

# A DEEP INFLUENCE: UNITED STATES-COLOMBIA BILATERAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM (SSR), 1994-2002

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## Abstract

The internal conflict in Colombia has propelled the development of security sector reform (SSR) programs; however, these programs have been usually linked to the influence of relations between the United States and Colombia in military and foreign policy terms. The main objective of this essay is to understand said interplay from the mid-1990's

to the early 2000's, which marked the biggest transformations to the Colombian defense sector in human rights, doctrine, equipment, and human capital. The analysis shows that such influence allowed for the consolidation of an offensive strategy which helped the Colombian government turn the balance of the internal conflict in its favor.

**Key words:** Military Forces, bilateral relations, State security, armed conflict, guerrilla.

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**UNA INFLUENCIA PROFUNDA:  
RELACIONES BILATERALES ESTADOS  
UNIDOS-COLOMBIA Y REFORMA AL  
SECTOR SEGURIDAD (SSR), 1994-2002**

**Resumen**

El conflicto interno en Colombia ha impulsado el desarrollo de programas de reforma al sector seguridad (SSR); sin embargo, estos han estado normalmente vinculados a la influencia de la relación Estados Unidos-Colombia en términos militares y de política exterior. El principal objetivo de este ensayo es entender dicha interacción desde mediados de los años noventa hasta principios del 2000, periodo que marcó las más grandes transformaciones del sector defensa colombiano en derechos humanos, conceptos doctrinarios, equipamiento y capital humano. El análisis muestra que tal influencia permitió la consolidación de una estrategia ofensiva, la cual ayudó al Gobierno colombiano a inclinar el equilibrio del conflicto interno en su favor.

**Palabras clave:** Fuerzas Militares, relaciones bilaterales, seguridad del Estado, conflicto armado, guerrilla.

**INTRODUCTION**

The internal conflict in Colombia has brought foreign influence to a very complex scenario of armed groups, war economies, and political motivations. In order to face all the challenges that emerged from this combination of variables, successive Colombian governments have asked for foreign aid aimed at

enhancing its military apparatus, and the role of the United States (US) has been especially influential in this trend. Once the Cold War and its ideological strife concluded, issues such as the War on Drugs and the War on Terror became the bilateral agenda between both countries, replacing the discourse of communism as the main threat to American interests in Latin America. Such changes to the US foreign policy perspective ended up influencing its military aid packages directed towards client states on the basis of new political conditions related to liberal-democratic values which, in the case of Colombia, served to construct a deep Security Sector Reform (SSR) in all aspects (political, military, doctrine, and economic). Given this new scenario, it is necessary to ask, how was the Colombian defense policy re-accommodated in the 1990's in the face of a new set of US defense interests and moral concerns? This essay is mainly devoted toward explaining such an important phenomenon for the contemporary military institutions of the Andean country by analyzing firstly, the US-Colombian military relationship in terms of the War on Drugs (1992-1998), as the first step of an SSR model and, secondly, in regard to the War on Terror (1998-2002). All of this will be studied before addressing some conclusions about these two periods in order to develop a prospective analysis in terms of a post-conflict environment.

The first part is chiefly aimed at studying the increasing violence of the internal conflict in relation with the strengthening of guerrillas, mainly the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC in Spanish), who used drug trafficking as its key financial engine. All this

was evolving amid the implementation of a stricter human rights doctrine, via a sort of US statecraft policy towards Colombia.

The second part develops a comprehensive analysis on how shifting priorities in Washington from the War on Drugs to the War on Terror was capitalized on by the Colombian government, with the purpose of improving its counterinsurgent strategy. This stage marked a rocketing tendency in the levels of violence related to the political conflict, which was exacerbated by the failed negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas in 2002. At the end, after analyzing these stages, it will be possible to draft some conclusions about the influence of US-Colombia bilateral relations in terms of military cooperation and SSR during the 1990's and the early 2000's. Finally, the question of how military forces will adapt to a new scenario during a post-conflict stage in which they seek internationalization through bilateral and multilateral platforms, and triangulated-military cooperation.

Currently, literature on SSR is mainly concerned with transitional scenarios from either autocracy to democracy or conflict to peace. In this sense, SSR is defined by the United Nations (UN) as a process of evaluation, assessment, implementation and monitoring of measures directed at developing "effective and accountable security for the state and its peoples without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law", being led by national authorities (United Nations, 2012, p. 2). The UN definition shows a general perspective that does not include a stage of transition as a *sine qua non* condition

for implementing SSR, which had been the case of SSR in Colombia in the 1990's.

Other multilateral platforms such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), has related SSR to political objectives: mainly those of liberal democracies. In this sense, the SSR objective, according to the OECD, is to "...ensure that security and justice are provided in a manner consistent with democratic norms, human rights principles and the rule of law" (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007, p. 28).

Since the security policy in Colombia has been highly influenced by US military aid, and even more so from the late 1990's to this day due to Plan Colombia, the SSR shapes answers to US perceptions of this field of study. For the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of State (DOS) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), "SSR refers to reform efforts directed at the institutions, processes, and forces that provide security and promote the rule of law" (USAID, DOD, DOS, 2009, p. 1). This concept has evolved through time by articulating topics linked with the establishment of relevant legal and policy networks; improvement of civilian leadership; enhancement of cooperation among security-related and civil institutions; and management of the legacies of past or present conflicts or insecurity (p. 1). All of this is supported by reforms that seek a series of changes in security and intelligence institutions; justice; enhancement of civilian oversight; management of military and intelligence services; community security; and the development of disarmament, demobilization

and reintegration programs (DDR) (p. 2). This is a more accurate definition in terms of the SSR process in Colombia as seen through at a glance in its bilateral military cooperation with the US.

This essay applies a descriptive method of study which aims at presenting the developments of SSR in Colombia, in relation with US military aid. In this sense, the most relevant factors of such phenomenon are better observed by characterizing political, military and historic variables framed in both local and international dimensions. Interpretation of this information is going to be assessed through the international relations point of view in terms of constructivist and rational theories, in order to better understand defense cooperation with regard to seemingly common interests.

Finally, this research makes extensive use of primary sources from both US and Colombian institutions, such as declassified archives, presidential speeches, official reports from oversight apparatus, and newspaper articles. Equally important are secondary sources on SSR, such as academic research papers, journals, and studies from multilateral organizations, governments, and specialized think tanks and research centers. Certainly, the prospects of post-conflict in Colombia

open new avenues of research and analyses in this issue, which need to be addressed by civil society in order to feed modern SSR proposals aimed at enhancing security and civil-military relationships in Colombia.

### **DRUG TRAFFICKING AND THE COLOMBIAN DEFENSE'S HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS (1994-1998): EARLY STAGES OF SSR IN THE 1990'S**

The 1990's brought huge influence of drug cartels and the growing presence of guerrillas such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), which, in contrast with other subversive groups<sup>1</sup>, persisted in the armed struggle against the establishment, even though a new constitution guaranteed improved levels of inclusiveness in the democratic game. By the mid-1990's the issue of drug trafficking strengthened its branches, reaching the governing elite and becoming the main financial engine of both right and left wing subversive groups; this scenario was exacerbated by a rocketing tendency in the offensive actions of the FARC guerrillas. In this context, the US emphasized its defense strategy in the War on Drugs, a core issue in

<sup>1</sup> During 1990 under the presidency of Virgilio Barco (1986-1990), four insurgent groups were the object of amnesties after their demobilization. The 19th of April Movement (M-19), the Peoples Liberation Army (EPL), the indigenous guerrilla of Armed Movement Quintin Lame (MAQL), and the Workers Revolutionary Party of Colombia (PRT), were part of an agreement with the Colombian Government before the Constituent Assembly of 1991. They were followed by the Socialist Renovation Movement (CRS), a dissident fraction of the ELN, and by the Urban Militias of Medellín during the Cesar Gaviria administration, being favored equally by amnesty laws (Chernick, 2012).

the post-Cold War era along with the promotion of human rights which became the pillars of the new shape of the Colombia-US military relationship.

By July 1992, the minister of defense, Rafael Pardo, along with representatives of the National Police and the military forces met with members of the US embassy where the chief objective was to design a bilateral strategy to place pressure on all fronts concerning drug lords by working directly with the Chief Commander of Military Forces, General Manuel Alberto Murillo González, on the development of a plan, "...that fully involved the army, navy and air force" (American Embassy Bogota, 1992, p. 3). The latter would be in charge of interdiction tasks in Colombian air space, while at the same time supporting army and police operations (American Embassy Bogota, 1992). Generally speaking, this might be read as an early stage of joint and coordinated operations, emanating from bilateral talks in response to a non-traditional security threat for both nations.

The issue of drug trafficking marked bilateral relations between Colombia and the US, a situation that was articulated by the Colombian defense policy during a time when the Samper administration (1994-1998) lacked credibility due to the involvement of personnel from his previous presidential campaign with Cali drug lords, and the successive attacks on the Colombian military forces carried out by the FARC guerrillas, such as the seizure of Las Delicias (1996) and Patascoy (1997). The Clinton administration, given the seriousness of the Colombian situation, expressed its support to President Ernesto Samper, while

making clear the founding principle from which bilateral relations and military aid was to be seen: "...the primacy of the drug issue" (Department of State, 1994, p. 2). This meant reinforcing "...military measures against the traffickers...an active policy of aerial interdiction and interception...legislation on money laundering...", and tougher judicial measures along with judicial cooperation with the US (Department of State, 1994a, p. 3).

However, military aid and the development of a bilateral policy on this matter was not the only issue covered in the Colombian-US relationship. Just like drug trafficking, human rights took relevant importance for governing elites and foreign policy makers in Capitol Hill (Department of State, 1994a). The topic acquired such relevance that the American Embassy in Bogota launched the Human Rights Coordinating Committee (HRCC) in December 1993, giving it a "...much higher profile in the context of the US-GOC [Government of Colombia] bilateral relations" (Department of State, 1994a). Equally, the pressure generated by the international civil society, multilateral organizations, and the US, made "...improving the police and military's human rights record a key GOC goal" (p. 2). According to the Department of State (p. 2), this was epitomized by the Samper administration's "...willingness to re-open formerly closed investigation[s] such as the Caloto and Trujillo massacres...", as well as official recognition of the role of vigilance that human rights activists can play in this field (Department of State, 1994b, p. 2).

According to the Department of State (1994b), the US government designed a strate-

gy based on four approximations towards promoting respect of human rights and compliance from Colombia's security sector agents. This approach stated first the necessity of providing education and training in human rights and international humanitarian law to selected officers in the military and police. Second, it imposed a system of combating impunity through the banning of cooperation with military units accused of human rights violations while conducting an aggressive monitoring program over those who benefit from US military aid. Third, it emphasized to the Colombian government the centrality of human rights as the most important mainstay of US foreign policy. Finally, it commanded the Colombian government to keep the "... Washington interagency community informed on human rights developments..." either negative or positive, "...in order to deal more effectively with US congressional and NGO interlocutors" (p. 7).

Certainly, the top priority given to human rights in the bilateral Colombian-US relationship deeply influenced the States' policy of the Andean country, going beyond the political interests of the incumbent administration, while propelling SSR changes in the Colombian military. All this was directed at constructing vigilant bodies with regard to the activities of government agents. In this fashion, the Andres Pastrana presidency (1998-2002) granted a major place to human rights in its governmental agenda, by drafting a global plan to enhance the human rights situation of the country. This task was assigned to Vice-president Gustavo Bell, who also received the title of Human Rights High Counsellor

(Pastrana, 1998). In order to make the plan come to fruition, Bell proposed the development of a sustained lobby in the Colombian Congress directed at supporting the approval of a truly "...needed military reform and other human rights legislation...", insisting as well, that "...human rights abusing security force members..." were to be judged by civilian courts (American Embassy Bogota, 1998).

These advancements in human rights legislation and military institutional behavior were issued in Law 522 of 1999, which created a new military justice law according to the tougher standards asked by the international community and the US (Congreso de Colombia, 1999). With the purpose of reinforcing such compromises and sending a political message about the commitment of Colombia with respect to human rights, the Pastrana administration ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in 2002 (Semana, 2002).

Undoubtedly, this policy produced the expected results, since it reduced, according to the US Southern Command, the extrajudicial assassinations adjudicated to the security forces from 54% in 1993 to 2% in 1999 (US Southern Command, 1999). However, illegal armed groups maintained their regular levels of violence and abuses to human rights (US Southern Command, 1999). Likewise, impunity was notorious during that time, being calculated at 97% in 1999 (US Southern Command, 1999). However, such positive results with regard to government agents were unable to create a solid basis that would prevent future violations to Human Rights perpetrated by certain sectors of the military forces.

Even though the stress on the defense of human rights was a *sin e qua non* condition for receiving military aid, denunciations of extrajudicial killings (better known in the media as “falsos positivos” -false positives-) committed by members of the Colombian Army started to be more recurrent in human rights activist circles and in the ombudsman office in the 2000’s. By September 2008, the government of Alvaro Uribe had to recognize in national media that some youths of Soacha, a suburb located in the outskirts of Bogota, were executed by army members and reported as guerrilla combatants. According to Human Rights Watch, the Office of the Attorney General of Colombia is currently investigating more than 3,000 possible cases perpetrated between 2002 and 2008. Nowadays, over 800 members of the Army have been prosecuted and convicted (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

During this time, the influx of US military aid was neither interrupted nor decreased until 2007 according to the NGO Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). The research concluded that “...reported extrajudicial killings increased on average in areas after the United States increased assistance to units in those areas” (Fellowship of Reconciliation, 2014). Changes in Capitol Hill from Republican to Democrat majorities in 2006 “...gave voice and power to critics of US policy in Colombia...”, while the Free Trade Agreement between Colombia and the US was due to be ratified. This situation was followed by a decrease of US military aid by “...more than \$200 million in 2007, effective in 2008” ( p. 31).

Local measures were applied by the Ministry of Defense in order to correct the internal

mechanisms that underpinned the “falsos positivos”. In this sense, the General Command of the Military Forces issued Permanent Directive No. 208, which issued 15 measures in regard to military instruction, doctrine, intelligence, operations, administrative and disciplinary control, planning, command responsibility, cooperation with judicial authorities and attention to the population’s demands (Ministerio de Defensa, 2010). This series of changes and policy implementations express the SSR answer at a local level, which propelled positive transformations in intelligence services through the issue of Law 1288 of 2009 (Ministerio de Defensa, 2010), and the human rights field in the Colombian military. In sum, this gave impulse to the Army and the Navy to create the operational legal advisors in 2007 and 2008 respectively, having been preceded by the Colombian Air Force, who was the pioneer in such legal advancement in 2004 (Ministerio de Defensa, 2013).

### **THE WAR ON DRUGS AND THE WAR ON TERROR (1998-2002): THE PROFOUND TRANSFORMATION OF COLOMBIAN DEFENSE**

The election of Andres Pastrana (1998-2002) as head of the Colombian government in 1998 was characterized by a serious situation of security and economic crisis, which affected all sectors of the State. The economy shrank for the first time since 1931, an effect accompanied by a growing weakness of the Colombian financial sector; levels of unemployment close to 20 percent; fiscal deficit;

and devaluation of the national currency (the Colombian peso) (Department of State, 1999). This situation acquired worrisome parameters due to a more offensive stand of Colombian guerrillas, especially the FARC insurgents, who were operating in large formations, multiple fronts, and mobile columns, thus, showing an evolution “...from merely small hit and run guerrilla-style attacks to sophisticated operations using intelligence, maneuvers, indirect fire, and command and control of multiple units that mass on the target” (Department of Defense, 1999, pág. 9). In this macro-context, the Pastrana administration carried out a peace negotiation with the FARC guerrillas spanning three years after November 1998, in a demilitarized zone of 42.000 km<sup>2</sup> known as *Despeje* (Crandall, 2002), while at the same time, they advanced in a massive diplomatic effort for defense that transformed the Colombian security sector: Plan Colombia.

This panorama was the engine that inspired the Pastrana administration to draw an institutional blueprint to enhance military, social, and judicial spheres in Colombia, in order to deal with the multiple crises that faced the country. According to President Pastrana, the cost of the program would be close to \$7.5 billion us dollars, requiring not just the aid from the us, but also help from other nations. Plan Colombia was aimed at reinforcing Colombian offensive capabilities in the coca growing regions in the south of the country, which were dominated by insurgents. Equally important was the strengthening of coca eradication and alternative economic activities for rural farmers dedicated to har-

vesting illegal crops. All these strategies were complemented by augmenting the protection and respect of Human Rights and the rule of law (Department of State, 2000). However, even though it was widely known that a relationship between guerrillas and drug trafficking existed, the us stressed that the main objective of Plan Colombia was counternarcotic operations, not counterinsurgency (Department of State, 2000a).

According to the National Planning Department of Colombia, Plan Colombia allowed for the acquisition and modernization of technical endowments and equipment, professionalizing members of security institutions and, improving mobility and logistics of military forces (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2006). At the same time, it introduced the concept of joint operations, emphasized earlier in 1992 in bilateral meetings between Minister of Defense Rafael Pardo, and the us embassy delegation (American Embassy Bogota, 1992).

In terms of stricter human rights controls, the aid to battalions was tied to their Human Rights record, hence, those accused of violations would not receive any aid at all. Additionally, training in investigation and prosecution of crimes against human rights was offered to public officials. On a diplomatic level, the us government pressured Colombian authorities to take appropriate measures against actors who violated human rights without regard to their standing of being either military forces, guerrillas, or paramilitaries (Department of State, 2000a).

These controls were also in agreement with the Leahy amendment, a law that set

human rights conditions on US military aid, and which has evaluated Colombia's record since 1997. The amendment forbids counter-narcotic aid towards military units accused of grave violations of human rights (Gloobal, 2016). This sort of certification can be seen as a foreign policy instrument of statecraft, aimed at enhancing human rights standards and behavior of military forces, with the participation of institutional and civil society mechanisms of vigilance (Serafino, Beittel, Ploch & Rosen, 2014). Under this schema, the US Congress blocked \$30 million US dollars of military aid from being given to the Army and the National Police of Colombia in July 1997 (El Tiempo, 1997). It also helped to prevent the giving of military aid to a Colombian Air Force unit in January 2003, due to the unit's "...lack of responsiveness and progress on an important human rights case" (Simons, 2003).

Apart from such behavioral checks, the limitation of Plan Colombia with respect to counternarcotic activities made its application by the State over all illegal armed groups a complicated issue that gave the upper hand to the latter over the former. This hindered military forces' capability to counterbalance offensive actions of the FARC insurgents, who, amid the peace talks, continued exerting control over some "...rural areas, destroying powerlines, establishing major roadblocks, and attacking isolated police garrisons" (Central Intelligence Agency, 2000, p. 7).

By September 2000, the FARC guerrillas executed an armed strike directed at boycotting local elections, Plan Colombia, and in opposition to the paramilitary territorial incursions in the department of Putumayo.

All this triggered a massive displacement of about 5,000 people, who at the same time alleged that the guerrillas were pushing them to take arms against the US aid in Putumayo (American Embassy Bogota, 2000).

Meanwhile, the Colombian government was consolidating diplomatic efforts to persuade its counterpart in Washington to allow the use of all components of the Plan Colombia in the war on insurgency. This argument was articulated as a general claim from high officers in the Colombian military forces, with regard to modernizing and professionalizing its equipment, policies, practices, and human capital. To all these demands, the US also suggested changes in the military judicial code, recruitment, and terms of service, as well as intelligence, personnel management, and logistics (Department of Defense, 2001).

In this environment of proposals and adjustments in the security sector, some of them being readily undertaken, the "Gato Negro" (Black Cat) operation was developed in Barrancominas-Guainía, which was directed mainly at proving the links of FARC guerrillas with narco-trafficking. The results of the operation were successful, since the Brazilian drug lord Fernandinho Beira Mar was captured, thus, proving the effectiveness of both joint operations and innovations introduced thanks to Plan Colombia. The "Gato Negro" offensive was the best proof of the FARC's links to cocaine trafficking and with Latin American criminal organizations, especially those rooted in Paraguay, Brazil, and Surinam (Semana, 2001).

In response to this military action, the FARC tried to gain control again over Bar-

rancominas; however, the military forces launched the “7 de Agosto” (August 7<sup>th</sup>) operation against a structure of about 1,300 insurgents in Guaviare, in which “Urías Cuelar”, the most important military leader of the subversive group after “Mono Jojoy” was neutralized (American Embassy Bogota, 2001). Certainly, both operations “Gato Negro” and “7 de Agosto” proved that the security sector in Colombia was in a positive transformation in its technical resources, human resources, and doctrine, since, before Plan Colombia according to the US analysts, it was not possible for the Colombian military forces “...to move over 3,000 troops in 48 hours to the combat zone” (American Embassy Bogota, 2001, p. 4). Equally important, was that both operations were carried out jointly in a coordinated and interagency manner with the participation of about 4,000 soldiers of elite units being transported in “Arpía” (Black-Hawk) and the MI<sup>2</sup> helicopters, while they were supported by OV-10 Bronco and Tucano aircraft (El Nuevo Herald, 2001).

In this context, the Bush administration had to deal with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, an event that pushed the US towards enacting a global antiterrorist policy which in turn had implications for Colombian defense policy. This became the tipping point of the US-Colombia relationship in terms of Plan Colombia, since it integrated a new approach towards Colombian security issues by acknowledging that narcotics and terrorism were interrelated problems (Depart-

ment of State, December 2001). This major change helped to propel the necessary lobby on Capitol Hill for allowing Plan Colombia resources and equipment to be used for more than antinarcotic issues, with some conditions such as obtaining positive results in the War on Drugs, progressive human rights records, and the design of a self-help financial approach to sustain the military budget (Department of State, 2002).

Such momentum for the SSR in Colombia in the early 2000's was met by the end of the *Despeje* in February 2002, which caused great levels of frustration in Colombian public opinion. This factor was well used by the independent candidate Alvaro Uribe Velez, who was elected president a wide majority in the polls. For the US, Alvaro Uribe showed an authentic willingness to compromise with an aggressive antinarcotic strategy based on increasing the number of troops; the establishment of a wide intelligence network and, finally, the development of a self-help financial approach to sustain the military budget (American Embassy Bogota, 2002). In this sense, the acquisition of \$6.2 billion dollars in a four-year period was crucial, a difficult task that was met by the appointment of Roberto Junguito as Minister of Finance who was in charge of creating a fiscal and tax reform to get the required funds for the Democratic Security program (Colombia.com, 2002).

Hence, Capitol Hill in October 30, 2002, authorized for the first time the use of Plan Colombia resources and equipment in anti-

<sup>2</sup> Russian helicopter manufactured by Mil Moscow Helicopter Plant (MI).

terrorist and counterinsurgency operations (Calvo, 2008), a major adjustment that gave great impetus to SSR in the Andean country, giving the upper hand to the Colombian government over the FARC insurgents in the mid-2000's. This was also a key factor in the development of Plan Patriota, as well as other crucial advancements in intelligence and precision air attacks that turned the internal conflict in favor of the State.

On the other hand, SSR in the Plan Colombia stage did not gravitate only toward the enhancement of military institutions, it was also highly important in the transition to a new accusatory criminal justice system that relied on US suggestions and experiences of its own system (US Government Accountability Office, 2008). In this scenario, military aid came to reinforce infrastructure and technology, planning and management models, and the enhancement of criminal investigation (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2006). All these factors were complementary measures adopted in the military field, aimed at coping with major issues of insecurity, criminality and internal conflict.

This series of changes did not merely obey the security interests of the US in Colombia in terms of the War on Drugs, but also, promoted a whole rationale of spreading liberal values and reinforcing democracy as a way of favoring US national security. In this sense, SSR becomes a tool of US statecraft directed at helping "...create a world of democratic, well-governed States that can meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system" (USAID, DOD, DOS, 2009, p. 2). All this is addressed

toward a bigger objective: to "...reduce long term threats to U.S. security by helping to build stable, prosperous, and peaceful societies beyond..." US borders (, p. 2).

After the terrorist attacks in the US, the advance of the War on Terror found a moral objective similar to those expressed in the Wilsonian idealism, which has served as the primary guide of US foreign policy. By 2006, the US National Security Strategy stated that "...the United States must defend liberty and justice...these non-negotiable demands of human dignity are protected most securely in democracies" (The White House, 2006). Similar speeches and arguments were present in the Colombian political realm, which interpreted guerrilla warfare as a threat against the democratic order and the rule of law, sponsored by narco-terrorism (Uribe, 2010).

These developments added new justifications and elements to understand and shape defense measures to address the Colombian conflict, as well as reinforce security as a central element to favor the State's economy, society and constitutional order. The relation of military cooperation between the US and Colombia, can be seen as a sort of economic inducement which involves "...commercial concessions, technology transfers, and other economic carrots that are extended by a sender in exchange for political compliance on the part of a target" (Blanchard, Mansfield & Ripsman, 2000, p. 1). This approach to SSR in the case of Colombia, in regard to the policy of Democratic Security, was not just directed towards recuperating order and security as the basis of liberty and Human

Rights guarantees, but also, as principles to bolster economic growth and cope with illegal industries (Presidencia de la República, 2003).

Notwithstanding, not all reforms advocated by US policy makers were implemented. Accountability of security and intelligence institutions by civilian instances has not been put in practice completely. This relationship is not just limited to vigilance of security institutions; it is as well a source of “political learning”<sup>3</sup> emanating from civil society. According to Bruneau (2005, p. 239), “...there was not until late 2003 a single university program, nor a single think-tank, nor a single NGO that [dealt] with security, defense, or civil-military relations” in Colombia.

Another issue comes from the political governing elites represented in the Colombian Congress since they have been historically apathetic towards security and defense matters. This phenomenon is rooted in the late 1950's, when division of tasks was agreed upon between the security forces and bureaucrats. Hence, “...the civilians would take care of government, including economic and social policy, and the military (including the police) would take care of national security and defense” (Bruneau, 2005). Therefore, civilians isolated themselves from security and defense dimensions of the State, leaving them almost entirely to the hands of military forces and the executive branch to this day. In consequence,

“...the roles of the legislature in policy definition, budget development, and oversight are minimal” (Bruneau, 2005).

Such a scenario seems to be backed by widespread apathy from civil society in regard to political matters. The plebiscite of October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, which sought to give political legitimacy to the Government of Colombia-FARC peace agreement, registered the highest abstention rate in 22 years with 62% (El Tiempo, 2016b). This shows the difficulty of articulating to civil society the need for defense architecture and vigilance since citizens' political will and awareness are absent and promises to be so in the near and mid-term future.

However, some initiatives have been advanced in terms of linking political parties to defense oversight bodies. The “Comisión Legal de Seguimiento de las Actividades de Inteligencia y Contrainteligencia” (Legal Commission of Intelligence and Counterintelligence Activities Tracing), which is formed by eight congressmen with representation of opposition political parties, and created by Law 1621 of 2013 that regulates intelligence activities is an example of such trend. Another new organization created by the intelligence law is the “Comisión Asesora para la Depuración de los Datos y Archivos de Inteligencia y Contrainteligencia” (Assessing Commission for Data, Intelligence and Counterintelligence Archives

<sup>3</sup> Political learning is the kind of knowledge developed by civil society organizations which are aimed at enhancing institutions and processes. In the case of Colombia, “...the creation of institutions, be they universities, think-tanks or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) [has been minimized], which could allow them [Colombian society and institutions] to get together to learn from one another and basically generate political learning” (Bruneau, 2005, pp. 238-239).

Depuration), in charge of reviewing archiving policies and coming up with recommendations for improvements, with participation by one representative from civil society and one from the Attorney General of Colombia (Congreso de Colombia, 2013).

### **CONCLUSION: BALANCE OF THE SSR IN COLOMBIA SINCE THE MID-1990'S TO THE EARLY 2000'S, AND PROSPECTIVE SCENARIOS AFTER A PEACE AGREEMENT WITH THE FARC GUERRILLAS**

Colombia has been facing several security issues that challenge its institutional shape, and the political, economic, and social dimensions of the State. In this context, the different SSR efforts have been underpinned by the establishment ever since the mid-1990's, but all of them were inspired by US models and dependent on military aid. In this sense, it is possible to recognize two stages: firstly, they mainly stressed the War on Drugs, and the respect for human rights and, secondly, they underlined the transition from the War on Drugs to the War on Terror.

From the mid to the late 1990's the Colombian State had some of the most serious negative human rights records; these violations were perpetrated by different armed groups in the country: guerrillas, paramilitaries, National Police, and military forces. In this landscape, the illegal industry of drug trafficking was widespread, affecting security and reinforcing subversive groups. These factors presented trans-border issues that triggered a deeper military cooperation between

Colombia and the US, propelling the SSR in an early stage toward participating in the War on Drugs and toward stricter standards of respecting human rights.

Such advances helped to categorize human rights as a State policy, with full recognition of their important role in the political agenda of US-Colombia bilateral relations. Even though the military forces and the National Police of Colombia greatly reduced their indexes of abuses and violations, illegal armed groups kept the number of disappearances and assassinations high, and even more so in the case of paramilitary groups. During this period, civil servants were trained as part of the agreements with the US, in investigating and prosecuting human rights violations. Equally relevant was the reform of military justice law, which answered to the interests of respecting human rights from US decision makers and international civil society.

However, by 2008 the apparent positive advancements in regard to respect of human rights suffered a huge regression due to the scandal of "falsos positivos". This situation in which army members' inflated operational results by committing extrajudicial executions that were then reported as neutralized guerrilla combatants in operations greatly affected the legitimacy of security institutions.

In terms of the War on Drugs, there was an early SSR doctrine variant which introduced the concept of joint and coordinated operations in 1992, thanks to bilateral meetings between the Colombian Ministry of Defense and US embassy experts. The principal objective of this initiative was to interrupt the influx of illegal drugs into the US, by devel-

oping an active policy of aerial interdiction, and the support of the Colombian Air Force to Colombian Army and Navy operations. However, all the military efforts rooted in a package of reforms and foreign military aid were limited to the War on Drugs.

By 1998, with the election of Andres Pastrana as president, the Colombian government spent its political capital in the peace negotiation of the *Despeje* with the FARC guerrillas. At the same time, they were advancing in a major plan of social and military investment named Plan Colombia. This SSR effort served to positively change the doctrine, equipment, policy, human capital and technical dimensions of the military forces and the National Police of Colombia, but with a clear War on Drugs connotation that later gained an anti-terrorist stress.

These changes put into practice the earlier concept of joint and coordinated operations to counterbalance the FARC's offensive over urban centers and isolated garrisons. The "Gato Negro" and "7 de Agosto" operations served to prove the new capabilities of the Colombian military forces against strategic and operational changes executed by the guerrillas who operated in great numbers that massed on the target.

Certainly, such a transformation, given the United States-Colombia bilateral relations, helped to structure a new military apparatus in Colombia, with great mobility, equipment, and offensive capability. In this sense, those developments created a strong foundation for the defense sector in the mid-2000's and up to this day by supporting technical intelligence,

precision airstrikes, and the presence of the Colombian Public Force in places where the guerrillas used to exert some kind of control. However, all this was possible thanks to the political changes in Washington, once the War on Terror was linked locally in Colombia to the counterinsurgency defense policy after the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 in the us.

### **PROSPECTIVE SCENARIOS AFTER A PEACE AGREEMENT WITH THE FARC**

Undoubtedly, the advent of a new stage of SSR that overcomes the counterinsurgent doctrine which has ruled Colombian military institutions so far might be highly possible if a successful agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC is achieved. In this scenario, the persistence of some illegal groups, and the change to post-conflict policies that come from the establishment, are the two main challenges faced by the Colombian security sector.

A key aspect of SSR in a post-conflict stage in the short run is the redefinition of national defense objectives. Once the FARC subversives agree to disarm, demobilize, work on reinsertion and reintegration (DDRR) mechanisms, as well as participate politically, the main strategic threat to Colombia will be overcome. This perspective might leave unclear the system of defense and security of Colombia in doctrinal, operative, and tactical terms. In this context, the key aspects of a new model of reforms in the security sector depend on old persis-

tent threats, such as the ELN<sup>4</sup> insurgents and criminal bands (BACRIM), who might recruit demobilized FARC members and dissidents frustrated with the peace accords. In order to cope with these menaces, security apparatus need to be supported by a coherent judicial and legal system that protects military operations in the absence of a law for security and national defense.

Regarding political innovations from the central government in addressing peace consolidation and security, the Colombian Public Force needs to interpret those scenarios accurately in order to articulate inner structural innovations that meet the new political, historical and social requirements. Under this parameter, the creation of departments which understand the operational and political levels of the SSR reforms in a post-conflict environment are indispensable. All of this has started to take place already through different military platforms, such as the Committee of Strategic Renovation and Innovation of the Public Force (CREI). The dynamic political environment suggests new fields to take into account in the armed forces; for example, issues like historical memory that might reinforce the legitimacy of Public Forces in the future, are part of the new dimensions of post-conflict reform.

The institutional changes in the Colombian establishment could be a source of transformations in the military apparatus as well. The new Ministry of Post-conflict and the management of the General Strategy of Construction of Peace Conditions (EGCP) might generate shock actions to guarantee the accomplishment of the agreements reached in the peace accord. The chief objective of the EGCP, which according to Guáqueta (2015), Vice-minister of Post-conflict, is aimed at executing a series of measures in terms of justice, security, development, governability and communication during the first eighteen months after the culmination of the peace accord. Certainly, all these policies will condition the room to maneuver and the primary functions of the defense sector, even more in topics such as DDDR, land restitution, security and consolidation of the territories left by the FARC guerrillas, and the security of the FARC ex-combatants who decide to participate politically in national, regional, or local democratic platforms.

The defeat of the plebiscite that was trying to grant political legitimization to the Colombian government-FARC peace agreement halted its implementation, with the difference that the SSR process in the Colombian military continues. The reform in the military

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that, on March 30, 2016, the government delegates and the ELN announced the start of peace talks. In this regard, this is a different process to what is happening with the FARC, especially because of the political-ideological character that manages the ELN. These dialogues certainly will be a step closer to achieving peace in Colombia, but it will also produce a mutation of the armed conflict toward the cities, as well as an increase of Organized Armed Groups (OAG) or Criminal Bands, both a product of redoubts and the participation of former members of FARC and ELN.

forces does not depend expressly on a situation of post-conflict with the FARC, since the reforms are in part immersed in the objective of internationalization of Colombian security institutions and the strengthening of defense cooperation with the US. In a prospective scenario SSR changes will be strengthened if the peace accord is implemented in the near future by either the Colombian Congress, Presidential mandate after signing a new agreement, or through a second plebiscite after achieving a political solution with opposition sectors (El Colombiano, 2016).

Several blueprints of SSR changes in the military forces have been developed recently, and they are in the process of being consolidated. An example of this is the Damascus Doctrine launched in mid-2016, and whose objective is to give the Colombian Army a profile and tasks closer to the social paradigm of human security (El Tiempo, 2016a). According to General Alberto Mejía, "... [The] troops' mission will go further than that of granting security, to put themselves to the service of communities" (El Tiempo, 2016a). This kind of advancement, the internationalization of military forces and tighter human rights standards, are variables of defense improvements that overcame the political scenario of the peace agreement of the Colombian government with the FARC, and that promises to deepen if it is implemented successfully.

Public forces in Colombia have been in a constant process of enhancement due to the internal situation of conflict. Institutional advancement, personnel training, technology, doctrine and equipment have been placed in a better offensive and defensive standing for

the military apparatus, helping the Colombian government to take the initiative against the guerrillas. The effective application of the peace agreement with the FARC guerrilla (and eventually with the ELN) would open a new scenario of military reform, whose most important characteristic would be its internationalization through both multilateral and bilateral platforms.

In terms of multilateral platforms, Colombia signed its first agreement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in June 2013, with the purpose of generating cooperation in areas of information, transparency, anticorruption, and humanitarian and peace operations (El Tiempo, 2013). In this regard, the announcement of Colombian participation in other countries has been growing along with the expectations of post-conflict in Colombia. General Alberto Jose Mejia, the Commander of the Army, stated in July 2016 that about 5,000 members of the Army will be sent to peace missions in Africa and the Middle East in the next two years (Caracol Radio, 2016). Something similar was previously expressed in 2015 in New York by President Juan Manuel Santos, when he argued that Colombia was ready to share with the world its successful experience and knowledge in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and transnational crime (Presidencia de la Republica, 2015). In order to give legal ground to such an endeavor, a framework agreement between the Government of Colombia and the United Nations (UN) has been signed directed at regulating the contributions of Colombia to the UN system of forces for peacekeeping operations (Congreso de Colombia, 2016).

Regarding bilateral platforms, Colombia has already developed relations with forces of countries that face similar challenges. In this area, the cooperation is related with training and the transmission of Colombian know-how in topics such as the War on Drugs, counterinsurgency and anti-kidnapping. It is possible to trace some records to 2006, when the National Police of Colombia sent a team of advisors to study the situation of drug trafficking in Afghanistan and give an assessment to its authorities (Dinero, 2006). Even before that, since 1989, the Jungle Command of the Colombian Police was already training policemen of countries such as Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Brazil, Argentina, Afghanistan and México in counternarcotics operations (Diálogo, 2015). In addition to such cooperative efforts, the General Commander of the Colombian military forces, Juan Pablo Rodríguez Barragan, travelled to Bucharest, Rumania, to a NATO high meeting, in order to widen the scenarios where Colombia might share its experiences on fighting terrorism and transnational crime. For NATO, the Colombian model and strategy in dealing with these issues has been successful (El Espectador, 2016), which can be a positive input for both regional and global security architecture.

Once such developments are observed, it is possible to assume that the Colombian military has already been internationalized to a certain degree and that such a process might be deepened under a post-conflict scenario with SSR. In this sense, it is going to be possible to advance in initiatives that include the US, in a scheme of triangulated military

cooperation. Under this concept, “Colombia with US backing could provide other countries with security cooperation at a greatly reduced economic expense, and without the political costs associated with an enlarged US military presence” (Tickner, 2014). In this scenario, capability building in states with weak security institutions, and the spread of liberal and democratic values abroad, might become additional tasks for the Colombian military if this model is consolidated in a post-conflict stage. Some experiences have already been undertaken in terms of counternarcotics, organized crime, strengthening of institutions, and citizen security mainly in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Panama (Ministerio de Defensa, 2015).

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