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Striking a New Balance?
Exploring Civil-Military Relations in Colombia in a Time of Hope

John-Andrew McNeish , Gabriel Rojas Andrade, Catalina Vallejo

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Authors:
John-Andrew McNeish, Associate Professor at NMBU Norway/ Adjunct Senior Researcher, CMI Norway
Gabriel Rojas Andrade, PhD Candidate at the Department of Law, Universidad de los Andes, Colombia
Catalina Vallejo, PhD Candidate, Department of Law. Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

Front page photo:
Press conference reporting capture and death of two members of an armed criminal organization. (Photo: John Andrew McNeish).

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Executive Summary

Colombia appears to be fast approaching an agreement on a set of peace accords ending an armed conflict that has lasted over 55 years. In this CMI Working paper, we consider the status of and possibilities to transform civil-military relations in the country and the possible connections this has to founding democratic and sustainable peace. We furthermore stress the need to expand on standard approaches to the study of civil-military relations in Colombia through consideration of their intersection with features of economic and social development in the country.

1. Introduction

Based on field[i] and documental research[ii] carried out in 2013 and 2014, this CMI Working paper aims to qualitatively explore civilian-military relations in Colombia. Whilst aiming to remain responsive to the particular intricacies of Colombian history, politics and culture, the Working paper will also focus on the following three central themes: 1) the military's position and internal structure; 2) the political economy of civilian-military relations; and, 3) the culture, religion and ideology of the military.

In recent years, significant new hopes have arisen in Colombia that a peace deal with guerrilla group FARC-EP is nearing, and with it the end of the internal war that started in 1964[iii]. As section I of the Working paper describes, hopes are also expressed that, with new agreements between the government and the guerrilla forces, there might be the opportunity to restructure military-civilian relations in the country (Guillén 2013). However, as is widely recognized, there are a series of significant barriers that stand in the way of an eventual peace deal. These in part result from a history of previous efforts to create peace deals, as well as the orientation of political opposition in the country. Added to this, we also suggest in this Working paper the need to acknowledge a series of lesser-known challenges that only become evident once attention is paid to the dynamics of civil military relations and their intersection with features of economic and social development in the country. It is our contention that whilst the peace talks are undoubtedly of importance in moving the country forward toward the end of armed confrontation with the guerrilla, they are not in themselves a sufficient basis for *substantive* peace.

To which this Working paper means to be strongly indicative, a basis for substantive peace requires a significant readjustment of civil military relations in line with definitions of a more democratic political and economic system. As outlined in section II below, over the last hundred years civil military relations in Colombia have—often violently—moved from irregularity, to an ideal of "arm's length", and on to a highly questionable praetorian relationship. The latter has typically been characterized by a dynamic whereby the military, through force, protects elite interests above and beyond the interests of national defence or even national law. As well as explaining skewed property ownership and high levels of inequality, the partial or differentiated democracy of this system indicates that civil military relations in Colombia relate strongly to both economic and social structures. Moreover, we argue in section III that there is evidence that a sustainable and substantive peace in Colombia is reliant on a significant reconsideration of the inequalities of economic relations in the country. Significantly, this implies reform of its current extractive model—issues that are not on the table in the current Havana peace talks[iv]. In section IV of the Working paper we further consider the military´s auto-perception (i.e. their cultural and ideological identity). In particular we highlight that whilst the armed forced are not immune from the influence of wider Colombian society, as evidenced in gender relations and symbolic politics, an effect of war has been the defensive generation of clear boundaries of difference with the rest of Colombian society. The Working paper concludes with some final considerations we view as essential to moving beyond the persisting partial and praetorian nature of democracy in the country.

2. Peace and its limits

Starting in February 2012, the *Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People´s Army* (FARC-EP)[v] and the government of Juan Manuel Santos have met in a series of peace talks in Havana, Cuba[vi]. The purpose is to search for the resolution of a conflict that has resulted in the death of over 600,000 people, the displacement of 7 million people, and a legacy of recorded human rights abuses (Marcos & Pineda Ariza 2013). Although the violence of the armed conflict continues, and much remains in terms of the negotiation of an eventual peace agreement, landmark agreements on land reform, and political participation have encouraged a new wave of cautious optimism amongst warring parties and the civilian population regarding the possibilities of achieving peace[vii]. So far, three out of the six terms tabled by both sides as necessary for a peace deal have been discussed and agreed on.

As made evident by the founding manifesto of the FARC, the current conflict originates from a rejection of the severe imbalance in land ownership in the country[viii] and the guerrilla's claim for the necessity of a revolutionary land reform[ix]. If ratified by the Colombian Congress and public referendum, there is widespread agreement amongst the parties and external analysts alike that the proposals for land reform announced in May 2013, when this point of the agenda was agreed upon, would transform Colombia's rural and agrarian reality[x]. In November 2013, both sides agreed on the rebels' political participation should a peace deal be reached. The agreement on political participation is also seen as an essential step towards ending the conflict as it grants a series of legal protections[xi] to members of the guerilla who demobilize and re-enter civilian and democratic political life. The May 2014 agreement on ending the drug trade by the FARC-EP is also hailed as highly significant, as it is widely recognized as fuelling the war economy and allowing the conflict to persist. Furthermore, whilst the details of how and how much remain unclear, there is now acceptance on both sides that reparations will have to be paid to the victims of the armed conflict. The steps towards the disarmament of the guerrilla and a programme for the implementation of all points in the peace talks are now being addressed.

2.1 Protection and reconciliation

It is worth recalling when considering these points that previous efforts by the guerrilla to return to the mainstream political process were disastrous. Following the creation of the Patriotic Union Party (UP) in the 1980s by the urban guerrilla movement M19 in response to an amnesty, and its election into a series of local governments, para-military organizations in the country carried out a campaign to assassinate their members. Over 3,000 were killed in a six-year period. This resulted in the FARC's return to the mountains, where it continued its meteoric expansion in numbers and territorial control in the 1990s. The current agreement on political participation is seen as an important step towards avoiding a repeat of this scenario. This is achieved through agreement on the need for mechanisms to promote the increased democratic participation and the protection of rights and guarantees for political opposition in general, as well as means to guarantee and promote reconciliation and protection of ex-guerrilla in particular.

There are also well-founded worries that rather than creating peace, the effort to introduce land reforms and return the FARC to formal political life will result in heightened levels of violence. Previous efforts over the last decade to return land resulted in the killing of dozens of displaced farmers, as wealthy landowners resisted legal process through their collusion with the military, drug traffickers and further deployment of para-military defence forces (Theidon 2007). There has also been, continuing to the present, a consistent campaign of terror and assassination carried out against union leaders and human rights campaigners in the country. There are present concerns that, despite the formal disbanding of the

para-militaries by the state and careful acceptance by the government of the FARC's demands for immunity from prosecution, a new wave of reprisal killings will occur resulting in the return and renewed commitment by the guerrilla to armed rebellion. There are also fears that the culture of the military in Colombia and particularly its continued foundation on a logic and practice of counter-insurgency (see below) will have little tolerance for the political pragmatism required if demobilisation is to work.

2.2 The hard-line

The general optimism now surrounding the peace talks and the Santos government's policy of "national unity" must then be balanced with the experience of previous failed efforts to negotiate a peace settlement with the FARC-EP. Indeed, not all political sectors in the country are in agreement with the peace talks. The view of the opposition, as expressed by ex-president Alvaro Uribe, is that the recent agreements on agrarian reform and political participation will leave "the country in the hands of drug smugglers and terrorists"[xii]. This is a position apparently shared by many of the military top brass. In preparation for the congressional elections in 2014, Uribe led an offensive to rebuild his political party, the Democratic Centre (CD), premised on a return to the successes of the offensive military actions in the early 2000s. Uribe furthermore condemns the recent agreement on political participation as providing immunity to leaders of the FARC-EP, whom he claims are responsible for multiple breaches to Human Rights. Uribe has asked for the peace talks to be suspended until the FARC discontinue "criminal activities"[xiii]. Although the peace talks have continued steadily, there has been no long-term cease-fire by both sides, and a series of attacks by the FARC[xiv] and continued successful assassination operations of guerrilla leaders by the military[xv] have fed support for the opposition and tested the patience of the peace negotiators[xvi]. It is only recently in December 2014, that the FARC-EP announced an unlimited cease-fire under the condition that there were no military attacks by the army. In February 2015 the government decided to put a halt to aerial bombardments against the FARC-EP, which however would continue if the FARC breached its cease-fire. The government expressly stated that its decision did not constitute a permanent cease-fire.

2.3 A system for justice

So far, there are no signs of sufficient legal and law enforcement mechanisms to protect people returning to civilian life and lands in previous areas of conflict. Indeed, some analysts and commentators state that the success of peace talks will not be guaranteed until the remaining question on ending the conflict is addressed[xvii]. Of these the issue of transitional justice (i.e., how to bring the rebels most responsible for human rights violations to justice) is thought by many to be the most challenging[xviii]. In preparation for an eventual agreement, the Minister of Defence in Colombia Juan Carlos Pinzón proposed a bill to the Constitutional Court to support reform of military legal jurisdiction (*jurisdicción penal militar*) to address all criminal acts committed by members of the armed forces—including those against civilians. Our interviews revealed that many key politicians, legislators and civil society organizations opposed the proposed measure, as it would guarantee military impunity from prosecution for breaches of human rights. However, the bill was not rejected because of moral or political argument in opposition, but rather failed to pass last year on the basis of series of bureaucratic irregularities. Responding to the decision, the Minister of Defence stated "This is an attack on the morale of the armed forces", and on the judicial order that lacks clear rules for the legal processing of military personnel[xix]. Adding to

concerns about an eventual legal system to deal with transitional justice is an awareness of the now acute capacity limits and inhumane conditions of Colombian prisons[xx].

3. Civil-military relations in Colombia

3.1 Irregularity

Civilian-military relations in Colombia contrast strongly with other nations in Latin America. On the one hand, Colombia has remained a democratic country with a high degree of institutional stability throughout a period in the region in which other countries experienced prolonged periods of military dictatorship and institutional breakdown. On the other hand, the country has been in the grip of an internal armed conflict for the last five decades in which multiple actors have played a role, but where the military has occupied a controlling position. This position has been used to push for the introduction and implementation of national security doctrine, the adoption of counter-insurgency policy and techniques, and for dictating the national budget in terms of privileging military spending. Unlike other countries in Latin America, Colombia´s armed forces have never supplanted, or even forced, a power-sharing arrangement with the country´s traditional elite (Isachsen 2014). The most powerful Colombian civilians have nearly always wielded more political power than the top generals. Civilian political leaders have always held military leaders at "arm´s length" (Isachsen 2014: 2). Whereas officers might be nominated to ambassadorial positions, they have seldom been named to head ministries or been successful in running for political office. Moreover, class distinctions in the country have kept the two groups largely distinct, with little inter-marriage between military officers and the country's economic upper class.

As characterized in more detail below, any attempt to explain this apparent paradox must take into account a series of domestic and external historical factors that have granted the military relative autonomy. Recognition must also be made of the relative short reach of governmental institutions in a country where the power and wealth of a traditional landed and modern industrial elite have been sustained by powerful legal institutions. These institutions require the military to respond to elite interests over the interests of the state, and to use legal loopholes in order to share its monopoly of violence in service of the same. Finally, as will be made evident below, external pressures have strongly influenced the ideological, institutional and technological development of the military in response to perceived threats.

3.2 Limits to military power

Andrade (2012) draws attention to a series of factors particular to the country that restricted the power of the military and its ability to challenge civilian authority in the initial stages of the country's development. Here he cites Ortiz's (2005) identification of limiting factors, such as the geographical and cultural fragmentation of the country. Great physical distances and complex topography have favoured the generation of strong regional identities and autonomous economies that complicate the centralization of political power and the formation of bureaucratic networks. In the Republican period, this geographical and cultural diversity formed the background of strong political confrontations that questioned the legitimacy of the central state, avoided the crystallization of a national identity, and fed both the civil unrest and the consumption of resources (Andrade 2012: 149). Moreover, the formation of parallel regional economies generated sufficient resources for non-state actors to confront the republican state.

Following the Wars of Independence in the 19th century, a series of *caudillos* (local warlords), capable of combining political influence, military power and economic financing, competed for power in the country. 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. This decentralized state was unable, however, 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 in the first six decades of the 20th century. Throughout this period, Colombia's military was provided one of the lowest budgets in any country in Latin America (Andrade 2012)

3.3 Towards professionalization

It is only at the end of the 19th century that the first real initiatives were taken by the Colombian state to institutionalize and professionalize the armed forces. The Constitution of 1886 traced the basis for the professionalization of military training and the formation of a national police following the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902). With the advent of the Conservative Republic (1918-1930), the first efforts to create a professional basis for the military failed due to the tendency of the sitting government to wield its power in an effort to control political discontent. Despite renewed efforts to return to professionalism in the Liberal Republic (1930-1946), similar political coercion and use of the military continued (Andrade 2012: 150). When the Conservatives returned to power in 1946 the political rivalry with the Liberals and the clear political manipulation of the forces of law and order led into *La Violencia*—or The Violence—a period in which both sides responded to political reprisals through force. The Liberals and the Communists formed armed groups (*bandoleros*) in reaction to the efforts of Conservative political leaders and supporting peasants to seize the agricultural lands of Liberal-oriented peasants. These groups were the progenitors of today´s guerrilla forces. The Conservatives responded through the organization of para-military organizations to support the military and police. In the resulting clashes and fighting between these groups over 20,000 people were killed[xxi].

The period of *La Violencia* officially ended in 1953 with the de facto presidency of General Rojas Pinilla, and the formation of a power-sharing agreement between the Liberal and Conservatives under the National Front government in 1957. However, no real governmental response was made to the root causes of the violence[xxii]. As a result, a number of the *bandoleros* continued their fight against the state. The massacres, plundering and crimes committed by the military during the period of *La Violencia* also established the persisting public perceptions of the armed forces in Colombia as aggressive and partial in their actions (Andrade 2012: 150). During the unrest the sitting government gave the military *carte blanche* to re-organize in order to respond to an irregular war. Whilst the distance would later change between the armed forces and civilian state, the period of *La Violencia* would in its exceptionalism generate one of the lasting characteristics of civilian-military relations on the country (i.e. the autonomous position of the armed forces in the management of public order, and their distancing from civilian influences on these matters).

3.4 At arm's length

Following *La Violencia,* Colombian military officers under the leadership of General Rojas Pinilla took power bloodlessly at the invitation of political and business leaders (Sotomayor 2008). However, the General left the presidential palace peacefully after national elections were held to re-establish

democratic order. The winner of those elections, Alberto Lleras Camargo, set out broad principles that would aim to guide Colombian civil-military relations for several decades. In this regard the famous discourse of Alberto Lleras in the Teatro Patria in 1958, made following the return to civilian rule and on behalf of the National Front government, is instructive. The *Lleras doctrine* proposes two simple parameters for relations between the government and the military: the undesirability of the participation of the military in politics, balanced with an acceptance that civilians should not intervene in issues of concern to military institutions (Andrade 2012: 150).

The significance of the Lleras-doctrine has been of some academic debate with regards to civil–military relations in Colombia. For some, it was the decisive point marking the start of the autonomy of the armed forces (Dávila 1998; Leal 2006; Pardo 2003; Pizarro 1987). The military dictatorship (1953-1957) announced the importance of the military institutions over and above the Colombian state. Indeed, the emergence of new threats (guerrilla insurgence, and later drug trafficking by cartels), required an increased political protagonism by the armed forces to secure necessary support. From this perspective, the armed forces developed in the late 50s an autonomous field of action in the management of domestic political order, and a new sense of its own importance in this task. At the same time, the rest of the state and society renounced their power to participate in the politics of security and defence (Andrade 2012: 151). This argument for the autonomy of the armed forces can be strengthened by recognition of other events in this period, and especially the onset of the cold war. Following their formal establishment in 1964, the FARC-EP and especially the *Ejercito de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) received training and direct military support from Cuba. In the proxy war that would develop, the Colombian military were granted state support to accept US counter-insurgency training and intelligence support.

Other academics question whether the autonomy granted to the military was really so definitive (Dávila 1998; Deas 2003; Salcedo 1999; Valencia 1992). They maintain that despite the rhetoric of the Lleras-doctrine, the autonomy of the military was always under question. From this perspective, the armed forces were never independent in the management of resources or operations, nor indeed in concrete actions such as negotiations with guerrillas. These perspectives emphasize the structural weaknesses of military institutions and the lack of professional development until the 1990s. They also highlight the oscillating efforts of successive administrations, particularly in the 80s and 90s, to tip the balance more or less in favor of military or civilian control of security policy. Whilst the government of Turbay Ayala (1978-1982) instituted statutes for security (Decreto 1923/1978) that widened the autonomy of military institutions in response to questions of public order, his successor Belesario Betancur (1982-1986) attempted to reign in the autonomy of the military—by strengthening other parts of the armed forces over that of the army—and sought actively to create a civil basis for the negotiation of an end to the armed conflict. Indeed, in the 1990s successive presidents demonstrated increasing interest in maintaining a distant control over the strategies used by the military to respond to threats to security.

3.5 Military saber-rattling

Whether the armed forces had complete autonomy or not, all are in agreement that by the 1990s the relationship between civilian government and the military had soured and the pact was under increasing question. Civilian expertise in defence and security policy, resource management, and strategy atrophied (Isachsen 2014:2). The officer corps perceived itself as having been left to confront narco-traffickers and insurgents on its own, with neither oversight nor a guiding national doctrine. The armed forces complained in the 1990s about the funding levels that, as a percentage of GDP, were lower that the Latin American average for most of the "pact" period; a scarcity that was keeping pay low and limiting equipment purchases. Multiple sabre-rattling episodes attempted to draw public attention towards the military´s plight. Most famously in May 1999 the Minister of Defense Rodrigo Lloreda

resigned in protest when the government announced that it was considering the indefinite extension of the demilitarization of municipalities within defined areas of front-line with the guerrilla. Lloreda and the military believed the government was giving too many concessions to the FARC-EP; a view that was by then widely accepted in Washington. In a show of force Lloreda was followed by the collective resignation of 12 generals, 20 colonels and 50 officers. The mass resignation was the largest in the country's history, and reflected the widening breach between the civilian and military authorities (Richani 2005). In line with the new Constitution approved in 1991, the government introduced a series of reforms to the structure of the state, including political (a civilian was named as the Minister of Defence) and legal measures that clarified civic-military relations under clear civilian control and respectful of international treaties and conventions—including human rights (Pardo 2003; Santos 2003). Neoliberal reforms in the course of the 1990s also imposed serious restrictions on public financing, and therefore further curtailed the autonomy and expansion of the military.

3.6 A praetorian pact

With little guidance or oversight, and starved for resources—by the late 1990s the military had about 20 functioning helicopters and 30,000 combat available troops— Colombia´s armed forces became ever less effective and more abusive. Officers, desirous of high body counts, ignored human rights violations committed by undertrained troops (Isachsen 2014: 4). Especially in areas with rising numbers of hostile guerrilla, they formed agreements with all who claimed a common cause (i.e., far-right politicians and cattle-ranchers, narco-traffickers and para-military groups). The armed forces´ toleration, if not outright support, of the paramilitaries resulted in one of the most serious human rights crises in Latin American history (CNMH 2013). In response to the sharp increase in violence, the international community placed increasing pressure on Colombia to hold the military accountable for human rights abuses. Pressure from the international community and human rights organizations led to a high-court landmark decision in 1997 ruling that soldiers who deliberately take part in human rights abuses must be tried and punished by the civilian court system. However, much of the ambiguity of civil-military relations in the 1990s was about to change as Colombia moved towards the new millennium. In the late 1990s the Colombian military received a further major boost to their power and autonomy as a result of two important changes in the war system's environment (i.e., Plan Colombia, the War on Drugs and the US War on Terror) (Schultz-Kraft 2012).

With the worsening of civilian-military relations and dwindling effectiveness of counter-insurgency tactics in the late 1990s, the guerrilla roughly quadrupled in size during the 1990s. This was further assisted by the FARC´s deeper involvement with the by now well-established drug cartels. By the end of the decade the FARC and ELN had fronts surrounding Bogotá and Medellín (Colombia´s two largest cities), and were kidnapping more than 2000 victims for ransom per year. It was also now evident to the military that the Lleras civil-military pact had failed and that a new relationship with the civilian state had to be established; one where they would more actively offer their autonomy in exchange for a largely unquestioned praetorian position behind the civilian state.

From the start, the Pastrana government (1998-2002) confronted important hurdles in its dealings with the military. Particularly controversial was the proposal to withdraw the armed forces from five municipalities in preparation for peace talks (Richani 2003). In the wake of the Lloreda crisis mentioned above, the position of the Pastrana government was weakened considerably. Shortly after, the government conceded to consulting the military in management of the peace process and granted the military the power to determine the fate of demilitarized areas. In doing so, the Pastrana government severely altered civil-military relations and constrained the government's manoeuvrability, tying the President's and his representatives' hands at the negotiation table. Military conservatives like Lloreda

fully rejected reforms such as the incorporation of FARC-EP forces and commanders in the military structures. With its indoctrination in Cold War ideology—particularly prevalent within its top ranks—the military was adamantly opposed to the "nightmare" of having to accommodate a militarized left wing (Richani 2003).

3.7 Plan Colombia

In line with the Colombian military, in August 1999, US envoys warned against the concessions being granted the guerrilla. Furthermore, they also offered the Pastrana government a deal to make a military lead acceptable. The US offered the Colombian government a substantial increase in US military aid if they would accept a comprehensive plan designed to revamp the military and reinvigorate the drug war. *Plan Colombia*, approved by the US Congress in July 2000, broadened the magnitude and scope of US involvement in Colombia's military strategy. In total, from 1999 to 2002, the US gave Colombia 2.4 billion USD in aid, 81 per cent of which was used to purchase arms. The US commitment of such resources brought Colombia into the orbit of strategic importance just behind Israel, Egypt and Iraq. With this new assistance the military shifted gear from a defensive to an offensive position[xxiii]. The number of professional soldiers increased from 22,000 to 55,000 and regular soldiers from 46,000 to 73,000. The government deployed two US trained anti-narcotics units before the end of 1999 (Richani 2005). By 2001, military-initiated attacks against the guerrilla outnumbered the attacks initiated by the rebels. The changing perception of the military articulated by the top brass was that the war was now winnable. Indeed, this position was given increased political credibility with the change of government in 2002 and the election of Alvaro Uribe to the Presidency. In fact, Uribe´s presidential campaign gained momentum after the peace talks between Pastrana´s government and the FARC-EP failed. His presidency promised to focus on the military defeat of leftist armed groups.

Plan Colombia was expanded under President Uribe and connected to the governmental strategy of Democratic Security Policy (PSD)[xxiv]. This strategy drew directly on the logic and language of the Bush administration's War on Terror (Marcos & Pineda Ariza 2013). According to Uribe, the Colombian state had theoretically granted all liberties to citizens, but "terror had overcome these liberties." Uribe regularly painted his government's actions as a war against terrorists, rather than placing the ongoing internal armed conflict in historical perspective and thereby recognizing the political, social and material foundations of the fighting. Uribe stated:

> *"There is no armed conflict here…there was armed conflict in other countries when insurgents fought against dictatorships. Here there is no dictatorship; here there is a profound, complete democracy. What we have here is the challenge of a few terrorists."*
>
> *(Hanson & Romero Pena 2005).*

As revealed in a recent Washington Post article[xxv], new covert action led by the CIA and funded through a multibillion-dollar black budget outside of the 9 billion USD official package of military support granted by the US since 2000, was also started under the guises of *Plan Colombia*. Introduced under the US Presidency of George Bush and continued into the Presidency of Barak Obama, the covert operation has used new data tracking technologies and smart bombs to speed up the efforts and success of the Colombian military to track down guerrilla leaders. These techniques not only allowed the

Colombian armed forces to significantly reduce the number[xxvi] and leadership of the guerrilla within national territory, but to also track and kill Raul Reyes—considered to be then No. 2 in the seven-member FARC secretariat—in Ecuadorian territory. As well as being condemned by the Ecuadorian government, this attack has remained a matter of international controversy in the region given its links to the US. Indeed, other countries neighbouring Colombia fear similar attacks could be made on their territory—particularly Venezuela[xxvii].

3.8 "False positives"

The various phases of the Uribe-administrations PSD-strategy resulted in the reduction of territories controlled by the guerrilla as well as heightened levels of detention. These factors were presented by the Colombian and US governments as success stories. However, the armed conflict continued largely unabated throughout the period of the Uribe government (2002-2010). Indeed, during the first two years of Uribe's administration there were more non-combatant deaths than during the full period of the Samper administration (1994-1998). The fog of war of the PSD period also allowed for the development of the "false positives" scandal in which the military hired "recruiters" to lure poor, young and sometimes persons with mental disabilities, to remote locations where they were then murdered. With the bodies photographed in guerrilla uniforms, these killings were then reported as guerrilla deaths in combat as a means to provide evidence for the increased statistical success of the military's gains in the armed conflict (Hanson & Romero Penna 2005). Moreover, despite denials of their recorded linkages to the military and the official government brokered cease-fire in 2002, the implementation of Plan Colombia and the PSD provided the conditions for the rapid expansion of para-military organizations and drug trafficking related criminal gangs[xxviii].

What is crucial to acknowledge in relation to the Presidency of Uribe is the first practice of a much tighter relationship between civil government and the military, and one where the President was actively involved in policy-making related to security and defence. Civilians—at least President Uribe and his conservative cohort—were now fully engaged in the day-to-day management of Colombia´s security strategy (Isachsen 2014:5). Uribe placed the armed forces on permanent offensive, pressing officers for results against the guerrilla. More generals and officers were fired or forcibly retired if they failed to demonstrate results than during the term of any other Colombian president. However, despite this pressure, there was little conflict between Uribe and the military command. He shared with them their conservative, pro-landowner political views, as well as their discomfort with peace talks, leftist rebels, the political opposition, and their disdain for human-rights defenders. The elite no longer held the military at quite the "arm´s length" as they once had. Indeed, Uribe instituted a "war tax" on the wealthiest Colombians that was used to procure helicopters and other expensive equipment for the army.

3.9 Praetorianism with a human face

Prohibited by Colombia´s Constitutional Court from running for a third term, Uribe left office in 2010. He was succeeded by Santos (2010-2014, 2014-2018)—Uribe´s former Minister of Defense—who, despite not enjoying the same level of affection from the military as Uribe, has shown no real desire to reconstruct the Lleras "arm´s length" principle.

In the recent national elections, Santos ran against the Uribista-oriented opposition candidate Oscar Zuluaga. Whereas there were clear differences between the two with regards to their willingness to

negotiate with the guerrilla, there was less to distinguish them with regards to other issues. Although Colombians listed their main concerns as unemployment, health and security in polls held in the run-up to the national elections, neither of the two electoral candidates particularly emphasized either of the first two of these issues. Rather, both candidates responded to concerns about poverty and inequality in the country by emphasizing the linkages between security, growth and private investment. Both also emphasized the continued role of the armed forces in securing these markets and material assets.

Although in Santos´ first term of government formal recognition was made of the human costs of the internal conflict and Victim´s Centres[xxix] were established to provide assistance to internally displaced and families affected by the armed conflict, no real change was made to domestic security policy. Instead of a return to the protection of the citizenry and national borders, the armed forces´ efforts remain largely directed towards the protection of the state from perceived internal threats, as well as the securing of infrastructure and sources of natural resource wealth seen as vital to national economic ambitions.

The placement of a Naval Commander in the position of Chief of the Armed Forces, reform of the military justice system, and support for peace talks have raised concerns and complaints within the military regarding Santos´ loyalties. However, none of these actions cut too deeply into the close civil-military relationship generated by Uribe and Pastrana's *Plan Colombia*. Recent discussion of the possible outcome of a new Santos government suggest, for example, that "the problem of Santos is that he wants transformation but by using the old coalition of power"[xxx].

3.10 Revision of national policy

Acknowledgement of the costs and limitations of the PSD—including international diplomatic concern and condemnation of human rights abuses—led to a revision of national policy in 2007. The new National Consolidation Policy (PNC) implemented under the first Santos administration was to lead to what was called a "social recovery of territory". The idea was that military methods would be concentrated on certain consolidation zones (i.e., vulnerable areas where poverty, absence of rule of law, illegal armed group activity, drug trafficking and cultivation, recognized ethnic territory disputes, and human rights violations were most pronounced) to be followed later by the presence of civil institutions of the state[xxxi].

New humanitarian actions by the military (following increased training in human rights) were also envisaged as a way to "win the hearts and minds" of populations (with a particular emphasis on indigenous and African Colombian populations—often disproportionally affected by the armed conflict) in consolidation zones. However, neither the PSD nor the PNC has led to any real improvement in the presence of civilian institutions in these areas because the military component remains pre-eminent. Indeed, military-led humanitarian action has led to increasing confusion over the difference between assistance and military action, which some analysts see as having raised the risk of retaliation by the FARC-EP against the populations involved. There has also been no abatement of military action under the Santos administration[xxxii]. Indeed, the Santos administration does not see a politics of peace and democracy as being realistic without military oversight (Velasquez 2012).

3.11 Cautious optimism

Santos inherited a military that had grown by c75 per cent since 2000, thanks to *Plan Colombia* and Uribe´s "Democratic Security" policy. The military budget has also continued to grow under Santos, albeit at a slower pace (Isachsen 2014). Whilst the ex-president Uribe began criticizing Santos for softness on security shortly after his election, a review of the current president´s speeches "reveals that, like his predecessor, he has called the military *our heroes* and urged them to remain on the offensive dozens of times" (Isachsen 2014:6). Indeed, more top FARC leaders have been killed under Santos than in the eight years under Uribe.

Although the violence of the armed conflict still continues, and much remains in terms of the negotiation of an eventual peace agreement, landmark agreements on land reform and political participation have encouraged a new wave of cautious optimism amongst warring parties and the civilian population regarding the possibilities of achieving peace[xxxiii]. Interestingly, despite their earlier protests against peace negotiations, and the continuing daily protestations of ex-President Uribe on his Twitter account, the military also so far appears to take a tolerant stance on the current process. This is clearly explained in part by the way in which Santos had crafted the talks so that the military do not lose face and are an active part of the process (Isachsen 2014).

The talks are taking place in a foreign country, meaning that the armed forces do not have to pull out of any Colombian territory to allow them to occur. Moreover, the talks are proceeding without a cessation to hostilities in place. Until March 2015, the military remained free to attack the enemy at any time, and did so even during the periods in which the FARC-EP has declared a brief unilateral cease-fire. The future role, size and funding of the armed forces and the police are not included in the peace negotiation agenda, and two of the most prominent retired security officers of the past decade have been included in the five-person principal negotiating team[xxxiv]. The Legal Framework for Peace, a constitutional reform Santos convinced the Congress to approve in 2012, sets boundaries for the transitional justice arrangements to which government negotiators can agree. The framework does not allow amnesty for the most responsible violators (i.e. leaders who planned and ordered massacres, kidnappings and other cruel criminal acts), but as Santos frequently reminds critics, the framework would allow military personnel accused of serious violations to receive light (or suspended) sentences.

"Batida" under way in Bogota.
Photo: Anonymous

Despite these proposed changes, President Santos has in general made a point in his Presidency to take the armed forces' side on the issue of human Photo rights prosecutions. Although he had moved hundreds of human rights cases to the civilian justice system when he was the Minister of Defence, as President he has launched a constitutional reform aimed at sending all cases first to the military justice system. It was only in response to the outcry of Human Rights NGOs, the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the US government that this legislation was watered down before ultimately passing. In 2013, the Constitutional Court struck the entire reform down on procedural grounds. As of 2014, civilian jurisdiction over human rights remains a key point of friction between the military and civilian justice system.

3.12 Conflict of interest

In the name of security, Colombians have become reluctantly 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[xxxv]. Judges in the Colombian military judicial system are either active or retired members of the military, which raises the question of a conflict of interest between those who are judges and, at the same time, are also trying to manage the military courts. The impunity of the military to act as it pleases, even in the face of rulings by the Constitutional Court, is also made evident by its continued practice of forced conscription (*batidas- see photo 2*). Whilst the state and the international community condemn the forced recruitment of children and young people by guerrilla forces, there is widespread public awareness that the Colombian military does much the same. According to a series of legal authorities, local government officials and civil society organizations we interviewed, the Colombian armed forces regularly carry out sweeps of peri-urban areas (often poor and inhabited by forced displaced people) in search of young men without a military service card[xxxvi]. Indeed, we were told that the army frequently cooperates with the national police to identify individuals and to transport "recruits" under duress to military zones.

Colombia's security forces also continue to face persistent accusations of past human rights violations. The arrest of Jorge Noguera, the head of Colombia's Secret Service (*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* DAS) in 2007, led to continuing revelations of previous DAS participation in union and other civilian activist leaders' assassinations. 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[xxxvii]. Whilst the government 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 amongst large sections of the populace. The same year, news reports in the country and abroad revealed that cocaine smugglers and leftist rebels had infiltrated senior levels of the Colombian army impeding efforts at defeating the guerrillas and fighting drugs[xxxviii]. After the January 2012 condemnation of Colonel Alfonso Plazas Vega for the forced disappearance of several survivors of the 1985 siege at the Palace of Justice, the military has expressed increasing upset about what they consider their "legal insecurity" and political persecution[xxxix]. This has not been helped by the rejection of the bill to reform the military judicial system mentioned above, or the Legal Framework for Peace introduced by the government that grants the civilian government extra-ordinary transitional powers[xl].

3.13 Civil-military economics

Whilst Santos has successfully drawn on his wealthy urban publishing and media background to generate a reconciliatory outward image, his history as a politician and current wider political platform indicate a desire to retain and improve, rather than scale-back, the state´s security apparatus. Moreover, the Santos government has persisted with economic reforms and new international trade agreements that carry the country further in the direction of economic liberalization and extractive practices—despite broad awareness in his government of its potential for further fuelling social unrest and confrontation. The Santos government´s particular emphasis on a heightened level of energy production and resource extraction, which it calls the *mining and energy locomotive* (*locomotora minera energetica*), has a series of inevitable consequences in the context of Colombia. Local communities become increasingly pitted against the state and private corporations, and the guerrilla, cartels and organized criminals have increasingly fixed their attention on the taxation and control of resource extraction and transport.

3.14 An economy of para-militarism

Although the evidence remains anecdotal, our interviewees emphasized that there are clear cooperative connections between the military, the political leadership and the agri-business elite. The agri-business elite should be understood to include here cattle ranchers, large landowners, narco-bourgeoisie, banana plantation owners, and owners of palm oil and flower-growing businesses[xli]. Together these groups have always opposed concessions to the guerrilla, used to their collective power to resist peace talks, and countered guerrilla efforts to claim territory through the organization of local defence forces. Moreover, the agri-business elite has also independently initiated armed campaigns to expand their own territorial power, for the most part conducted by clandestine para-military organizations.

In addition to historic connections to land-owning elites, para-military organizations also have a series of more modern foundations that make evident their links to the military and interests of the State. Indeed, the key role played by para-military organizations in Colombian history evidences more clearly than any other factor the uneasy alliance of interests between elites, the state, and the military. Fearing the growth of Communist cells in the late 1950s, the US sent a special-forces unit to Colombia to help the national military under “Plan Lazo” to create and deploy a para-military force to commit acts of sabotage and terrorism against Communists. Although efforts were made by some governments to remove such tactics[xlii], a number of Colombian administrations have provided outright support for training and support of civilians by the military or police for security purposes. A key example of this was Decree 3398 in 1965, issued during a state of siege, which defined the defence of the nation as requiring "the organization and tasking of all of the residents of the country and its natural resources...to guarantee national independence and institutional stability”[xliii]. In the name of counter-narcotics efforts, the Armed Forces *Directive 200-05/91* introduced in 1991 also solidified linkages between members of the Colombian military and civilian members of paramilitary groups.

Human Rights Watch concluded in a 1996 report that while "not all paramilitaries are intimate partners with the military", the existing partnership between paramilitaries and the Colombian military was "a sophisticated mechanism, in part supported by years of advice, training, weaponry, and official silence by the United States, that allows the Colombian military to fight a dirty war and Colombian officialdom to deny it”[xliv]. In 1994, Decree 356 of Colombia's Ministry of Defence authorized the creation of legal paramilitary groups known as *Special vigilance and private security services*[xlv], also known as CONVIVIR groups. The CONVIVIR groups were intended to maintain control over high risk areas where guerrillas did not have a strong presence after having been expelled, and where there was no longer need for a large military force or illegal paramilitary presence. Many illegal paramilitary groups

transitioned into legal CONVIVIR groups[xlvi]. These CONVIVIR groups worked alongside both the Colombian military and illegal paramilitary groups in counterinsurgency operations[xlvii].

In April 1997, the creation of the *United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia*[xlviii] (AUC) was announced, formally inaugurating what has been termed by analysts as the "second generation" of para-militarism. Financed by drug trafficking, by 2000 the AUC had swelled to more than 30,000 combatants and had recruited notorious members of the cartel *Los Pepes* into senior positions. Aiming to exert control over land and monopolize both drug production and trafficking and the illegal mining of emeralds, the AUC waged a campaign of violence against anyone who stood in its path. Its combatants forcibly displaced, tortured, and killed thousands of peasant farmers, Afro-Colombians, indigenous persons, trade unionists, human rights advocates, religious leaders, and other civilians[xlix] (i.e., essentially anyone who they suspected friendly to guerrilla interests, or stood in the way of their resource interests). Of the 558 episodes of severe cruelty committed during the last thirty years of conflict, 60 per cent were committed by para-military organizations[l], according to the recent major report by the National Centre of Historic Memory (2012: 55).

3.15 From AUC to "bacrim"

In 2005 the AUC was officially disbanded and outlawed. However, in a 2006 report Amnesty International corroborated national media reports revealing that paramilitaries in demobilized areas continued to operate, albeit under new names. As well as strong evidence of continued links between paramilitaries and the security forces, Amnesty International also stated that there were fears that government policies designed to reintegrate members of illegal armed groups into civilian life risked "recycling" them into the conflict. As recently reported, "the reality today is that some of these regions are under the control of new criminal structures that mutated from paramilitaries to what are euphemistically known as "Criminal Gangs," —bacrim— (*bandas criminales*) or "emerging bands," comprised of and led by a significant number of former guerrilla and paramilitary combatants"[li]. Meanwhile, factions of armed groups who used to brutally annihilate each other now work together out of economic interests derived from drug trafficking and resource capture, making it very difficult to distinguish political and ideological differences, and muddying the border between legal and illegal actors. During a recent international conference on Public Environmental Policy, the Colombian Vice-minister of Finance revealed that groups such as the FARC-EP, ELN and *bacrim* are directly related in the business of illegal emerald and gold mining[lii]. It is also suspected by some on the basis of the recent record of corruption charges that the military can also be found in the midst of these "muddied waters"[liii]. The bacrim operate according to franchised structure in which there is not a hierarchical command structure but rather a fragmented, cellular distribution of territories that allows small gangs to control all illegal business as long as they facilitate the routes for drug and human trafficking. According to Colombian colleagues this decentralized structure may explain why it is not possible to easily identify and prosecute their leaders.

3.16 Increasing focus on resource capture

In the course of the armed conflict there has been a clear effort by both the military and the guerrilla to capture and retain territory in order to establish clear bridgeheads and guaranteed supply of needed resources. During the early days of the armed conflict the FARC-EP established their stronghold in the western departments of Meta, Tolima, Huila and Western Cauca. The FARC-EP's 1993 decision to raise

funds from coca-leaf production, and some fronts' later involvement in cocaine production and transport, helped the leftist group to grow vertiginously in the 1990s, from about 4,000 to 18,000 members by the end of the decade. By the second half of the 1990s, the FARC-EP was mounting large-scale assaults on military bases and rural population centres, kidnapping hundreds per year for ransom, and making the nation's road network too dangerous for travel. By the end of the 1990s, close to half of Colombia had become "red zones" under the control of the guerrilla. The limitation of further guerrilla territorial take-over was only abated by the autonomy granted to the military under Plan Colombia, the entrance of US support (overt and covert), and the brutal responses of the cartels, landowners and para-militaries.

Over ten years of heightened counter-insurgency and para-military activities have significantly weakened the guerrillas' strength, and have pushed their rural hideaways into ever more remote areas, resulting in the substantial reduction of conflict in urban centres. The remaining geographical areas of concentrated armed conflict largely coincide with areas of fertile lands of interest to agri-business and underground natural resources that are especially attractive to mining, quarrying and oil companies. In addition to fertile agricultural soil suited to coffee and agricultural production, Colombia is rich in mineral and energy resource with a history of extraction dating back hundreds of years. Colombia is, for example, the world's leading producer of emeralds, South America's second largest producer of gold, and only producer of platinum. Colombia also boosts the largest coal reserves, second largest oil reserves, and third largest natural gas reserve in South America. All of this has established Colombia as top tier in terms of international investments in exploration and extraction. There is a close correlation between these resources and drug trafficking, where the extortion of capital from these industries links them directly with both the armed conflict and drug trade.

For the Colombian government, the "national interest" in protecting a major source of state revenue has provided new forms of discursive legitimacy for counter- insurgency actions. It has also importantly reshaped forms of military deployment with an increasing number of troops and resources deployed to protect energy infrastructure. It is also of note that all of the government´s strategic military Consolidation Plans are located in zones were these recourses have been discovered and are exploited. Under the Santos administration these deployments have continued. Indeed, in recent years this has been encouraged by the government´s economic commitment to expand resource extraction premised on the need to fill a dwindling public purse and secure economic growth in a future post-conflict context.

In 2002 the US Bush administration granted Colombia financial and technical support to develop an elite Colombian army brigade "to protect the country's economic lifeline, an oil pipeline" from attacks by the FARC-EP[liv]. In later years these activities have continued and expanded as the extractive activities in the country have boomed in line with the high prices of commodities over the last decade[lv]. As exploration pushes deep into the country's eastern lowlands, oil companies face a familiar problem in rural Colombia (i.e., security). Attacks on oil infrastructure more than doubled between 2008 and 2011, according to the Centre for Security and Democracy at Bogotá's Sergio Arboleda University[lvi]. In January and February 2012 there were 13 separate attacks on the country's main pipeline, from Caño Limón to Coveñas, which was able to pump oil for only 20 days in that period. The trans-Andean pipeline in the south was attacked 51 times last year. In February the ELN kidnapped 11 men in Casanare who were building the Bicentenario, a new pipeline. The recent spate in violence is in part a reaction to a reform of royalties by the government. Distribution of a percentage of royalties used to be paid directly to mayors in oil areas, and was often stolen by guerrillas or paramilitaries. Royalties now go to the central government, which hands them out according to stricter criteria. As a result the gunmen have switched to extorting directly from oil companies rather than local mayors[lvii].

3.17 War technologies

In this economic climate—one at least shared in part by other Latin American nations such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Brazil and Mexico—the counter-terror/counter-narcotics/counter-energy-terrorism/counter criminal gangs expertise of the Colombian military has become an important product in its own right. Whilst the Colombian military have for some time been involved in weapons research and development through the INDUMIL and COTECMAR corporations, it is only in recent years that they have established a program to combine contracts for maritime technology, bombs and small arms with military and strategic training. Recent reports tell of the current program to reproduce the Colombian security model in another eight countries of the region[lviii]. Multi-national corporations have also become directly enmeshed in domestic security provisioning, bringing in new actors such as private security agencies—some of which also serve as US government contractors—into the contested field.

With the Santos government's clear message of including and protecting the energy sector in its economic model, a series of new trade agreements have also been recently signed[lix]. New investment has not only fed directly the expansion and further exploration in the oil sector, but also stimulated infrastructure construction including the expansion or building of new roads, bridges and ports—key points throughout the country. Inevitably, it is these points together with the pipelines and extractive locations that have become the new focus of the geography of the war in Colombia (i.e., the Pacific Coast, the border areas with Venezuela and Ecuador, and the Amazonian territory). It is in these areas that atrocities such as the *chop-up houses* established by criminal gangs in the city of Buenaventura[lx] continue to take place. It also is from these centres of conflict that the majority of the country's displaced population is now produced. With every passing day hundreds of people move out of these conflict zones, swamping the Victim's Centres the Santos government has set up in the marginal neighbourhoods of cities such as Cali, Medellin and Bogotá to provide a minimal response to their basic needs.

4. Self-Perception: Gender, beliefs, and ideology of the Colombian military

The vast amount of academic literature produced by Colombian scholars addressing the armed conflict and the development of the military in the country focuses on institutional development, the flaws and weaknesses of the state apparatus, and an endless catalogue of human rights abuses (*violentología*). Where ideology is mentioned it is largely in relation to the thinking of the guerrilla, or as an after-thought in an otherwise institutionally-cantered analysis of military history. To understand the logic of the Colombian armed conflict, more work needs to be done to dissect not only the guerrilla's ideology, but also that of the military and its para-military allies. Recent qualitative research corroborates the assertion that "there continues to be an ideological component to Colombian insurgencies" (Ugarizza & Craig 2012). This matches other authors´ "re-discovery" of the importance of ideology and grievance in the study of armed and resource conflicts (McNeish & Logan 2012). This is a theoretical move that has been necessitated by the need to explain and respond to events such as the War or Terror and the changing nature and justifications for war and security (Duffield, 2001; Cramer 2006; Amar 2013). After five decades of fighting an irregular war, influenced by techniques, ideas and training developed for the Cold War, it is not surprising to find that a mentality of counter-communism and counter-insurgency (our counter-guerrilla) is deeply embedded in the ideology and logic of the Colombian armed forces.

The official profile is one that is more professional and less politicized. According to the web pages of the General Command of the Colombian Armed Forces, their mission is "the defence of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, the defeat of threats, and contribution to the generation of an atmosphere of peace, security and development in the constitutional order of the country"[lxi]. This is followed by a vision that expresses that "the armed forces are a modern, professional and disciplined institution with a high level of education and training, sustained by a high ethical morality, a credible ability to fulfil and confront the challenges of its commitment to defence and national security, contributing to the paths to peace and development of the nation". It also contains a note on principles that expresses clear respect for and application of human rights. Here there is no direct contradiction or denial of the history of counter-insurgency.

In our interviews with military personnel, as well as on the posters placed outside of military bases and in the media, the armed forces retell a public story of professionalism and sacrifice in their provision of the guarantee of democratic security in the face of insurgency. However, the public face of a rights-based professionalism clearly contrasts with the history and political economy of civil-military relations told above. Indeed, the military's internal efforts to cultivate the sense of heroism expressed in the hymn is not only an expression of patriotism, but suggestive of an "othering" process where it not only seeks to mark distinction from the guerrilla, but from the rest of Colombia. It is they that are the ideal of the people; only the armed forces offer their bodies to the nation's defence and development. This identity politics is typical to all militaries. In Colombia, however, the prolonged nature of the armed conflict and of the historical autonomy of the armed services has encouraged a particularly powerful separate cultural development. In Colombia "ideology allows armed groups to distinguish themselves from rival organizations, allowing for long-term internal cohesion in the face of the enemy" (Ugarriza & Craig 2012:12). Indeed, whilst it is clear from the discussion of history and political economy above that the military have in organization and throughout time operated in the interests of regional elites; their distinct sense of identity and values are evident in recent public discussions regarding the peace process.

Military chiefs currently voice great concern with respect to the political changes proposed by the government of Juan Manuel Santos intended to end the armed conflict (Montero 2012). They question reform at a time when they see themselves as winning and object to negotiation with an enemy they see as terrorists. For the public—by means of mass and social media—military personnel continue to support an idea of the guerrilla as "the only enemy" (*enemigo único*). They expound revisionist histories about Latin America by celebrating the 20th century successes of regional military dictatorships in the fight against communism, counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism including their excesses (Arce 2003). This is also perhaps not surprising given that so many Colombian military personal have received training, like many of their Latin American counterparts, in the US School of the Americas (now renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation). Whilst the School now gives more space for teaching human rights, counter-insurgency ideology and techniques remaining a central component of its training. Important distinctions are visible in current discussions of economic policy. Whilst seeing themselves as sharing a concern with the defence of territory and the nation, the armed forces are less convinced by the imperative of currently ruling political elites to further develop a neoliberal economy. Whilst they have been assisted by the state to develop their own industrial and economic interests, neoliberalism has nonetheless resulted in a significant reduction in their share of the national budget and institutional influence within the Colombian state

4.1 Cultural and moral universe

Paintings found on walls of 4th Brigade´s Officers´ Mess. (Photo: John Andrew McNeish)

The length of the conflict has not only enabled the establishment of the military as a separate Colombian community, but one that has also developed its own cultural, moral and artistic expressions. Visiting the Barracks of the 4th Brigade in Medellin, we were invited to conduct an interview in the officer's new reception building. Several paintings produced by personnel and their families hung on the walls of the large seminar room where we talked with a lieutenant colonel. The aesthetics of these pictures are suggestive of the private cultural and moral universe the Colombian military has cultivated. Here both religious and gender-based values are brought to the surface. One picture (Picture 2), produced in memory of a soldier killed by a roadside bomb, depicts the remains of the explosive are placed on a plinth as though on a religious alter along with a depiction of the skull of the deceased, his picture, and his bleeding heart. Connotations of the Catholic religious order, but also of a soldier's cult of death are strongly emphasized. In another painting (Picture 3) a mother and daughter grieve the loss of a soldier and father. The mother wearing a soldier's cap cradles a grief-stricken daughter who clutches his insignia, whilst elements of the lost soldier's uniform hang on the wall. Here there is not only suggestion of sadness and hardship, but of the general militarization of society and especially the mother's gendered role and sexuality. In a third painting (Picture 4), a soldier is depicted kneeling before a member of the FARC-EP who prepares to execute him, whilst other images of the war are placed in a background of boiling dark purple and blood red clouds.

It would be misleading to think that these aesthetics and cultural values are entirely separate from the rest of Colombian society. Nonetheless, the pictures do tell us something of the particular way in which the personnel of the armed forces interpret more widely accepted ideas. As in the rest of the Latin America, there is an increasing drift to secularism and move to more charismatic forms of religious worship in

Painting found on wall of 4th Brigade´s Officers' Mess. (Photo: John Andrew McNeish)

Colombia—including the conversion to protestant and syncretistic churches and sects. However, although legislation for religious freedom and the separation of church and state was made in 1991, Catholicism remains the dominant religious form (c84 per cent) in the country[lxii]. Indeed, according to current law, apart from civil marriage, the state only recognizes marriage conducted by the Catholic Church, excluding other churches, and accession is required for non-Catholic groups to minister to soldiers, public hospital patients, and prisoners, or to provide religious instruction in public schools. The anti-communism of the armed forces has also influenced them in their retention of more orthodox theology and practice. Whereas orthodox Catholic Church organizations, which have a history of support for right-wing governments in Latin America and elsewhere, retain high membership in the Colombian armed forces, linkages to more progressive movements, such as Liberation Theology, and organizations, such as Pastoral Social, are viewed with deep suspicion given their historic links to left-wing organizations and the guerrilla. The persisting religious morality of the armed forces has also had a role in governing gender practices. Whilst women have been allowed in supporting roles for the last thirty years, it was not until 2008 that they were admitted to the national military academy[lxiii]. This stands in strong contrast with the guerrilla that have actively sought to recruit women into their ranks since the start of the armed conflict.

In addition to explaining differences in the internal gender politics of the military and the guerrilla, ideology and religion have also played a role in determining the gender politics of the war itself. Indeed, given the largely guarded nature of female sexuality in such a Catholic and patriarchal society such as Colombia, violence against women has become a particular feature of its conflict (CNMH 2012: 77). In addition to the magnitude of sexual violence in the conflict (c.1754 registered victims), the use of sexual violence varies between groups. Whilst studies of sexual violence in Colombia reveal that all sides in the conflict have committed such acts, it is para-military organizations that are overwhelmingly responsible for cases of sexual violence (CNMH 2012:80). It is argued that para-military organizations use sexual violence for a serious of strategic reasons. These strategies stretch beyond the battlefield to curiously also express a particular sense of "social cleansing" (i.e., to combat the growing leadership of women in society, to destroy the social circle of those designated as enemies, to punish socially

transgressional behavior (diverse sexualities, prostitution), to support invented historic practices (*droit du seigneur)*, to create bonds between recruits, and to generate fear amongst enemies) (CNMH 2012: 80-83). Whilst these actions are clearly separate from the largely professional actions of the military, acknowledgement of the empirical connections and shared ideological and religious background with the para-militaries inevitably raises questions as to the extent of their complicity.

5. Final Considerations

This CMI Working Paper has aimed to give a brief review of the current state and background of civilian-military relations in Colombia. The Working paper reveals in particular the paradox that exists between Colombia's democratic stability and the persistence of an armed conflict in the country, and suggests this paradox can be explained by the particular history and structure of civilian-military relations in the country. In particular, we place emphasis on the historical circumstances that have allowed Colombia to avoid dictatorship, but also encouraged the military to gain both autonomy and a powerful position in deciding the limits and terms of civilian politics and democratic life. As we have shown this situation persists despite moves towards peace accords under the Santos administration.

These arguments force us to look beyond the immediate features of conflict in the country, and to acknowledge the larger questions of politics and economy to which the conflict responds (Vargas 2006). Indeed, they confound static institutionalist approaches to studying civilian-military relations, whether it is from the *professionalism* position of Huntington (1957) or the *convergence* position of Janowitz (1966). Instead the political history of civilian-military relations during Colombia's 55 years of conflict suggests (Andrade 2012: 147; Finer 1962) that "the rigorous application of civilian control, understood as the simple subordination of the military to civilian authorities under-estimates the difficulty to control the use of power in times of war".

Whilst recent democratic legal and political processes suggest that the foothold of the armed forces in civilian politics is slipping, study of persisting security structures reveals that this is not the case. The military's direct integration within structures of civilian security have resulted in the clear militarization of society as well as the cultivation of informal and extra-constitutional relations with para-military and organized crime demonstrates their retention of *praetorian* powers. This has been given consent by political elites, liberal and conservative, in their search for ways to protect a *king's peace* for the legal and illegal chosen few (i.e., power sharing and the economic benefits of land and industrial concentration) (Palacios 2012; Hernandez 2010). The development of these powers was also clearly encouraged by legal developments in the country and a series of external factors. These external factors include the cold war, the war on drugs, and the war on terrorism, which with outside military and intelligence support have unnaturally extended the life of counter-insurgency logics and policies.

We furthermore suggest that a crucial aspect of civilian-military relations in Colombia is the relationship to the claims for land and resources by diverse military and civilian sectors. Resource politics reveal the changing nature of the country's political economy, as well as the manner in which the typical distinctions between the military and civilians in Colombia have become blurred through the establishment of para-military organizations, criminal bands and private security forces.

Finally, we suggest that ideology provides added value to the study of the military in Colombia. Our Working paper draws attention to the persisting importance of anti-communism, a strong patriarchal culture, and to a lesser extent, Catholicism as the foundations of military identity in Colombia. Understanding of these foundations helps to form a nuanced explanation of both the alliances and differences the military express in Colombian society, as well as their particular social and cultural orientations. This is important in terms of understanding military society, but also the extent to which "counter-guerilla" praetorianism has become the cultural *raison d'être* of the Colombian armed forces. As an internal cultural reasoning, not only an official ideology and strategy, this has provided at least some members of the armed forces with the basis for action that extends beyond the law (in the shape of para-military action). Over fifty years of internal armed conflict have then generated dangerous

autonomy and ambiguity, confounding traditional analytical approaches to civilian relations that propose professional separation or congruence.

In conclusion, for those now looking for a way towards peace and the expansion of democracy in Colombia, study and response must be made not only of the violent impacts of conflict, but the material and ideological circumstances in which they have occurred.

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Notes

[i] Including a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with military, state and civil society representatives.
[ii] Including the use of secondary published sources, an extensive literature review, and data mining of media coverage.
[iii] See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-22676049
[iv] The agenda set for the Havana Peace talks include rural reform, political participation, illicit drugs, victims, end of conflict, and implementation of the agreement.
[v] The *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), Colombia's other major guerilla force, have also entered into discussions to follow through with a similar process following the conclusion of talks with the FARC. Also recently a third smaller group *Ejército Popular del Pueblo* (EPL) has expressed its intentions of ending confrontations with the government. See http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/content/colombia-guerrilla-group-epl-wants-join-peace-dialogues
[vi] The governments of Norway, Canada and Cuba are the third party guarantors of the peace talks.
[vii] http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/10/2012102164651720923.html.
[viii] According to the UNDP 52% of farms in Colombia are owned by just over 1% of landowners.
[ix] In Colombia, where no real land reform process has ever been carried out, there are estates of up to 100,000 hectares in size, while 87 percent of peasants have no land.
[x] Amongst the details of the agrarian reform that have been released so far include the following points: the formation of land bank and register; the redistribution of unused or illegally controlled land; mechanisms for responding to judicial conflicts over land and the protection of property rights; the continuation of land reparations of land confiscated during the conflict; and a series of rural development initiatives to give loans as well as assist with access to markets, health and education.
See http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/27/farc-colombia-peace-talks. For a timeline of the negotiations and related documents see http://colombiapeace.org/timeline2015/
[xi] Legal Framework for Peace: Acto Legislativo 001 de 2012. The idea is to apply transitional justice measures to facilitate the peace agreement. Such measures include renouncing criminal investigations and prioritizing processes against the main leaders rather than against the middlemen.
[xii]http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/colombia-alvaro-uribe-blasts-peace-talks/story?id=17510115
[xiii] There are pending court rulings against FARC members for crimes including homicide, kidnapping, extortion and drug trafficking. Most of them have not been imprisoned. Also see: http://colombiareports.co/uribe-allies-demand-suspension-of-peace-talks-after-heavy-farc-blow/.
[xiv]See http://www.dw.de/colombia-peace-talks-set-to-resume-despite-army-patrol-deaths/a-17043437
[xv] See http://edition.cnn.com/2012/12/03/world/americas/colombia-farc
[xvi] http://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2013/02/colombias-peace-talks
[xvii] I.e. *conflict victims*; and *implementation, verification, and legalization of accords*.
[xviii] http://colombiapeace.org
[xix] http://lasillavacia.com/print/45946
[xx] http://www.semana.com/opinion/articulo/las-prisiones-colombianas-problema-todos/247149-3
[xxi] See Grenville, J. A. S., *A History of the World in the Twentieth Century* (1994).
[xxii] I.e. state neglect, inequity in land distribution, and poverty remained largely unaddressed.
[xxiii] Reinforced by newly acquired Black Hawk helicopters, troop-transport aircraft, silent planes with night-vision equipment and reconnaissance planes.
[xxiv] Under *Plan Colombia* a series of Special Forces units were established. The South Combined Task Force integrated the Army, National Navy and Colombian Air force with the objective of neutralizing in an effective way drug traffickers and outlawed armed groups. In December 1999 the Quick Deployment Force was created with the mission of conducting a high mobility counter insurgency offensive. A series of counter-narcotics battalions were also established in 2000. A high mountain battalion was also created in 2001 with the purpose of maintaining the control on the Sumapaz region, a strategically important zone in terms of operations against guerrilla groups in the South of the country. The *Agrupación de Fuerzas Especiales Antiterroristas Urbanas* (Urban Counter-Terrorism Special Forces Group, AFEUR) is an elite unit of the Colombian Army, whose primary mission is to perform counter-terrorist (i.e. counter subversive) operations and hostage rescues.
[xxv] http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2013/12/21/covert-action-in-colombia

[xxvi] http://dialogo-americas.com/es/articles/rmisa/features/regional_news/2013/01/02/feature-ex-3788. Also see "Desmovilización, principal arma contra las guerillas" El Tiempo 23/09/13.
[xxvii]http://www.globalresearch.ca/colombia-us-surrounds-venezuela-with-military-bases/14488
also http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-10757064
[xxviii] These linkages and the blurred lines between military and police operations became clearly visible during Operation *Orión* i.e. to remove the presence of urban guerillas (FARC, ELN and *Comandos Armados del Pueblo*) from District 13 in Medellín in 2002.
[xxix] These centres were established with Victim's Law (1448 /11) from which no member of an armed group (including the military) are to benefit. This Law was the first step for the separation between Uribe and Santos.
[xxx] See http://lasillavacia.com/historia/el-problema-de-santos-es-que-quiere-hacer-transformaciones-pero-con-la-vieja-coalicion-de
[xxxi] http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/2012/187926.htm.
[xxxii] President Santos, who was defense minister under Uribe, has greatly increased the pace of operations against the FARC. Almost three times as many FARC leaders (47 vs. 16) have been killed under Santos as under Uribe. See http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2013/12/21/covert-action-in-colombia
[xxxiii] http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/10/2012102164651720923
[xxxiv] I.e. General Jorge Mora, who led the anti-guerilla offensive during Uribe´s first term and General Oscar Naranjo, Colombia´s chief of police from 2007 to 2012.
[xxxv]According to information from the military published by the Colombian daily newspaper *El Tiempo,* investigations are underway against 12,404 Colombian soldiers and military officials; 1,177 have been discharged from service. There are convictions and arrest warrants in 244 cases. With respect to retired military, the civil judicial system has detained 175 and convicted 298, while the military judicial system has detained 83 and convicted 36. Some 1,346 investigations for crimes against humanity are underway, including homicide of persons under custody 695 (51.6%), homicide 157 (11.6%) and aggravated homicide 494 (36.7%). See *El Tiempo*, May 27, 2012, page 13.
[xxxvi] We witnessed this ourselves in the district of Soacha.
[xxxvii] http://www.forcolombia.org/conflict/armylink
[xxxviii]http://www.canada.com/topics/news/world/story.html?id=024cd644-15ac-4657-8385-ec3544aca221
[xxxix] http://colombiareports.co/more-military-jurisdiction-gives-impunity-hrw
[xl] The military states that the new law would permit demobilized guerrillas to "hold positions in government or collective bodies, without punishment, without truth, and without any type of reparation". See http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/7794
[xli] Indeed, this seems logical given the way in which the Colombian military was founded on the basis of a series of regional militias linked to regional elites and parallel economies.
[xlii] Most notably the anti-paramilitary decrees of 1989.
[xliii] http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1996/killer2
[xliv]http://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/killer7 Also see:
http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_140_ing
[xlv] *Servicios especiales de vigilancia y seguriadad privada.*
[xlvi] The governor of Antioquia, Álvaro Uribe Vélez-who would later become President of Colombia- was one of the primary proponents of the CONVIVIR program. It is this positioning that explains his opposition to both the efforts to create peace talks between 1998 and 2002 as well as current peace talks. It also this positioning that explains the much lighter treatment of convicted para-militaries during his administration. The legal proposal offered by a coalition of Colombian congressional deputies during the Uribe administration set the possible terms of punishment for para-military "crimes against humanity" at only 5-10 years in prison, whilst military crimes could be prosecuted with sentences of 30-40 years.
[xlvii] http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/019/2005
[xlviii] Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia.
[xlix] *See* Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Dep't of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Colombia (2002), http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/wha/8326.htm.
[l] http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/micrositios/informeGeneral/descargas
[li] http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/7794
[lii] http://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/ARTICULO-WEB-NEW_NOTA_INTERIOR-13214378
[liii] http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/7794

[liv] Trained by US green berets or contract employees, the brigade would incorporate approximately 2000 troops and a mobile infantry unit specialized in surveillance and rapid deployment tactics, moving beyond the missions against narcotics to protect the 480-mile long Caño Limón-Coveñas pipeline.
[lv] Colombia's output of crude has nearly doubled in the past six years, from 525,000 b/d in 2005 to a daily average of 914,000 last year. In all, foreign direct investment in the oil industry jumped from $278m in 2003 to $4.3 billion in 2011, according to the central bank.
[lvi] http://www.economist.com/node/21550304
[lvii] http://www.economist.com/node/21550304
[lviii] http://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/ARTICULO-WEB-NEW_NOTA_INTERIOR-13105572
[lix] With the US, the EU and Israel, amongst others.
[lx] http://www.hrw.org/reports/2014/03/20/crisis-buenaventura
[lxi] http://www.cgfm.mil.co/CGFMPortal/faces/index.jsp?id=6552
[lxii] http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2004/35531
[lxiii] http://talkingaboutcolombia.com/2010/12/07/women-as-high-ranking-military-officers

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Colombia appears to be fast approaching agreement on a set of peace accords ending an armed conflict that has lasted over 55 years. In this CMI Working paper, we consider the status of and possibilities to transform civil-military relations in the country and the possible connections this has to founding democratic and sustainable peace. We furthermore stress the need to expand on standard approaches to the study of civil-military relations in Colombia through consideration of their intersection with features of economic and social development in the country.

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