

Colombian Strategic Culture

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4

FINDINGS REPORT

FIU

Applied Research Center

Latin American and Caribbean Center

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The FIU-SOUTHCOM Academic Partnership Strategic Cultures Assessments

Florida International University's Applied Research Center (FIU ARC), in collaboration with the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and FIU's Latin American and Caribbean Center (LACC), has recently formed the FIU-SOUTHCOM Academic Partnership. The partnership entails FIU providing the highest quality research-based knowledge to further explicative understanding of the political, strategic, and cultural dimensions of state behavior and foreign policy. This goal will be accomplished by employing a strategic culture approach. The initial phase of strategic culture assessments consists of a year-long research program that focuses on developing a standard analytical framework to identify and assess the strategic culture of ten Latin American countries. FIU will facilitate professional presentations of the following ten countries over the course of one year: Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. In addition, a findings report on the impact of Islam and Muslims within Latin America will be produced.

The overarching purpose of the project is two-fold: to generate a rich and dynamic base of knowledge pertaining to the political, social, and strategic factors that influence state behavior; and to contribute to SOUTHCOM's Socio-Cultural Dynamics (SCD) Program. Utilizing the notion of strategic culture, SOUTHCOM has commissioned FIU ARC to conduct country studies in order to explain how states comprehend, interpret, and implement national security policy vis-à-vis the international system.

SOUTHCOM defines strategic culture as follows: "the combination of internal and external influences and experiences – geographic, historical, cultural, economic, political, and military – that shape and influence the way a country understands its relationship to the rest of the world, and how a state will behave in the international community." FIU will identify and expound upon the strategic and cultural factors that inform the rationale behind the perceptions and behavior of select states in the present political and security climate by analyzing demography, history, regional customs, traditions, belief systems, and other cultural and historical influences that have contributed to the development of a particular country's current security rationale and interpretation of national security.

To meet the stated goals, FIU ARC will host a series of professional workshops in Miami. These workshops bring subject matter experts from all over the US and Latin America together to explore and discuss a country's specific history, geography, culture, economic, political, and military climates vis-à-vis strategic culture. At the conclusion of each workshop, FIU publishes a findings report, which is presented at SOUTHCOM.

The following Colombia Findings Report, authored by Dr. Victor Uribe-Uran, is the product of a working group held in Miami on September 3, 2009, which included ten prominent academic and private sector experts in Colombian history, culture, geography, economics, politics, and military affairs.

The views expressed in this findings report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Government, US Department of Defense, US Southern Command, FIU-ARC, or Florida International University.

On behalf of FIU-ARC, we wish to acknowledge and thank all of the participants for their contributions, which made the Colombian Strategic Culture workshop a tremendous success.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	7
Origins of Strategic Culture	7
<i>Physical Aspects – 7</i>	
<i>Political Features – 11</i>	
<i>Socio/Cultural Aspects – 13</i>	
Keepers of Colombian Strategic Culture	18
<i>Elites – 18</i>	
<i>Military Organization/Bureaucracy – 21</i>	
<i>Public Sentiments/Attitudes – 23</i>	
Challenges, Continuity, and Change	24
<i>Contemporary Security Challenges – 24</i>	
<i>Continuity versus Change – 29</i>	
Conclusion	30
About the Author	31



Executive Summary

Origins of Strategic Culture in Colombia

- Any strategic decisions on the use of force will require factoring in Colombia's mountainous and fragmented geography. Despite modernization of transportation and infrastructure, large portions of the territory remain underdeveloped, disjointed, and inaccessible.
- A stable temperate to tropical climate does not pose any major logistical challenges for decisions to utilize force. Colombia's climate favors military action at any time, except perhaps for limitations derived from rainy seasons of relatively short duration.
- Because the Colombian population grows moderately, remains fairly young, and does not experience any dramatic aging, there are no major demographic limitations to enlisting able bodies for military ventures, especially since there are over 18 million people between the ages of 16 and 49 fit for military service.
- For the most part, Colombia still relies on foreign technology and military support, primarily from the US. It lacks the technological self-sufficiency to outmaneuver and compete with advanced economies (militarily or industrially).
- A considerably centralized presidential system, with due constitutional consultation of the congress and no significant regional opposition or contestation, effectively determines when to proceed with force under any particular set of circumstances.
- Even though it has been marked by recurrent civil wars and violence, Colombian society has experienced uninterrupted elections. In addition, the country does not lean towards militarism; until recently, the military has been a rather weak institution.

- Generally speaking, Colombians are interested in economic advancement rather than ideology, rhetoric over action, and formal legalism rather than strict observance of rules.
- Colombians are deeply hierarchical, individualistic, and polarized. They distrust one another and exhibit little tolerance for the trappings of democratic governance.

Keepers of Strategic Culture

- Highly educated technocratic elites drawn from the capital and provinces such as Antioquia continue to dominate politics and public administration. Historically, the military, as an institution, has not attracted people from elite families and the educated class.
- Even though most Colombians are legalistic, many, including members of the military, are willing to ignore formal regulations and procedures and are thus prone to non-compliance with laws and regulations.
- The Colombian State has become deinstitutionalized. The strategic effect of this development has resulted in the state exhibiting the personalistic rule of the current president, Alvaro Uribe.
- Colombia's historically weak military establishment has undergone major professionalization and modernization in recent years. Still, accusations of systematic human rights abuses committed by the military continue to be a matter of concern.
- Many Colombians believe that the State must intervene heavily in the economy, be responsible for job creation, and be the main guarantor of the welfare of the people.

- Most Colombians favor a negotiated settlement of the ongoing armed conflict with the FARC, but are pessimistic about the possibility it will succeed.

Challenges, Continuity, and Change

- Guerrilla warfare and drug trafficking groups, now atomized, continue to be the main enduring challenges to security and stability in Colombia.
- The presence of left-leaning governments in neighboring countries, particularly Ecuador and Venezuela, is the most significant emerging problem that poses a potential threat to Colombia's security.
- Democratic life affords strategic cultural continuity in Colombia, posing restrictions on the indiscriminate use of force.
- The "democratic security" policy currently promoted by the Uribe administration is a major innovation, even though it may be more rhetorical than applied at this time.

Introduction

This final report is based on the incorporation of views from individual papers written by a number of academics invited to take part in a day-long workshop on the strategic culture of Colombia, held in Miami, Florida, on September 3, 2009.¹ This findings report is the culmination of the workshop and provides a parsimonious yet comprehensive analysis of Colombian strategic culture.² The report remains the responsibility of its author.

The main objective of this report is to address some of the historical narratives, geopolitical and cultural factors, and demographic foundations of Colombia's *strategic cultural orientation*.³ The report also seeks to highlight key strategic cultural values and traditional orientations exhibited by the country (both the elite and the masses); to identify the primary purveyors of strategic culture; and to look at continuities, changes, and challenges for strategic culture, particularly contemporary ones.

Origins of Colombian Strategic Culture

Physical Aspects

Geography: Mountainous and Fragmented. Historians and social scientists widely agree that, from colonial times to the present, Colombia's national territory, identity, and economy have been shaped mainly by its challenging mountainous and fragmented geography. The division of the Andes Mountains near Colombia's southern border with Ecuador (*el macizo colombiano*) into three ranges, or cordilleras,

¹ Participants included, in alphabetical order, Professors Maria Aysa Lastra (demography, FIU), Bruce Bagley (international relations, U. of Miami), Ana Maria Bidegain (history of religion, FIU), Herbert Braun (history of society and politics, U. of Virginia), Mauricio Garcia Villegas (law and sociology, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota), Anthony Maingot (sociology and foreign relations, FIU), German Palacio Castañeda (history of ecosystems, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, the Amazon), Elvira Maria Restrepo (law and the judicial systems, U. Miami), and Maria Velez de Berliner (security and the military, private consultant).

² The outline is listed in Jeffrey S. Lantis, "Strategic Culture: A Multifaceted Cultural Approach to the Study of Latin America. Case Study Guidelines," FIU-SOUTHCOM Academic Consortium Strategic Culture: A Multifaceted Cultural Approach to the Study of Latin America. Miami, May, 2009.

³ Understood as "... the combination of internal and external influences and experiences – geographic, historical, cultural, economic, political, and military –that shape and influence the way a country understands its relationship to the rest of the world ... The concept of strategic culture is a useful tool for better understanding why countries react the way they do and how they may react to specific future situations. Strategic culture describes the range of cultural, political and military experiences that drive a country's approach to the world." Lantis, "Strategic Culture," p. 6.

(eastern, central, and western) that traverse the country from south to north, has provided Colombia with great ecological, biological, and agricultural diversity, but it has also seriously impeded national economic integration and the effective formation of a Colombian Nation-State.

This geographical reality has made Colombia a difficult territory to govern effectively from the center in Bogota. It has provided ample “ungoverned spaces” propitious for the rise and consolidation of local and regional centers of rebellion or revolution. In the twentieth century, geographic factors have continued to afford conditions favorable to the emergence of both guerrilla insurgencies such as the FARC and drug trafficking organizations that have challenged the central Colombian State’s ability to establish and maintain a monopoly of force, to administer justice and to govern effectively within the national territory. At least until the end of the twentieth century, and still today in some remote regions (such as the eastern planes or *Llanos orientales*, the southernmost Amazonian basin, and the Chocó, west of the territory alongside most of the country’s Pacific coast), Colombia’s security forces have simply not possessed the capabilities—transportation infrastructure, manpower, firepower, or institutional organization—needed to preserve order throughout Colombia’s vast territory.⁴ A widespread perception derived from the fragmented geographical reality is that the Colombian State does not have control over a fair portion of its territory. Therefore, there seems to be more territory than State, more geography than sovereignty, and more country than effective citizenship.⁵ Yet, despite not exercising supreme authority over the totality of its territory, the Colombian State can hardly be classified as a failed state, given that it has a developed, functional, institutionalized apparatus that exercises a significant degree of legitimate authority in various parts of the country, including the capital.⁶

Climate and Natural Resources. Colombia’s proximity to the equator gives rise to a mostly tropical to temperate climate without any significant or abrupt variations. Average temperatures remain constant in the various regions throughout

⁴ See Bruce Bagley, “Colombian Security Forces: International Policy and Strategic Culture.” Paper prepared for the Strategic Culture of Colombia Workshop, Miami, September, 2009.

⁵ See German Palacio, “Cultura Estrategica en la Historia Colombiana. Un Aporte con Perspectiva Ambiental,” Paper prepared for the Strategic Culture of Colombia Workshop, Miami, September, 2009. In support of his assertions Dr. Palacio cites the work by Margarita Serje, *El revés de la Nación: territorios salvajes, fronteras y tierras de nadie* (Bogotá: Universidad de Los Andes, 2005).

⁶ Anthony Maingot, “Colombia: A ‘Failed State?’ Reevaluating the Criteria.” Paper written for the workshop on Strategic Culture of Colombia, Miami, September 3, 2009.

the year, most changes resulting from altitude or dry and rainy seasons. This has limited the need for long-term, formally institutionalized planning, infrastructure, and technological capacity typically required in countries with marked seasons.

In a disjointed and partially occupied territory, the country's ecological, biological, agricultural, and mineral diversity provides advantages as well as disadvantages when considering national security. An example of one advantage is Colombia's very expansive, rich natural park system with at least 58 areas alleged to be set aside as sanctuaries for the preservation of diverse flora and fauna.⁷ An example of a disadvantage is that the combination of rich deposits of minerals (to include gold, silver, emeralds, coal, and oil), fertile lands that produce a diverse and ample array of agricultural goods (to include illegal crops of marijuana, coca bushes, and poppy fields), and isolated terrains are either not interconnected or, if so, are linked through non-navigable waterways. This leads to the surfacing of pockets of destructive boom-and-bust extractive economies and cultures. Aggressive freelance miners and cultivators have tended to thrive in such a setting, many of them carrying out predatory and environmentally unsafe, illegal operations beyond the control of local, regional, or national authorities. Through extortive taxes or direct revenue, the considerable profits accrued from such illegal ventures have also contributed to the creation and strengthening of counter-state armed groups (for example, drug trafficking armed forces, guerrillas, and right wing paramilitary forces).

Demographic Realities: Multi-Ethnicity and Multi-Culturalism. Colombia now has a population between 48 and 50 million people, the third largest in Latin America after Brazil and Mexico. Close to 73% of the populace lives in overcrowded urban areas, many settling in shantytowns or marginal quarters on the outskirts of the main cities. The fertility rate has declined steadily over time. In 1970 the fertility rate was 5.3% and dropped to 3.8% by 1980. Today, the fertility rate seems to be constant at approximately 2.0% annually.⁸ The population growth rate has also fallen over the years. In the decade between 1970 and 1980, it was 2.2%; between 1980 and 1990, 1.9%; between 1990 and 2000, 1.8% annually. This is where it now stands. Annual mortality has gone down from 9.0 per 1,000 in 1970 to 6.0 per 1,000 in 2005, a fair share of it still the result of violence. Infant

⁷ For a map detailing them see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_national_parks_of_Colombia

⁸ Silvia Chant, "Gender and Population," in Silvia Chant with Nikki Craske, *Gender in Latin America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 71-97.

mortality has declined steadily, from 77 per 1,000 live births in 1970, to 41 in 1980, 23 in 1998, and 19 in 2005. Yet it remains high relative to other industrial economies which have an average of 7 per 1,000 infant deaths. Average life expectancy has increased from 62 years between 1970-1975 to 70 years between 1995-2000, and 72.3 years in 2005.⁹ Many of these statistics ultimately mean that, as is the case in most of Latin America, by 2015 Colombia will not be afflicted by “demographic aging” but rather will continue to have just one-third of the average percentage of the elderly population found in advanced economies.¹⁰

The most important feature of this population is perhaps its multiethnic and multicultural character. The vast proportion of the population is made up of *mestizos*, or persons of mixed race, which represents anywhere from 60% to as much as 70% of the total population. Then, one finds Afro-Colombians who represent approximately 11% to 25% of the total population, who are, in absolute terms, the third largest population in the Americas after those of Brazil and the United States. Caucasians, who in actuality are difficult to distinguish from *mestizos*, comprise 10% to 20% of the population. Indigenous communities represent about 2% of the population grouped into as many as 160 ethnic groups, some living in legally-constituted reservations (*resguardos*) of which there are as many as 355, encompassing 28% of the national territory.¹¹

Technology. Because it had a mostly agriculturally-based economy throughout the 19th century, Colombia now has a significant industrial sector which has been steadily growing and diversifying since the early 20th century. Though predominantly imported from abroad, the state possesses the technologies required to produce beverages, textiles, cigarettes, oil, clothing, footwear, plastics, chemicals, bricks, tiles, and cement, as well as the means to conduct food processing. Car assembly plants are also present, as well as small-scale industries that produce home appliances such as stoves and refrigerators for distribution in the local market. In addition, there continues to be an important series of extractive mineral ventures, focusing on the production of oil, gold, coal, and

⁹ Silvia Chant, “Gender and Population,” in Silvia Chant with Nikki Craske, *Gender in Latin America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 71-97; Profamilia, *Salud sexual y reproductiva en Colombia. 2005 Encuesta Nacional de demografía y salud.* (Bogota: Profamilia, 2005).

¹⁰ The proportion of elderly people (over 65 years old) in high-income economies is currently 14.5%. It will be 18.5% in the year 2015. See Chant, “Gender and Population,” p. 90.

¹¹ Esther Sanchez.

emeralds, sometimes through local artisanal methods in addition to modern techniques. There is also an agrarian and livestock sector. Agriculture, though widely considered to be in crisis, remains a significant industry as well. Not only is the production of vegetables and fruits for local consumption abundant, but there also is a growing agro-industrial sector, comprised primarily of large African palm and sugarcane plantations. Livestock is dominant in many parts of the country as well.

Political Features

Type of Government/Political System: Centralized Democracy. Colombia has a highly centralized presidential system within the context of a constitutional and democratically-elected form of government. Even though city mayors, councils, state (*departamento*) governors and chambers of deputies (*asambleas*) are popularly elected, as are the national president and the legislature, the financial and political autonomy of local governments is limited. Power still rests mainly with those in the capital. Overall, national fiscal, military, security, and domestic policies are formulated by the national government, *viz.*, the national treasury and the central executive.

Historical Experience: Civil Wars and Regional Powers. The two dominant political experiences of both the Colombian elite and the bulk of its population have been civil war and elections. In the nineteenth century, there were approximately 8 major conflicts that erupted during the 1810s, 1830s, 1840s, 1850s, 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s. The most violent and brutal conflict during the 19th century is referred to as the Thousand Days War, which occurred between 1899 and 1902 and claimed 100,000 lives. The 20th century witnessed a protracted civil war known as *La Violencia*, a mostly rural confrontation pitting the followers of the two dominant political parties, that is, liberals and conservatives, who perpetuated mass, brutal violence against one another between the 1940s and the early 1960s. At the conclusion of the conflict, the death toll was estimated to be between 250,000 to 300,000. This confrontation was followed by the emergence of armed leftist guerrilla groups in the mid-1960s. To compound the negative effects of rampant political violence, the initiation of drug-related violence emerged during the 1970s, and, beginning in the mid-1980s, right wing paramilitary armies were also established

throughout the country, expanding violence exponentially. Presently, armed conflict in Colombia continues to involve left wing, right wing, and drug-trafficking armies, each largely financed through the manufacture and trafficking of illegal narcotics. In spite of widespread and protracted civil conflicts, the country experienced uninterrupted elections during much of the 19th and 20th centuries, a trend that continues into the present. It has a longstanding tradition of democratically-elected governments, with a short-lived period of military rule understood to have been a “military government under civilian tutelage” rather than a classical dictatorship.¹²

During the 19th and throughout the early 20th centuries, Colombia’s fragmented geography and consequent heightened regionalism perpetuated the status of regional ruling elites rooted in a pre-capitalist agricultural economy and the traditional hacienda system. The major exception to the large estate system occurred in the mostly unsettled regions of western Colombia known as Antioquia, where no indigenous populations were readily available as a labor force. The Antioqueño and Viejo Caldas sections of Colombia were settled primarily during the second half of the 19th century via colonization flows out of the Eastern Cordillera linked to the expansion of coffee cultivation on relatively small family plots.¹³

Military organization. The continuing strength of the country’s regional elite led to a persistent rejection of a powerful central government in Bogota, and prevented the emergence of a strong, centralized military apparatus in Colombia during the 19th and much of the 20th centuries. Fearful of central domination and jealous of their regional prerogatives, Colombia’s regional elite systematically defeated efforts to create, train, and fund a professional army. They opted instead for the preservation of a relatively weak state and military that gave them extensive regional autonomy but that were unable to forestall rebellion in the 19th century, the secession of Panama during the War of a Thousand Days in 1899-1902, or the recurrent outbreak of partisan violence (*La Violencia*) in the first six decades of the 20th century. Throughout this period, Colombia’s military was provided with one of the lowest budgets in any country in Latin America.¹⁴

¹² Carlos H. Uran, *Rojas y la Manipulacion del Poder*. Bogota: Carlos Valencia Editores, 1983.

¹³ See Bagley, “Colombian Security Forces: International Policy and Strategic Culture.”

¹⁴ See Bagley, “Colombian Security Forces: International Policy and Strategic Culture.”

Social/Cultural Aspects

Dominant worldviews, values, and ideologies of Colombia will be discussed in this section. According to Herbert Braun:

Colombians appear to be flexible. At least Colombian men seem to be. Women might be as well, but that is an additional subject. An analysis of the nation's strategic culture begins and ends with this male malleability. We could say as well that the culture and comportment of the Colombians is lax, but this idea carries with it notions of weakness and violence, pejorative considerations that are also far from accurate. Colombians hardly have the rigidity of form and belief that underpin systematic efforts, like revolutions, for example. There have been few if any in the nation's history. Colombians are more given to occasional, contained protests. Yet, the occupation of various military bases by a foreign power does not seem to bother them much. Colombians can be a threat to themselves, individually more so than collectively, and often they have been, and more so than they would wish, but they can hardly be a threat to others.¹⁵

Braun also notes that, according to Malcolm Deas, the English historian of Colombia, the lives of the people he studies are unusually "communicative, fluid, unmanichean," from which has grown a "historiography [that] is rich in memoir, anecdote, incident, sketch; it is intimate, conversational, personal."¹⁶ Colombians live in an intensely face-to-face society. They walk out onto their sidewalks each morning carefully groomed. Deeply sociable, they continuously seek to be surrounded by one another, by those "above" and "below" them. They want to be at the center of things.¹⁷ Aloneness, isolation, and solitude are viewed negatively, as pathological. They are urban and urbane. The countryside and rural folk do not count for much, in their opinion. Separated, *campesinos* are understood to be far inferior and dispensable. Violence by and against them is broadly understood, if not tolerated.

¹⁵ Herbert Braun.

¹⁶ Malcolm Deas, "Reflections on Political Violence: Colombia," in David Apter, ed., *The Legitimization of Violence*, New York, 1997, pp. 379-380.

¹⁷ Herbert Braun, "Colombia, ¿Mucha nación?" in *Revista Número*, # 29, Bogotá, June-July 2001, pp. 70-73, and "At the Center of Things," in *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*, Vol. II, Number 3 (Spring 2003), pp. 8-10.

The individual counts far more than his or her belief-set. Ideology counts for less. Festive collective mobilizations are common, and collective protests are rare.¹⁸ Colombians hang together. They are opposed to sharp changes. They want a strong government, but one that does not get in their way. They distrust the market, and willingly work within it to improve their material lives and their status, to rise in society, to *salir adelante*. The fact that economic interests prevail over ideology among the guerrillas and the paramilitaries should not surprise us.¹⁹ Braun also notes that, when considering the role of culture and the military in structuring society:

We might consider that a military culture lies at the opposite end of one that is flexible. Discipline, regimen, heroism, and a fascination with war and violence are far removed from the lives of most Colombians.²⁰ Their violent behavior, private and also public, tends to be more inter-personal than political. The military is a weak institution, little respected, even today. The guerrillas and the narco-traffickers are broadly deplored. When violent behavior is not passionately personal, it is directed more often than not against inferiors. There has been little violent contestation from below, little that could count as revolt and revolution, including the experience of the Liberal guerrillas of the 1950s. From the beginning the guerrillas sought their integration into the nation, not the overthrow of the government.²¹ This is the case as well for the likes of Pablo Escobar and other right-wing paramilitaries. The actions of the men with guns on the so-called “left” and “right” resemble colonial *tumultos* more than they are a modern form of warfare, even though unlike *tumultos* they are rural and are somewhat connected to national-like

¹⁸ Herbert Braun, “A City on Display.”

¹⁹ The best account of the daily behavior of the guerrillas is fictional. See Ben Fountain, “Near – Extinct Birds of the Central Cordillera,” in his *Brief Encounters with Che Guevara*, New York, Harper-Perennial, 2006, pp. 1-31. But see also my *Our Guerrillas, Our Sidewalks: A Journey into the Violence of Colombia*, 2nd edition, Rowman and Littlefield, 2004. The Spanish version is *El rescate: diario de una negociación con la guerrilla*, Bogotá: Norma, 1998.

²⁰ For an exploratory essay on the place of discipline in Latin America, and its troubled connection with modernity, see Miguel Angel Centeno, “The Disciplinary Society in Latin America,” in Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López-Alves, eds., *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory Through the Lens of Latin America*, Princeton, pp. 289-308.

²¹ Herbert Braun, “Aves de corral, whisky, toallas y algo más: Colombia entre el recuerdo y el olvido,” in *Revista Número 38 (2004): Separata Especial*, and “¡Que Haiga Paz!”: The Cultural Contexts of Conflict in Colombia, “in Christopher Welna and Gustavo Gallón, *Peace, Democracy, and Human Rights in Colombia*, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, pp. 23-59.

organizations. But the *frentes* are where meaning and experience reside. Violent actions are local and sporadic.²²

Colombian culture puts a strong emphasis on the notions of hard work, hierarchy, respect, legality, and place in the social order. Hard work:

. . . is not far removed from the lives of the Colombians, who are industrious and entrepreneurial, and also playful, fun-loving and boisterous. They believe in the law and many transgress it with ease, usually in small sort of ways. Corruption is understood. Natural law can be deeper than man-made law. Colombians do share with a military culture a deep belief in hierarchy, in placing themselves in vertical orders, above and below others. They are deeply conservative. They are driven by a search for status, with place, with respect, and with honor. They defer easily to others who are above them on the social scale, and expect to be deferred to by those below. They are elegantly gracious, courteous, and quick to feel insult when others treat them likewise. At those moments they can lose some of their flexibility.²³

According to Ana M. Bidegain, although mainly a result of its multi-ethnic character, Colombia is also a multi-cultural society, this diversity being part of a unified whole that for a long time had been held together by Catholic culture, a stabilizing and integrating force. Providing a common and unifying framework, Catholicism gave all peoples a relative sense of belonging and a shared worldview. Even though it was originally imposed, it allowed for some consensus to form among otherwise competing regional elites (Antioqueña, Cundiboyacense, Vallecaucana, Santandereana, and Caribbean). However, the symbolic, cultural, socio-economic, and political powers of the Church were perceived by the elite as a real challenge to

²² William B. Taylor, *Drinking Homicide and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages*, Stanford Stanford University Press, 1979. I have drawn connections between the student movement in Mexico in 1968 and colonial behavior, in "Protests of Engagement: Dignity, False Love and Self-Love in Mexico during 1968," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 39, Number 3, July 1997, pp.511-549.

²³ Herbert Braun.

building a new, secular Nation-State.²⁴ In fact, the Church was at the center of many of the civil confrontations the country faced in the 19th century, and continued to be a source of contention throughout the 20th century. Due to various reasons, this Catholic framework broke down during the period of power sharing between liberal and conservatives known as the National Front (1958-1974), when a secularization process from below started to take place. There began a search among Colombians for other values and beliefs that brought about a multiplicity of perspectives without a new unifying civil ethical framework.²⁵

Popular Narrative in Myths, Symbols and Key Texts. Apart from Catholicism, another widespread sentiment among the elite concerned the permanent obsession with the need to colonize what seemed to be an endless and savage frontier. In this regard, there was a radical difference between the American frontier ideal embodied in the works of Frederick Jackson Turner,²⁶ and the one depicted in one of Colombia's foundational texts, that is, the 1923 novel *La Voragine* by writer and diplomat José Eustasio Rivera.²⁷ Whereas, in a well-known 1894 article, Turner observed that the American west had been definitely conquered and closed, inspired by frontier regions such as the Orinoquia in the country's northeast, and the Amazonia far to the south, Rivera held that the taming of the frontier was a permanent source of conflict and an endless venture. In fact, many of his characters are "devoured by the jungle." Turner's views are associated with the flourishing of democratic and egalitarian communities of landed proprietors, mainly small farmers. Rivera's perspective is ultimately linked to an understanding of frontiers as never-ending sources of conflict and violence, the reason for a permanent calling, a life mission.²⁸

Maria Aysa Lastra contends that:

The prolonged period of Violence in Colombia [has] had profound effects on the strategic culture of Colombians, it has increased mistrust among them and hindered the construction of a strong civil society. There are several pieces in

²⁴ See Ana M. Bidegain, "Cultures, Religions and Strategic Culture: Colombian case." Paper prepared for the Strategic Culture of Colombia workshop, Miami, September, 2009. In support of her claims she cites Serge Gruzinski, *Le pensee metisse* 1999 (English version *The Mestizo Mind*, 2002).

²⁵ Bidegain, "Cultures, Religions and Strategic Culture."

²⁶ Turner, Frederick, Jackson. *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920).

²⁷ José Eustasio Rivera, *La Voragine* (Bogotá: El Áncora Editores, 1997).

²⁸ German Palacio, "Cultura Estrategica en la Historia Colombiana. Un Aporte con Perspectiva Ambiental."

Colombian contemporary literature and, particularly, a literary genre called *Sicariato*, in which a variety of authors depict the violent subculture of those who are hired to kill. Two of the most important authors of this genre are Jorge Franco Ramos with *Rosario Tijeras* and Fernando Vallejo with *The Virgin of the Assassins*. Other important literary works that describe the Colombian society during the last prolonged period of violence are: *The Day of Hatred* by Jose Antonio Osorio Lizarazo; *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *News of a Kidnapping* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez; and, *Delirio* by Laura Restrepo.²⁹

Public Opinion and Attitudes. Lastra notes that lack of trust is a common trait among the Colombian people. An ingrained lack of trust among Colombians is depicted in a popular practice that describes importance and mistrust as a daily practice. They follow closely the *papaya* rule which consists of two parts: “*No dar papaya*” (which means do not do anything that gives other people an opportunity to take advantage of you), and “*A papaya dada, papaya partida*” (which means that if others are giving you the opportunity to take advantage, you must do so).³⁰

The best source to gauge Latin American’s current public opinion on political matters is the series of polls conducted by Mitchell Seligson, of which there is now a five-year-long series available. The most recent one on Colombia, entitled, “The Political Culture of Democracy in Colombia, 2008,” presents up-to-date data on public opinions concerning a variety of topics, from crime and corruption to the electoral system and conflict. This report shall first focus on Colombians’ attitudes regarding the state and democracy, and will then discuss views on conflict.

In general, as per the recent poll, Colombians believe that the State should own the major firms and industries. The survey suggests that Colombia is one of the countries in Latin America with the highest level of popular support for this type of intervention, far above places like Costa Rica and Brazil, but slightly under Chile and Argentina.³¹ There is also strong support for the idea that the State, rather than the

²⁹ Maria Aysa Lastra, “Economic and Social Strategic Culture in Colombia.” Paper prepared for the Strategic Culture of Colombia workshop, Miami, September, 2009.

³⁰ See Maria Aysa Lastra, “Economic and Social Strategic Culture in Colombia.” Paper prepared for the Strategic Culture of Colombia workshop, Miami, September, 2009.

³¹ See Juan Carlos Rodríguez Raga and Mitchell A. Seligson, “Political Culture of Democracy in Colombia, 2008,” Table 5.13.

private sector, should mainly be responsible for citizen welfare.³² Similarly, there is majority support for the idea that the State rather than the private sector is responsible for generating employment.³³ Colombians also attribute to the State a central role in reducing inequalities.³⁴ Based on attitudes such as these, the poll presents an index according to which Colombia occupies fourth place in Latin America in favour of intervention of the State in economic life.³⁵

As for democracy, a majority of Colombians lean toward what the Seligson report refers to as “authoritarian stability.” This means that a large portion of Colombians (38.5%) believe in the legitimacy of the political system, but currently exhibit low tolerance for democratic governance. In fact, Colombia is the highest in Latin America in this regard. The poll goes on to show that about one-third of Colombians would favour the restriction of basic democratic principles. It is one of the countries with the highest proportion of citizens who would justify the closing of Congress by the president. Similarly, about one-third of the persons would favour the closing down of Congress and the high courts. One in four Colombians would favour the dissolution of the Constitutional Court under certain circumstances. A large proportion of Colombians, the highest in all of Latin America, would favour restrictions on the opposition. Colombians also occupy first place against the expression of ideas by minorities. A large proportion of Colombians view minorities as a threat. Based on these answers, the Seligson team built an index whereby Colombia is currently ranked as the second highest country in Latin America, after Ecuador, in terms of displaying attitudes contrary to liberal democracy.³⁶

Keepers of Colombian Strategic Culture

Elites

Leadership Beliefs and Values. Colombia’s ruling elite is highly educated, accomplished, and deeply Catholic. The elite first originated and developed in the

<http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/files/IKBL4k/Political%20Culture%20of%20Democracy%20in%20Colombia%202008%20v2.pdf>

³² Ibid., Figure 5.14.

³³ Ibid., Figure 5.15.

³⁴ Ibid., Figure 5.16.

³⁵ Ibid., Figure 5.17.

³⁶ Ibid., Figures, 6.5, 6.13, 6.15 to 6.17, 6.27 to 6.30.

central portion of the territory, mainly Bogota, then, in the country's south, the Cauca region, and, later, in the central north-western region of Antioquia. The regional elite grouped themselves into two dominant political parties: liberals and conservatives, which became "subcultures of daily life."³⁷ In the late 19th century, the Antioquia segment, linked to coffee growing, gold mining, trade, and industry, emerged as the single most dominant component. It joined the Bogotano elite to establish a "national" block.³⁸ That block went through cycles of conservative rule (1886-1930), liberal rule (1930-1945), and power-sharing (1958-1974). Subsequently, there began a deepening crisis of bipartisan rule (1980s-present day) that still lingers today.

According to Braun, the elite did not seem to have had much difficulty making itself generally, and quite comfortably, understood by its followers, especially but not exclusively by the literate members of the towns. And those in the towns had little trouble addressing their urban leaders. For the Colombians are a people of words. They are orators who speak fluidly, elegantly and easily in public.³⁹

Colombian leaders, and the people in general, are also extremely legalistic. The legislature and administrative offices issue laws and regulations at a frantic pace. Still, many people, including leaders, do not necessarily abide by the law and easily break it when it is convenient to do so. They jump lines, disrespect traffic regulations, pay brokers to speed up official documents they may need (from driver's licenses to passports and visas), and engage in petty or large-scale corruption with some ease.⁴⁰ The popular administration of Alvaro Uribe has actually been exemplary in this regard: the President's sons have apparently enriched themselves through land purchases, taking advantage of privileged insider information about future developments in such lands; there is ample evidence that the President's second election was in part the result of bribes paid to members of Congress. More recently, a major scandal involving the Ministry of Agriculture's adjudication in favor of wealthy supporters of the President, of millionaire subsidies originally intended for modest peasant families, has come to the surface. Similarly, intelligence services directly tied

³⁷ See Gonzalo Sánchez, "La Violencia in Colombia: New Research, New Questions," in *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 65, 4 (1985): 789-807.

³⁸ See German Palacio, "Cultura Estrategica en la Historia Colombiana. Un Aporte con Perspectiva Ambiental."

³⁹ Herbert Braun, "A Strategic Culture of Flexibility. The Case of Colombians," paper prepared for the Strategic Culture of Colombia workshop, Miami, September, 2009.

⁴⁰ See Mauricio Garcia, "The Culture of Non-Compliance in Latin America," paper prepared for the workshop on Strategic Culture of Colombia, Miami, September 3, 2009.

to the office of the President have illegally tapped the phones of court justices, leaders of the opposition and their relatives. Members of the armed forces have also seemingly participated in massive extra-judicial executions of poor youngsters kidnapped in popular neighborhoods, who were forcibly transported to rural areas, dressed in military clothing, and ultimately portrayed as members of leftist guerrillas killed in combat. All of these violations were apparently committed to receive monetary rewards and paid leave.⁴¹

Personal Versus Institutional Decision-Making Structure. Colombia has had a fairly stable institutional democracy with strong courts, highly legitimate presidents, an unpopular but functional legislature, and a strong and well-established electoral and political party system. However, over the period of President Uribe's administration, the political system has become personalized. The presidency now seems above the law, the legislature is in a shambles with many of its members under judicial investigation, the courts have lost independence, and political parties have been fragmented and weakened. Except for the strengthening of the military and its successes against insurgent forces, one could say the Colombian State has lost considerable institutional clout in the past few years.

Lastra contends that:

The combination of a weak state,⁴² its scarce presence in the countryside, organized guerillas and paramilitary groups, and drug trafficking activities provoked an escalation of violence in the country that accounts for the mobilization of about 20% population. Today 10% of the Colombian population lives abroad, the majority of them in the United States, Spain and Canada.⁴³ Additionally, those who did not have the economic, social or human resources to travel abroad have migrated to metropolitan areas in Colombia. According to official statistics there are 3.2 million displaced persons in Colombia;⁴⁴ however, independent agencies have estimated that

⁴¹ Bagley, "Colombian Security Forces: International Policy and Strategic Culture."

⁴² Mason, Ann, "La Crisis de Seguridad en Colombia: Causas y Consecuencias Internacionales de un Estado en Via de Fracaso," *Colombia Internacional*, vol 49-50 (2001): 82-102

⁴³ Berube, Myriam, "Colombia: In the Crossfire, Country Profile." Migration Policy Institute, Washington, DC, 2005. Available at: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=344>

⁴⁴ Acción Social, *Registro Único de Población Desplazada, Presidencia de la Republica de Colombia*, Bogotá, Colombia, 2009. Available at: <http://www.accionsocial.gov.co/contenido/contenido.aspx?catID=383&conID=556>

there about 4.5 million.⁴⁵ In short, one of every five Colombians in the past decade left their place or origin in order to seek an alternative future.⁴⁶

Military Organization/Bureaucracy

Historical Experiences. As explained by Bruce Bagley:

Colombia's weak national-level security forces also proved largely incapable of reining in revolutionary guerrilla violence during the National Front period (1958-1974) and beyond, despite repeated resorts to "states-of siege" powers by successive Colombian governments. Indeed, in the 1990s, the Colombian military suffered multiple defeats at the hands of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas (e.g., in 1996 in the Bajo Caguan and in 1997 at the Patascoy volcano, among others). These humiliating military setbacks lead to a growing realization among Colombia's economic and political elites of the need to modernize and professionalize the Colombian Armed Forces. This modernization process began in earnest first under President Andres Pastrana (1998-2002) and subsequently under President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2006; 2006-present).

Bagley goes on to explain that:

Via the US-approved Plan Colombia after July 13, 2000, Washington enthusiastically supported and assisted Colombia's military modernization program with over six billion dollars in US aid between 2000 and 2009. President Uribe's program of Democratic Security (*Seguridad Democrática*) is widely acclaimed in Washington for marking a major shift in the strategic culture within Colombia's security forces in general, including all branches of the Armed Forces and the National Police.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ CODHES, *Sistema de Información sobre Desplazamiento Forzado y Derechos Humanos*. Bogota, Colombia, 2008.

⁴⁶ Aysa Lastra, "Economic and Social Strategic Culture in Colombia."

⁴⁷ See Bagley, "Colombian Security Forces: International Policy and Strategic Culture."

Prevailing Values and Orientations. Historically, the Colombian military establishment has been jealous of its independence, willing to defend its privileges against attempts by civilian authorities to curtail longstanding attributions (for instance, judicial ones), and prone to the use of heavy-handed methods to combat insurgents. The military's independence was symbolized by the fact that, until some years ago, ministers of defense were invariably generals on active duty. It was also reflected in that the military tried its own members for criminal offenses, even those unrelated to military service. This all changed during the early 1990s when civilians asserted control over both the direction of the country's defense policy and the investigation and trying of the military's crimes unrelated to military functions. Still, given the need to constantly rely on the military to tackle the country's fragile security conditions, military forces continue to play a prominent role in the lives of Colombia's citizens, including the handling of regular checkpoints and the patrolling of streets and inter-state highways.

Colombia's security forces continue to face persistent accusations of human rights violations. Indeed, the arrest of the head of Colombia's Secret Service (the DAS—Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad) Mr. Jorge Noguera in 2007, led to continuing revelations of previous DAS participation in union and other civilian activist leaders' assassinations. Recent (2009) revelations of illegal DAS bugging of political opposition and NGO leaders in Colombia continue to roil Colombian politics and may well lead to the dissolution of the DAS itself (now proposed by President Uribe). Within Colombia's military forces, the so-called "false positive" scandal of 2008-09, in which elements of the Colombian army were accused (and subsequently convicted) of murdering innocent civilians and then, after dressing them in FARC uniforms, claiming they were guerrilla fighters, provides clear evidence of ongoing human rights violations on the part of at least some Colombian military officers and soldiers, and raises troubling questions regarding the depth and degree of the Colombian military's commitment to protecting human rights.

In March 2007, Colombian Army Chief General Mario Montoya became the highest-ranking military officer in Colombia to be implicated in a scandal over links between illegal paramilitary fighters and top officials in the government of President Alvaro Uribe. While Bogota denied the validity of the accusations against Montoya (and other high-ranking Colombian military officers such as the head of the Colombian Armed Forces, General Freddy Padilla de Leon), such denials appear to

lack credibility among the populace. The implications of this military-para-military link loom over the future of US-Colombia relations as well.⁴⁸

Public Sentiments/Attitudes

Salience of and Views on Security Issues. The 2008 poll on political culture contains information on crime, insecurity, and conflict in Colombia, affording valuable insight into current views on each of these key matters. There is also other equivalent information on Colombians' notion of "happiness."

Paradoxically, given the high incidence of violence, Colombia exhibits one of the lowest rates in Latin America of people who declare having been victimized by crime over the past year, with the largest percentages found among the better educated people in urban areas, especially Bogota and those in the Pacific region. Colombians also seem to feel fairly safe when compared to many countries in the region.⁴⁹

The opinions of Colombians concerning their country's ongoing conflict are mixed. Between one-half and two-thirds of Colombians consider terrorism, violence, the lack of security provided by the State, and kidnapping to be contributing factors to the country's most serious problems. Almost one-third of the population has relatives who have died, been forced to leave their homes or gone into exile as a result of the conflict. Two-thirds of them have been victims of the guerrillas, whereas one-third lists the right wing paramilitaries as the culprits. Very few people (about 10%) exhibit any trust in the guerrillas, and the same goes for the paramilitaries whose support has declined steadily since 2005, currently representing around 10% of the population. The vast majority of the people (about 71%), whether victims or not, believe that the best solution to the conflict is a negotiated settlement. Yet, a vast majority of the people (between 50 to 62%) are pessimistic about the possibility of a negotiated solution.⁵⁰

According to a recent survey cited in the report by Lastra, Colombians are among the happiest people in the world.⁵¹ Lastra also argues that, despite their history of conflict, limited upper social mobility and, for 50% of the population,

⁴⁸ See Bagley, "Colombian Security Forces: International Policy and Strategic Culture."

⁴⁹ Juan Carlos Rodríguez Raga and Mitchell A. Seligson "The Political Culture of Democracy in Colombia, 2008," Chapter 3, Figures 3.1 to 3.9.

⁵⁰ Juan Carlos Rodríguez Raga and Mitchell A. Seligson "The Political Culture of Democracy in Colombia, 2008," Chapter 9, Figures 9.1 to 9.23.

⁵¹ Veenhoven, R., (2009) *World Database of Happiness, Distributional Findings in Nations*, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Available at: <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl>

poverty, the typical Colombian has created a sense of permanent enjoyment for the present, which has allowed Colombian society to continue its slow evolution without threatening the status quo of the dominant class.

This reported happiness is also the product of many years of being constantly exposed to the fear that something might happen to you and your family, or learning almost every day from the media that a number of persons were killed, kidnapped or threatened in almost every corner of the country, from a well-known venue in Bogota to a small remote village.⁵²

Challenges, Continuity, and Change

Contemporary Security Challenges

Recent Shocks or Challenges. The main security challenges in Colombia continue to stem from, first, longstanding guerrilla insurgency and, then, from the emergence of a drug trafficking elite that penetrated the institutional apparatus of the Colombian State, corrupted politics, weakened the justice system, and radically transformed the international relations of Colombia with most of its partners, in particular the United States.⁵³ The growth of radical regimes in neighbouring countries, particularly Ecuador and Venezuela, also poses a new sort of challenge due to the porous nature of borders that makes it easy for guerrillas and drug traffickers to find safe heaven.

As Velez de Berliner argues, Colombians, besieged by drug traffickers, paramilitaries, army and police units under the control of or working with paramilitary groups, *sicarios*, and sundry criminals, welcomed Alvaro Uribe's heavy-handed (*mano dura*) approach to stemming violence. Under the weight of his political charisma and personality, as well as his record of cleaning up Medellin with the *Convivir* paramilitaries, Uribe gave Colombians a sense of national unity against the FARC, the right wing paramilitaries clustered in the AUC (Colombia's United Self Defence Forces), and other criminal groups. After seven years in power, most

⁵² Aysa Lastra, "Economic and Social Strategic Culture in Colombia."

⁵³ See Palacio, "Cultura estratégica en la Historia de Colombia." The author cites in his support Uprimny, Rodrigo, Alfredo Vargas. "Violencia, ilegalidad y guerra sucia" en Germán Palacio, *La irrupción del Para-Estado. Ensayos sobre la crisis colombiana* (Bogotá: ILSA-Cerec, 1989); Palacio, Germán, "Institutional crisis, regime flexibility, and parainstitutionality in Colombia" Huggins, Martha (ED.) *Vigilantism in Latin America* (Praeger: New York, 1991).

Colombians remain committed to and support Uribe's citizens' security. This is why they are likely to re-elect him in 2010 to an unprecedented third, consecutive presidential term, if, as expected, he declares his candidacy.

However, security has come at a heavy cost. In the name of security, Colombians accept and have become accustomed to high levels of corruption within the security forces, the political establishment, and the judicial system. Hardly a week goes by when a high level officer of the security forces or high public official is not indicted for membership in or collaboration with drug trafficking or paramilitary groups. Currently, "the Penal Justice [system] has 17,000 cases against army members; the *Fiscalía* (attorney general's office) has filed charges against 1,137 military personnel; the military police in Puente Aranda is judging 244 officers; and, the Cantón Sur is doing the same with 100-plus officers."⁵⁴

The detention of General (Ret.) Rito Alejo del Río for presumptive association with the AUC and a series of massacres and assassinations of people thought to be members of or associated with the guerrillas reinforces the mass of Colombians' belief in the collaboration of high-ranking officers with criminal elements. The former pursue an increase in the numbers of guerrilla casualties to accrue political favours and secure promotions. The same goes for the alleged collaboration of National Police General (Ret.) Miguel Maza Márquez in the 1989 assassination of then pre-presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán, attributed at the time to the Medellín Cartel and members of the FARC. This case is still under investigation.

Despite these transgressions of justice and breaches of the military code, citizens' security remains the centrepiece of security culture in Colombia. Today, no politician or public official, let alone the public, will campaign or argue against Uribe's security policies. Either through corruption or through legislative processes approved during ad hoc sessions, citizens' security is embedded in the institutions of Colombia, which Uribe has shaped to fit his political agenda. With the exception of the Supreme and the Constitutional Courts that remain somewhat independent, Uribe has become a centrifugal force around which Colombian politics and institutions are based, including the security forces.

⁵⁴ Maria Vélez de Berliner, "Colombia's Security Forces and Strategic Culture," paper prepared for the strategic Culture of Colombia workshop, Miami, September, 2009. The paper cites as a support a phone interview on 13 September 2009 by Maria Velez de Berliner with Dr. Luis Fernando Botero, member of Colombia's bar.

Today, 180 members of Colombia's Senate and House of Representatives are either in jail or under investigation for their membership in or associations with paramilitary groups or drug cartels (*parapolítica*). The *Farc-política* scandal aggregates politicians, businessmen, and security forces suspected of, or found to be, part of the FARC.⁵⁵ Family members of Uribe's cabinet and inner circle are also under investigation for sundry illegalities, such as the "sale" of notary offices in contravention of legal procedures. Several *Fiscales* (prosecutors) have resigned under pressure when they conducted investigations of those close to the government's inner circle.⁵⁶ Reports of other investigations support the infiltration of Medellín's *Fiscalia* (office of the prosecutor) and security forces by drug and paramilitary mafias. Yet the respective investigations often come to an abrupt end. Few have been charged.⁵⁷

It will be a long time before Colombia sees an end to *farc-política* and *parapolítica* revelations and scandals. The open door trading of influences that led to the congressional approval of the re-election referendum in August 2009 does not bode well.⁵⁸ As the referendum and Uribe's re-election process proceeds, it will not be surprising to find the electoral process is marred by the infiltration of compromised elements of the security forces and other criminal organizations.⁵⁹

Enduring Rivalries. The most enduring rivalry the Colombian State has faced is the one represented by organized crime. As Bruce Bagley's paper indicates, during the 1970s and early 1980s, fueled by a burgeoning demand for cocaine in the United States, first the Medellín cartel and then the Cali cartel emerged in Colombia as the dominant transnational criminal organizations in the cocaine smuggling business from the Andes into the United States. They quickly became notorious as the most powerful and ruthless criminal organizations in the Western Hemisphere. Both Medellín and Cali began their drug smuggling criminal enterprises by clandestinely importing by plane cocaine "base" or "paste" (*pasta básica*) from the southern Andes, especially the Alto Huallaga region in Peru (65% of the world's coca supply) and the Chapare region in Bolivia (25% of the world's coca supply) into Colombia, refining it into powder cocaine in secret laboratories located in Colombia's hinterland, and then

⁵⁵ "La Infiltrada," *Semana*, Edición No. 1332, p30-35

⁵⁶ "Por qué Renuncié," *Semana*, Edición No. 1374, p24-27

⁵⁷ "La Para-Política Está Amenazada," *Semana*, Edición No. 1374, p24-27

⁵⁸ "La Certeza de la Incertidumbre," *El Tiempo*, 6Sep09 (Web edition)

⁵⁹ All of the comments above on current security challenges are taken from Vélez de Berliner "Colombia's Security Forces and Strategic Culture."

smuggling the refined cocaine across the Caribbean Sea (by planes or cargo ships and “fast” boats) into south Florida from where it was subsequently distributed by criminal networks throughout the United States using cars, trucks, and/or planes.

The expanding wealth garnered from the sale of illegal narcotics increased the firepower and augmented the political clout of the Medellin and Cali cartels in Colombia, which led to escalating levels of drug-related violence and corruption during the first half of the 1980s.⁶⁰ The Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) also got involved with coca production and refining in the early 1980s, primarily as “protectors” of the coca growing peasantry and “guards” for cartels’ refining operations and rural landing strips in the Colombian hinterlands. As a result of their dominant position within the booming cocaine trade, the Colombian TCOs were unquestionably far richer and more powerful than the Mexican crime groups involved in marijuana and heroin smuggling into the US market during the same period.

The fall of Medellin and Cali left a vacuum in the Colombian cocaine trade that was quickly filled by a proliferating number of smaller trafficking organizations—often called *cartelitos*—that assumed a lower, less violent profile in Colombian society and politics in an effort to avoid detection and arrest. Some Colombian traffickers did seek to reconstitute larger cartels out of the remnants of Medellin (e.g., the Cartel del Milenio run by Alejandro Bernal in the late 1990s) or Cali (e.g., the Cartel del Norte del Valle run by Don Diego from the mid-1990s through the mid-2000s), but such efforts ultimately failed to prosper because the larger, more prominent and violent cartels sooner or later attracted too much attention from Colombian and US law enforcement agencies to survive. By the early 21st century, some 300 relatively small trafficking groups (*cartelitos*) had sprung up around Colombia to fill the vacuum left by the demise of Medellin and Cali. Only the Cartel del Norte del Valle endured through the first half of the 2000s, but it also succumbed in 2008 to a combined Colombian and US law enforcement campaign.

These new *cartelitos* yielded control of coca cultivation and processing in the Colombian countryside to the FARC guerrillas and to the right wing paramilitary AUC, which between them controlled most of the coca growing areas in Colombia’s isolated rural areas by force of arms while fighting a bloody

⁶⁰ The two Colombian cartels earned as much as 4 billion dollars annually from the cocaine trade in the early 1980s as a result of the 1980s “crack” cocaine boom in the United States.

internal war against each other to maintain or expand their territorial control. Focused primarily on exporting refined cocaine obtained from the FARC and the AUC to the US (but with considerably diminished logistical capabilities in comparison with Medellin and Cali), the increasingly atomized Colombian *cartelitos* systematically forged commercial relationships or alliances with criminal trafficking organizations outside of Colombia. This reduced role for the Colombian *cartelitos* in the political economy of cocaine trafficking from the Andes into the United States created new opportunities for the Mexican TOCs that they quickly and enthusiastically sought to exploit.⁶¹

Emerging Problems. The leftist governments of Correa's Ecuador and Chavez's Venezuela represent a new type of challenge. It seems apparent that FARC guerrillas use the Ecuadorian and Venezuelan borders strategically, coming in and out on a regular basis and, in particular, whenever security needs dictate. It seems clear too that the FARC has received support from the Venezuelan regime. It is no wonder why Venezuela has proactively tried to involve itself in mediating between the Colombian government and the rebels, and why it has demanded, on numerous occasions, that Colombia recognize the insurgent group as a belligerent force under international law. The tensions in dealings with both neighboring countries have escalated to the point that nowadays, diplomatic relations between Colombia and Ecuador are suspended. Venezuela, in turn, has put restrictions on trade and adamantly opposes Colombia's resolve to allow US military forces to operate in several military bases inside its territory, as per an agreement recently reached between the two countries.

The recent military cooperation agreement between the United States and Colombia has been the subject of intense debate in South America. At least two meetings of UNASUR's (Union of South American Nations) Security Council have been devoted to it. There is major opposition to the cooperation agreement, not only in Venezuela and Ecuador, but also in Bolivia and Argentina. In the near future, as the agreement materializes, it is likely that debates over the presence of US troops in Colombia will resume and intensify.

⁶¹ Comments on drug trafficking and related threats are taken from Bagley, "Colombia's Security Forces: International Policies and Strategic Culture."

Continuity versus Change

Strategic Cultural Continuity. Colombia continues to be a democracy, a major aspect of its strategic cultural continuity making it unlikely that force will be used without restraint. Civil freedoms are relatively ample. Though its ownership is heavily concentrated, the media operates without apparent restrictions.⁶² Similarly, in spite of its dismal human rights record, the military continues to be subordinated to civilians. At the moment, a fair portion of the population seems intolerant of institutions intrinsic to liberal democracy (for example, freedom for the opposition, rights of minorities, independent functioning of branches of government), yet they appear to favor a negotiated solution to the armed conflict and are disinclined to engage in war.

Innovations or New Directions. The greatest innovation in strategic culture over the past eight years was the inception and consolidation of “democratic security,” a policy promoted by President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2006, 2006-2010). According to the premises of domestic security, in order for the country to develop and achieve peace it must promote security without restricting democratic freedoms, increase investors’ confidence, and improve social responsibility and cohesion.⁶³ This is a fine set of objectives, if only the government could abide by such declarations/objectives. Democratic guarantees springing from a strict division of power into three independent branches of government have weakened during the two periods Uribe has been in office. Power has been heavily concentrated in the hands of the executives, and the opposition has become the focus of, among others, the illegal gathering of intelligence information through the covert interception of communications without judicial warrants. Social responsibility, in turn, has mainly taken the form of financial gifts to municipalities, administered at the President’s whim in on-site weekly populist meetings with communities throughout the country. It is also represented by monthly subsidies to low-income families living in extreme poverty, subsidies which are not sustainable.

⁶²Colombia is in rank 125 in freedom of the press among 195, 1 being the freest and 195 the most restricted. See Freedom House, “Freedom of the Press, 2009.” Available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/FreedomofthePress2009.pdf>

⁶³ “Los tres pilares de Uribe,” *El Tiempo*, February 3, 2009. Available at http://www.eltiempo.com/participacion/blogs/default/un_articulo.php?id_blog=3911873&id_recurso=450015324

Conclusion

Colombians are more of a threat to themselves than to others, and have been so for centuries. The elite and their followers are likely to use force against each other rather than against another nation, whether a neighboring or distant country. In spite of widespread one-on-one violence, the strategic culture of the country does not seem to favor militarism or the use of force, much less force used in violation of international law. Therefore, the recent attack of a FARC encampment on Ecuadorian territory by the Colombian army, a violation of another nation's sovereignty, was a truly exceptional situation. Something similar is unlikely to occur again, not only because of strategic cultural considerations, but due to the international crisis that would ensue on account of it, likely to be graver than what has been experienced thus far.

Security is unquestionably a growing concern for the violence-haunted and violence-prone Colombian elite and populace, who are truly exhausted by many years of war against local insurgents and organized crime. Still, it is not reasonable to expect that security will be pursued at any cost. Even though they have proven ineffective, and have ordinarily come mixed with implicit or overt violations of human rights, rather than naked force and military means, the country has typically favored legal and other democratic channels to deal with disturbance and crime. In fact, the most widely used mechanisms to demobilize insurgents have not been military in nature, but rather are comprised of soft power mechanisms such as amnesties and pardons. Even drug traffickers were more effectively tamed at first through deals and promises of leniency than through violent repression. To be sure, things have changed greatly because amnesties and deals were abused by those to whom they were addressed. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the current regime's preference for the use of force, judicial, and legal mechanisms shall continue to prevail over force in the long-term. In light of a history of violence, both state and civil society appear more ready to engage in intellectual polemics and rhetorical battles than physical combat. The preferred solution to problems and tensions facing state and civil society could be expected to take the form of enactment of laws and regulations, or a resort to the courts and litigation rather than force-based aggression.

About the Author

Professor Victor Uribe-Uran specializes in Latin American history and law, and holds a joint appointment as Associate Professor of History and Law at Florida International University. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. After earning his Juris Doctorate at the Universidad Externado de Colombia, he served as a lawyer and then director for the Project of Legal Aid and Legal Research at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, in Bogotá. He also has held faculty appointments at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Seccional Medellín, and has served as a visiting professor of law at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá.

The recipient of awards for both teaching and scholarship, including a State University System Teaching Incentive Program Award and a Faculty Senate Award for Excellence in Research, he has received fellowships, research awards and contracts from, among others, the Fulbright Program, the Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the United States Agency for International Development. Professor Uribe has served on the board of editors of journals like the *Law and History Review* and *The Americas*.

A prominent and widely-published scholar, Professor Uribe-Uran is the author of ten books or book chapters and more than 50 articles and book reviews. Currently, he is finishing a book project on domestic violence and the law in Colombia, Mexico, and Spain. In 1997, he received the prestigious Tibesar Prize from the Conference on Latin American History, American Historical Association, for best article published in the *Americas*.

Professor Uribe-Uran is a key figure in the establishment of the FIU College of Law; his extensive service includes membership of the search and screen committees that recruited the founding faculty and many of the top administrators. Between 2006 and 2009, Dr Uribe served as Chief of Party in the USAID's Justice Reform and Modernization program being implemented in Colombia by the FIU Center for the Administration of Justice.

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