are given as RCA-I-1, RCA-I-2, etc. depending upon the particular appendix number (although the introductory chapter is, again, unnumbered) or RUS-1, RUS-2, etc., and will be cited as such.

9. "National Intelligence Estimate: NIE 88-65-Prospect for Colombia," July 9, 1965, *DDQS*, p. 3.

10. RCST, Part I-CS, Chapter 2, "The Violence Problem," Bohannan Papers, HIA, pp. 2-14 thru 16; "Despatch from the Ambassador in Colombia (Cabot) to the Department of State-Political Summary and Assessment: The Rojas Regime and Its Fall, July 9, 1957," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, FRUS*, Vol. VII, 1955-57, pp. 943-45.

11. "Preliminary Report, Majority)-Forward," pp.1-3 and "Outline of Observations and Principle Recommendations," Bohannan Papers, HIA, pp. 6-17. A more rigorous analysis of the complete *Violencia* era puts the total death toll at approximately 159,200. See Ramsey, "The Modern Violence in Colombia, 1946-1965," Ph.D. Thesis, p. 449.

12. "Preliminary Report (Majority)-Outline of Observations and Principal Recommendations," Bohannan Papers, HIA, pp. 11-12.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 16, and Annex I, pp. 2-15, both in Bohannan Papers, HIA.

14. "Preliminary Report (Majority)-Outline of Observations and Principal Recommendations," Bohannan Papers, HIA, p. 11.

15. RCST, Part I-CS, Chapter 2, "The Violence Problem," Bohannan Papers, HIA, 2-45 thru 55. For an extensive analysis of the relationship between the *Violencia*, land transactions, intermediaries, and the illicit trade in coffee, see Carlos Miguel Ortiz Sarmiento, "The 'Business of the Violence': The Quindío in the 1950s and 1960s," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñeranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez, eds., *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992, pp. 125-154.

16. *Ibid.*, 2-56; RCST, Part III-RUS, RUS-9, 10; RCST, Part II-RCA, Introduction-paragraph 16 (no page numbers in introduction) all in Bohannan Papers, HIA. It should be noted that documents encompassing Recommendations for Colombian Action available in the Bohannan Papers are a "Rev. 10" version. Nonetheless, given the late date, they are likely to closely reflect, likely even mirror, the final official report sent to Herter.

17. RCST, Part III-RUS, Bohannan Papers, HIA, RUS-7.

18. *Ibid.*, RUS-8.

19. RCST, Part II-RCA, Bohannan Papers, HIA, Introduction-paragraphs 1 thru 7.

20. RCST, Part I-CS, Chapter 1, "Introduction to Colombia," Bohannan Papers, HIA, pp. 1-17 thru 45.

21. RCST, Part II-RCA, Bohannan Papers, HIA, Introduction-paragraphs 8, 10.

22. Sam C. Sarkesian, *U.S. National Security: Policymakers, Processes, and Politics*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989, pp. 34-36.

23. RCST, Part II-RCA, Bohannan Papers, HIA, Introduction-paragraphs 11, 12, 63.

24. RCST, Part III-RUS, Bohannan Papers, HIA, RUS-9, 10.

25. *Ibid.*, RUS-15 thru 17, 31; RCST, Part III-RUS, Appendix I, "Analysis of Requirements for U.S. Assistance," to "Recommendations for U.S. Action," RUS/I-3, all in Bohannan Papers, HIA. Equipment costs were primarily tied to purchasing two light helicopters and six fixed-wing "Helio-Couriers" for *Lancero* units engaged in counterinsurgency operations.

26. "Helicopter Operations in Colombia," Tab L, p. 1; "Military Sales and Military Assistance," Part I, 1943 to 1960, Tab I, p.6; "Planning and Objectives," Tab E, p. 2, all in *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives.

27. *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study*, Department of State Airgram A-649, April 6, 1964, NSF, Country File, "Colombia, Volume 1," Box 14, Austin, TX: Lyndon B. Johnson Library, p. 15. (Hereafter cited as *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study*, LBJL). As the cover page to this document states, it is "a case study of the Colombian rural 'violence' phenomenon prepared at the request of the Special Group (CI) following its meeting with Ambassador Fulton Freeman on February 20, 1964." The study was written by Second Secretary Gerald M. Sutton of the Embassy Political Section and contains [sanitized] information furnished by Service Attachés, the Military Group, AID, the Colombian Government, and local news media and publications. I am extremely grateful to Regina Greenwell, Senior Archivist of the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, for expediting the delivery of this document as it was only just declassified prior to the final draft of this monograph. It is an excellent overview of the *Violencia* period, with three appendices detailing the communist role in the "independent republics," a précis of the Colombian military plan to stem internal violence, Plan LAZO, and a brief history of U.S. internal security assistance.

28. "Planning and Objectives," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab E, pp. 1-2.

29. Visit to Colombia, South America, by a Team from Special Warfare Center, February 26, 1962, "Major Conclusions," *Low-Intensity Conflict Document Collection*, LICDC, National Security Archives, NSA, pp. 3-4.

30. *Ibid.*, Recommendations, LICDC, NSA, pp. 5-8.

31. *Ibid.*, Narrative Report: Survey Team Activities Colombia, "Observations," LICDC, NSA, pp. 1-8.

32. All quotes from *Ibid.*, LICDC, NSA, p. 1.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study-Appendix C: The Role of the Military Missions*, LBJL, p. 3.

35. Planning and Objectives, Tab E, pp. 1-3; "Summary and Conclusions," pp. 1, 26, 33, *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives.

36. Captain Roy Benson, Jr., *The Latin American Special Action Force of the U.S. Army as a Counterinsurgency Force*, December 1965, p. 2; "Classified U.S. Army Special Forces MTT Missions, Latin America 1962-1973," Enclosure 2, "Colombia," pp. 2-7. Both documents in Jack Taylor, "Donation Box 2-Vietnam: Files-Latin America-MTTs, Colombia-MTTs," LICDC, NSA. See also "Training," Annex B to Tab K, "Mobile Training Teams 1960-1968," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, for MTT information not declassified in Jack Taylor collection.

37. *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study*, LBJL, p. 20.

38. "Report of Joint Mobile Training Team to Colombia," RCS CSGPO-125, No. 48-MTT-104-63, November 18, 1963, John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center-U.S. Army Special Operations Command Archives, Fort Bragg, NC, JFKSWC-USASOC Archives, pp. 1, 5.

39. Richard Maullin, *Soldiers, Guerrillas, and Politics in Colombia*, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1973, p. 73.

40. Captain David Edison Malott, "Military Civic Action in Colombia," MA Thesis, Gainesville: University of Florida, 1985, p. 76.

41. Captain Charles L. Daschle, AI(CE) Assistant G2, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, "The Background to Potential Insurgency in Colombia," September 9, 1962, JFKSWC-USASOC Archives, pp. 3-6.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-16; "Summary and Conclusion," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, p. 18.

43. All quotes from Maullin, *Soldiers, Guerrillas, and Politics in Colombia*, p. 75.

44. "After Action Report, Civic Action Mobile Training Team No. 48-MTT-01-63," Colombia, South America, May 10, 1963, JFKSWC-USASOC Archives, pp. 6-7.

45. "Civic Action Projects: Llanos-Amazonas National Territories Net," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab H, pp. 5-7.

46. "After Action Report," 48-MTT-01-63, pp. 7-8.

47. "Civic Action Projects: Rural Civil Defense Early Warning Radio Nets," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab H, pp. 4-5.

48. "Summary and Conclusions," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, pp. 5, 18.

49. Minutes of Meeting of Special Group, CI, April 12, 1962, *LICDC*, NSA, p. 3.

50. RCST, Part I-CS, Chapter 8, "Relief and Rehabilitation," Bohannon Papers, HIA, pp. 8-12 thru 8-20.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-21 thru 8-29.

52. All quotes *Ibid.*, pp. 8-38, 8-41.

53. Louis J. Lebreton, *Estudio sobre las condiciones del desarrollo de Colombia*, Bogotá: Aedita Editores Ltd., 1958, p. 361, as quoted in Malott, "Military Civic Action in Colombia," MA Thesis, pp. 73-74.

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56. *The U.S. Army and Civic Action in Latin America*, Vol. 3, July 1, 1963, to June 30, 1967, prepared by Staff Historian, Assistant Chief of Staff, G3 HQ-USARSO, October 1968, File USARSO-1, 1963-67 cy.1, CMH Archives, pp. 32-34; Civic Action Projects, *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab H, pp. 1-2.

57. Malott, "Military Civic Action in Colombia," MA Thesis, pp. 75-78.

58. "History of Counterinsurgency Training in Latin America, October 1962 to December 31, 1965," 3D Civil Affairs Detachment, prepared by 3D Civil Affairs Detachment, Fort Clayton, Canal Zone Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces Southern Command, File 8-2.9A DA cy.1, CMH Archives, p. 1; Civic Action Projects, *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab H, pp. 2-4, 7-8.

59. *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study*, LBJL, p. 16.

60. Andrew M. Molnar, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies*, Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 550-104, Washington, DC: The American University-Special Operations Research Office [SORO], 1966, pp. 234-235.

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62. RCST, Part I-CS, Chapter 6, "Intelligence," Bohannon Papers, HIA, 6-2, 6-20, 6-52, and 6-56.

63. Ramsey, "The Modern Violence in Colombia, 1946-65," Ph.D. Thesis, pp. 405-406.

64. "Mission History-U.S. Army Mission to Colombia, 1959 and 1960," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab C, pp. 93-94, 98.

65. "USARMIS Intelligence Effort in Colombia, 1961-65," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab F, p. 1.

66. "Public Relations, Public Information, Troop Information and Education, TI and E, and Psychological Warfare," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab M, p. 2.

67. "USARMIS Intelligence Effort in Colombia, 1961-65," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab F, pp. 1-4.

68. Maullin, *Soldiers, Guerrillas, and Politics in Colombia*, p. 75.

69. Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum—"Cuban Training of Latin American Subversives," OCI No.0515/63, March 27, 1963, *CIA Research Reports, Latin America, 1946-1976*, pp. 15-56. There is some discrepancy in the figures estimated earlier by the Special Forces intelligence officer (150 bandit groups, approximately 2,000 men) and the sanitized source for the CIA. Figures from the latter for 1962 alone estimated 2,582 bandits captured, 1020 detained on suspicion of banditry, and 388 bandits killed. The CIA estimate does acknowledge that only 2 percent of all those arrested and detained were actually convicted and sentenced.

70. *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study*, LBJL, pp. 11, 16-17.

71. "Planning and Objectives," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab E, p. 3.

72. *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study*, LBJL, p. 24.

73. "USARMIS Intelligence Effort in Colombia, 1961-65," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab F, p. 5.

74. "Training," *Colombia Document*, CMH Archives, Tab K, p. 6.

75. *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study*, LBJL, pp. 11, 16.

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77. Jorge P. Osterling, *Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989, p. 280. One report describes the Lleras administration's efforts as "strongly identified, rightly or wrongly, with an appeasement policy towards the bandits." See *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study*, LBJL, p. 14. This assessment seems overly harsh, given the administration's efforts to enlist U.S. support against the violence problem.

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83. "The Backlands Violence is Almost Ended," *Time*, June 26, 1964, p. 31.

84. Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 146.

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**Major General Robert R. Ivany
Commandant**

STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE

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