

Third Parties, War Systems' Inertia, and Conflict Termination: The Doomed Peace Process in Colombia, 1998-2002

Nazih Richani

Volume 25, Number 2, Winter 2005

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs25_2art04

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-5673 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Richani, N. (2005). Third Parties, War Systems' Inertia, and Conflict Termination:: The Doomed Peace Process in Colombia, 1998-2002. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 25(2), 75–103.

Article abstract

This article discusses the role of third-party interventions in the failed peace process of Colombia that took place between 1998 and 2002. It analyses how both neutral and biased interventions impacted upon conflict dynamics. The article demonstrates that the neutral intervention was limited to the initiation of the peace talks and intermittent particularly in its final phase, while the biased intervention, led by the US, changed the incentive structure of the actors involved, creating hopes among the hard liners that the US could help them in winning the war. In hindsight, this biased intervention failed to tip the balance of power, but contributed to the derailment of the peace process. This article argues that third party intervention, particularly the biased intervention, failed to dismantle the war system. Instead, it has brought the Colombian war system into a phase of fluctuating stalemate, characterized by renewed volatility and violence.

Third Parties, War Systems' Inertia, and Conflict Termination: The Doomed Peace Process in Colombia, 1998-2002

by
Nazih Richani

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the role of third-party interventions in the failed peace process of Colombia that took place between 1998 and 2002. It analyses how both neutral and biased interventions impacted upon conflict dynamics. The article demonstrates that the neutral intervention was limited to the initiation of the peace talks and intermittent particularly in its final phase, while the biased intervention, led by the US, changed the incentive structure of the actors involved, creating hopes among the hard liners that the US could help them in winning the war. In hindsight, this biased intervention failed to tip the balance of power, but contributed to the derailment of the peace process. This article argues that third party intervention, particularly the biased intervention, failed to dismantle the war system. Instead, it has brought the Colombian war system into a phase of fluctuating stalemate, characterized by renewed volatility and violence.

INTRODUCTION

Why some civil wars are difficult to terminate has become a major puzzle for those seeking to understand and resolve violent conflict. The average duration of civil wars increased in the post Cold-War period to 15.1 years from a median duration of 5.5 years in 1999.¹ Of the civil wars that started after 1945, one-quarter lasted two years, another quarter lasted at least 15 years, and thirteen lasted 20 years or more.² The problem of these protracted wars poses a series of theoretical and empirical challenges to students of civil wars that has, in turn, generated a significant literature in the last decade. In spite this attention, research has not yet provided satisfactory explanations for a range of key issues, such as why some conflicts are more protracted than others or, when they terminate, why they

Nazih Richani is Associate Professor in the Political Science Department and coordinator of the Latin American Studies Program and the Institute of Foreign Service and Diplomacy at Kean University.

do so. In part, this failure may be a result of overzealous attempts to find an overarching theory that could explain the dynamics of all civil wars, or at least a preponderant number of them (large N), while also factoring in their nuances and peculiarities. Of course, this observation invokes the traditional debate of whether we scholars should lower our theoretical ambitions – and rethink our methodological approaches or rather focus our energies on refining large-N quantitative studies. In my view, given that scholarly research has already generated a substantial body of empirical studies, it may be time to retool and rethink “middle-range theories” that are constantly enriched by the findings of both large-N studies and individual cases, and to strengthen the linkages between quantitative and qualitative research.

Explanations of conflict termination can be divided into four broad categories.³ The first category argues that civil war termination is a function of the military balance, political conditions, and economic costs of the conflict that are likely to encourage the combatants to find a negotiated settlement.⁴ According to this perspective, when both parties are hurting from the conflict in terms of rising fatalities, the costs of the confrontation are increasing, and the region is not favoring the continuation of the conflict, then a negotiated settlement becomes viable. The second set of explanations argues that a negotiated settlement is possible when combatants manage to resolve their core disputes. Accordingly, a negotiated settlement is possible only when a bargain is reached.⁵ This reasoning is circular and does little to identify the necessary conditions for the crucial bargain that must be met in the first instance. A third set of explanations maintains that a successful and durable negotiated settlement depends on the guarantees provided by a third party as well as its capacity to enforce the terms of an agreement.⁶ The fourth category argues that the correlation of the military power balance and the costs of the war in itself is insufficient to determine the “ripe moment” – to use William Zartman’s famous phrase – for a successful conclusion of conflict, unless the “real” costs are complemented by a perception among the combatants and their support bases that they could be better off with a settlement than with continued war.⁷ This article seeks to assess the validity of some of the core propositions of each of these explanatory frameworks on the duration of civil wars by examining why the 1998-2002 Colombian peace process failed.⁸

Here, it is useful to define the concept of the war system as used in this article. A war system is a pattern of violent interaction among different actors sustained over a period of time. As such, war systems are embedded in every civil war situation. The emergence, consolidation, and duration of war systems depend, in part, on the evolution of the correlation of forces among warring actors, and on the political economies that each of the belligerent forces construct during the course of the conflict. In this analysis, if the political, economic, and military assets that any actor obtains during the conflict exceed what it had prior the conflict, then this is considered as a positive political economy. Positive political economies may generate incentives to continue the war until one of the par-

ties prevails. War systems are not rational constructs nor does their perpetuation depend on one actor's behavior. War systems are as much the product of unintended consequences of actors' behavior or of actors' attempts to outsmart their opponents, as they are of structural constraints, such as the balance of military power, the limited resources at the disposal of one party or another, or the international conditions that inhibit one party from pursuing a winning strategy. Agency and structure are integral parts of the war system theory. Agency is defined in terms of how the organization of the parties to the conflict, such as rebel groups, the military, or segments of classes such as landowners, cattle ranchers, or owners of banks, articulate their political interests. War systems then, are dynamic. They influence their units (and act as an independent variables) and their stability is dependent on the outcome of units' behaviors and changes in their regional and international environments.⁹

This article evaluates the role of two key third parties, the United Nations and the United States, during the 1998-2002 peace process in Colombia.¹⁰ It attempts to explain why these two parties failed in "maturing" the conditions for peace and how their failure had the effect of prolonging the civil war, thereby also contributing to the inertia of the war system. This article builds upon previous research on the civil wars of Colombia, Lebanon, and Angola, which I have characterized as war systems to explain their protracted nature.¹¹

This analysis distinguishes between two types of intervention: biased interventions, by which third parties, typically a single state with interests of its own and having a stake in a particular outcome, provide military, diplomatic, and economic support that favors one group, say the government, against its opponents; and neutral interventions, which are undertaken by a neutral party such as an international organization, and are undertaken for the neutral end of a viable peace agreement, even though such agreements may not benefit all parties equally in practice. While neutral intervention may have stimulated pragmatic immediate political gains, the biased intervention changed the incentive structures of the warring groups by giving one party hope of improving its military standing against its opponent and hence reducing that party's interest in negotiating. While the other party fearing this biased intervention seeks to offset it by adopting new strategies. A case in point is the FARC's (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) political behavior: when the Plan Colombia was imminent it institutionalized its ransom-kidnapping by declaring its 002 Law to secure more income. Although this article's findings are consistent with the growing empirical evidence that suggests third-party interventions mostly fail to decisively end violent conflicts, it also suggests that neither type of intervention were, in this case, sufficient to explain the failure of the peace process. Rather, I argue that the interplay of these third-party interventions with the war system's inertia provides a better explanation as to why the Colombian peace process collapsed.

This article draws upon Webster's definition of "inertia" as a property by which matter – or, for the purposes of this analysis, a war system – remains "at

rest or in uniform motion in the same straight line unless acted upon by some external force.”¹² Inertia is the inherent resistance to change that allows the war system to perpetuate over time. The external forces in this article are the third-party interventions. Further, it operationalizes the war system’s inertia by noting patterns or changes in the number of violent attacks between guerrillas and the armed forces.

In part, the inertia of the war system stems from the social actors who consider violence as the most cost-effective mechanism to achieve a favorable negotiated outcome of their social conflict, given the higher costs of peace they would likely incur if a settlement were to be reached under a military impasse.

Third Parties: “Maturing” the Conditions, “Stimulating” Pragmatism, and Changing Incentives

The role of third-party interventions has received considerable attention in the conflict resolution literature. Third parties have been depicted variously as facilitators, biased actors, or as impartial guarantors of the implementation of agreements. But among scholars there is no agreement on whether third-party interventions prolong or shorten the duration of civil wars. Conventional wisdom and some studies suggest that a third-party role has proven critical to progress at certain points in certain peace processes, such as those of Lebanon, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, El Salvador, and Guatemala.¹³ Whether acting as mediators, facilitators, and/or enforcers, third parties in these cases arguably helped in hammering out agreements by resolving sticking points, providing open channels of communication and confidence-building measures, overseeing the implementation process, and guaranteeing the personal security of the combatants.¹⁴ In sharp contrast, Patrick Regan’s study of 150 civil wars during the period 1945-99 found that in 101 cases there were 1,036 individual interventions that had the effect of prolonging conflict. Regan concludes that third-party intervention tends overwhelmingly to prolong rather than shorten conflict, whether this intervention was by a biased or neutral party.¹⁵ Alternatively, research undertaken by Dylan Balch-Lindsay and Andrew Enterline concludes that third-party biased intervention on the side of government tends to prolong conflicts, while a neutral third-party intervention increases the probability that a war will end at any given point in time.¹⁶ Given the contrasting findings of these large-N quantitative analyses, a micro-level case study may be a useful way to inform the debate as to why third-party interventions fail, and why and how they instead may contribute to conflict duration.

In the late 1990s, Colombia experienced both types of third-party intervention, both at the onset of and during the peace process itself: one was initiated at the outset by a neutral party, the UN; the other by a biased party, namely the United States, beginning a few months after the initiation of the peace process in January 1999. Each intervention will be discussed in turn.

For most of the 1990s, a negotiated settlement to the Colombian conflict remained a remote possibility, particularly in view of the peace attempts of the 1980s which brought only mixed results and partial successes. Afterwards, the war system in Colombia entered a new phase in its consolidation. During the administration of Ernesto Samper (1994-98), which was severely weakened by the narcodollars that allegedly supported his presidential campaign, the government lacked the needed legitimacy to mobilize political support for engaging the guerrillas in peace talks. What ensued was an interlude of eight years in which the idea of a negotiated settlement was effectively shelved. One may have hoped that the increased intensity of warfare between 1994 and 1998 – as measured by the number of fatalities, the frequency and scope of massacres, the incidence of armed clashes, the number of internally displaced people, and the economic costs of war – all underscored by an obvious military impasse, would have convinced the combatants and their support bases that a negotiated settlement was a desirable exit strategy. That lack of interest in a negotiated settlement and the escalation of warfare was also due to the FARC's consolidation of power and preparation for a shift in its military strategy from a "mobile war" to a "war of positions" under which it could hold fixed territories for an expanded period of time.¹⁷

Neutral Intervention

The idea of initiating the peace talks of 1998 did not come from the Pastrana government nor the FARC. Rather, the idea to jump-start peace talks was first articulated by a group of academics supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1997. This group invited the then-presidential candidates, including Andres Pastrana, to a meeting held in Quirama, Antioquia. The group succeeded in persuading all candidates who attended to sign the Quirama declaration, by which they committed, irrespective of who won the elections, to support the initiation of peace talks with the FARC and ELN. Only two candidates declined this invitation and refused to make the commitment: Harold Bedoya, the former commander of the military, and Pastrana. Pastrana explained his demurral on the grounds that he was not yet an officially-declared presidential candidate and therefore not in a position to do so, while Bedoya was against any negotiation with the insurgency.¹⁸

In January 1998, a new UNDP representative, Francesco Vincenti, was appointed to Colombia. Vincenti brought a new and more aggressive direction to the Quirama declaration by building a consultative network with an expanding group of stakeholders.¹⁹ This network soon included seven individuals, including UN officials stationed in Bogotá, journalists, and a politician. This self-designated group chose the UNDP offices as their meeting place. The UNDP officers elaborated a peace proposal that was then submitted to a working group that included Alvaro Leyva, a prominent figure of the Conservative Party and ex-minister of Mines; James Lemoyne, who was at the time a UNDP consultant; Maria

Elvira Bonilla, a journalist and wife of then-Senator Juan Manuel Ospina (Conservative Party); Jorge Urbina, a lawyer from Costa Rica Juan Manuel Santos, the director of *Fundacion Buen Gobierno*; and Alfredo Molano, a sociologist and leftist intellectual.²⁰

The group initiated its work in February 1998, several months before the election that brought Pastrana into the presidency. The “kitchen group,” as I refer to it in this article, met with the three most important presidential aspirants: Noemi Sanin, leader of the movement *Si Colombia*, Horacio Serpa, leader of the Liberal Party, and Andres Pastrana, leading a faction of the Conservative Party, the *Nueva Fuerza Democratica*. Notably, Pastrana was the least interested among the three in what the kitchen group proposed to him only three weeks before the first presidential round.²¹

The first round of elections left Pastrana in second place against Serpa, having gained 34.73 percent of the votes compared to Serpa’s 35.03 percent. As a result, Pastrana took a more serious look into the kitchen group’s proposal for launching a new round of peace negotiations.²² Alvaro Leyva, a close friend to Pastrana, was instrumental in changing Pastrana’s view of the proposal, arguing that for Pastrana to win the presidency he would have to articulate a peace strategy that would go further than what his closest rival, Serpa, had proposed. Leyva, alongside Victor G. Ricardo, Rafael Pardo, and Augusto Ramirez, drafted a 20-point proposal that became Pastrana’s official peace platform, launched during his bid to win the run-off vote. The Leyva and company document drew heavily from the previous two months’ work of the kitchen group, in which, along with the presidential candidates, they had consulted with military commanders (Fernando Tapias and Jorge Enrique Mora), Nicanor Restrepo, a member of the influential business conglomerate, the *Antioquian Syndicate*, and also Julio Mario Santo Domingo, the owner of the important business conglomerate, *Santo Domingo*.

It was only at this point that first contacts were made with the leaders of the FARC, numbering 18,000 combatants. Leyva, Vincenti, and Lemoyne went to Mexico City to meet with FARC representative Raul Reyes, a member of its General Secretariat, the highest-ranking level in the guerrilla organization, in what would be the first of three meetings.²³ After meeting with Reyes, this same group then met with Peter Romero, Assistant Secretary of State of the Western Hemisphere at the US State Department to inform him about the intended peace process.²⁴ That visit set in motion a process within the US administration that culminated in December 1998, after Pastrana had won the election, in a now-famous meeting between Phil Chicola, then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Andean Affairs, and the FARC commander, Raul Reyes, in Costa Rica. That meeting was the first between the FARC and senior US officials since the beginning of the FARC’s armed struggle in the early 1960s. The FARC’s motives for engaging Pastrana and the US were multiple, including achieving its long sought goal of belligerent status and to break its political isolation.

For his part, Pastrana endorsed Leyva's strategy of winning the election by articulating a road map that included meeting the FARC's key demand of withdrawing state military forces from five contested municipalities.²⁵ This platform tipped the electoral balance in Pastrana's favor.

The Pastrana electoral machine played the peace card with great efficiency. A case in point was that a few days prior to the second presidential round Pastrana's emissary met with FARC leader, Manuel Marulanda. That meeting was widely publicized by the media and the noted photo of Marulanda wearing a wristwatch from the Pastrana campaign was possibly the icing on the cake of Pastrana's ensuing victory.

Detailing this historical account is important because it provides telling insight into how the peace process started, the decisive role played by neutral third parties in its onset, and the conditions under which the combatants agreed to negotiate. This history also casts some light on the combatants' degree of "ripeness" for this process. The most notable insight is that neither the FARC nor sectors of the political elite and dominant classes were the driving force behind starting the peace talks. What is noteworthy is that Pastrana and his campaign team, in their zeal to win the elections, especially after losing the first round to the Liberal presidential candidate, deployed their peace strategy first and foremost as a vote-getting strategy, not as a dedicated and principled effort to end the conflict. Indeed, that critical role was performed by the UNDP's Colombia's office alongside a select group of academics, journalists, and politicians.

It is not surprising, then, that when the peace talks were initiated there was no clear agenda. Nor did either of the combatant parties have a set of objectives or a negotiating strategy beyond what they had already obtained: for the FARC, the withdrawal of government troops from the five municipalities; for Pastrana, electoral victory. Among observers of the early peace dialogues, it was well-understood that neither the FARC nor the government were committed to peace talks for their own sake, but were drawn into the process by a number of other factors, including public relations, domestic public opinion, regional and international pressure, and a desire to improve their political-military position *vis-à-vis* one another. Perhaps the best description of the inauspicious beginning of the peace process was that of a prominent journalist, Hernando Gomez Buendia, who wrote: "that peace process was born dead because of a birth defect, in reality there was no negotiation, but a series of squabbles on technical issues, and especially over 'la zona de distension'."²⁶ In my view the "birth defect" that doomed the process from the outset was the exclusive focus on immediate gains. The kitchen group intervention changed the incentive structure for both Pastrana and the FARC, stimulating their respective appetites for immediate gains that were not conducive to setting the grounds for a genuine and sustainable peace process. This could explain why both parties quickly became stuck in the technical squabbles referred to by Gomez. One military stalemate preceeding the peace talks, contrary to what George Modelski thought, is not the most important condition of a settlement.²⁷

While it is true that Pastrana initially saw the peace process merely as a way to win the presidency, his administration nonetheless continued the process after the election. There are several reasons for this. First, the withdrawal of government troops, as demanded by the FARC, from an area double the size of El Salvador had created a momentum of its own, not least by raising political expectations among important segments of Colombian society, including its dominant classes. Already in 1997, there was an upsurge in popular demands for peace, expressed in the symbolic 10 million votes for peace in the Peace Mandate (*Mandato por la Paz*) that grew thereafter. In addition, within the government team there was also a group, including the Antioquian Conservative leader Fabio Valencia Cossio and Victor G. Ricardo, who became the government chief negotiator, who had tied their political fortunes to the success of a peace initiative that had already brought them into the spotlight. Valencia Cossio gambled on the peace card in the hopes that it would not only bring Pastrana the presidency but also would enhance his own prospects for securing that office in 2002.²⁸

This pro-peace group was supported by influential elites, such as Nicanor Restrepo, who occupied a prominent position within the *Sindicato Antioqueno*, an important conglomerate of business enterprises based in the department of Antioquia. In a certain sense the peace card that Pastrana used to win the presidency created a “peace constituency,” motivated by pragmatic political interests that were difficult to ignore after he was elected. Given this constellation of interests, it became imperative for the government to explore further avenues for the process it had set in motion, despite its own ill-preparedness.

The lack of a negotiating strategy on part of the Pastrana team was best described by Ricardo Correa, the Secretary General of the ANDI (The National Association of Industrialists), who participated in the last phase of the peace process as a member of the government negotiating team. Correa revealed that the government team had little idea of what items it wished to negotiate, whereas the FARC’s representatives presented specific positions on the agrarian question and political reforms. “The government negotiators did not know how to respond nor did they have a mandate to do so.”²⁹ According to Correa, changes in the composition of the government’s negotiating team, together with the lack of coordination between the team and the government, only exacerbated the problem further. As Correa reported, at times, “the government’s negotiators felt that they were not supported by the central government.”³⁰ These revelations show just how little the “peace” option had been thought through by the Pastrana team.

Clearly, while the UN-led neutral intervention served to jump-start the peace talks, it did so only because it served the expedient political interests of the combatant parties, interests that were largely unrelated to reaching a sustainable settlement. Pastrana won the presidency, while the FARC gained territory, political prestige, and international recognition. However influential they were to the onset of the peace talks, the neutral intervention of the UN-led kitchen group soon ended as neither the government nor the FARC were interested in a third-party

mediator that could participate in the process.³¹ This may have been the main shortcoming of this neutral intervention.

As stated at the outset, the failure of the peace process was a product not only of the limited and partial nature of this intervention, but also of the way third-party involvement interacted with the war system. Neutral intervention by the UNDP-led peace group had only a slight impact on the inertia of the war system, since the configuration of the conflict conformed to a pattern that had started in 1990. Figure 1 demonstrates the increasing intensity of the conflict following the 1990 Casa Verde attack against the FARC headquarters, then declining for a period, and then rising again in 1997, in the wake of the emergence of a new military actor – the unified paramilitary structure under the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC). As the figure also shows, the intensity of conflict declined somewhat in 1998, returning to the 1995 level. This suggests that the third-party neutral intervention may have acted upon the war system inertia by decelerating, at least for a few months, the escalating trend that had started in 1995. Finally, it is noteworthy that the acceptance of the parties to engage in the peace talks was not really due to the military stalemate nor the balance of power and the rising costs of the war, but rather corresponded to a different motivation as explained above. This is contrary to the assumptions of expected utility choice theorists such as Zartman, Donald Wittman and David Mason, Joseph Weingarten and Patrick Fett.³²

Figure 1. Intensity of the Conflict at the National and Regional Level



Source: Vicepresidencia de la Republica, Informes, 2004.

Beginning in 1999, however, the US-led biased intervention helped propel the conflict to an unprecedented degree of intensity. The impact of this biased intervention is discussed below.

Biased Intervention and Its Impact on Local Actors

Notwithstanding the less than favorable conditions under which the peace negotiations originated, these initial conditions alone do not explain its ultimate failure. That the process was so quickly taken over by the biased intervention of the United States government makes it impossible to fully assess the full impact of the neutral intervention, or to infer with confidence whether the process would have been more fruitful had it been left to continue. Given these limitations, the analysis in the following sections instead details how and why the biased intervention contributed to the collapse of the process. The impact of the United States' involvement was to strengthen the bargaining position of the government's armed forces, the agribusiness elite, and their right-wing paramilitary allies, thereby reducing any incentive for them to negotiate under the 1996-98 balance of forces, which they perceived to be more favorable to the FARC.

In fact, fears among the military and its allies of an unfavorable settlement were not unfounded. Between 1996 and 1998, the FARC scored several important military victories (Las Delicias and Purerres [1996], San Juanito and Patascoy [1997], Miraflores, El Billar, and Mutata [1998]), suggesting that the FARC had acquired the military initiative and tactical advantage against government forces.³³ These battles continued throughout 1999, increasing the level of insecurity among the military and the right-wing elements in the political establishment and also worrying US decision-makers.³⁴

In executing these attacks, the FARC deployed forces ranging from 300 to 2,000 combatants, indicating that the FARC's military strategy was becoming more sophisticated, shifting from small guerrilla units using hit and run tactics to "mobile warfare," employing a larger number of combatants (battalion-strength) and targeting well-armed garrisons in peripheral cities.³⁵ The insecurity of the Colombian military resonated among important circles within the Clinton administration who were increasingly concerned about the growing military capacities of the FARC.³⁶ Consequently, in December 1998, at the same time that Philip Chicola, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Andean Affairs, was meeting with the FARC in Costa Rica, the US and Colombian governments agreed to form a new counter-narcotics battalion to be stationed in Putumayo, close to the strongholds of the FARC.³⁷ Strong opposition within the Republican-controlled US Congress to Chicola's meeting with the FARC quickly aborted the tentative US-FARC rapprochement.³⁸

Against the backdrop of the FARC's military successes, another development alarmed both decision makers in the Clinton administration and conserva-

tives in the US Congress. In January 1999, the CIA released a report in which it claimed that a new and large-scale effort of coca seeding was occurring in the FARC-controlled department of the Putumayo, which stood to increase coca production considerably. According to the report, these new coca fields were estimated to yield the FARC additional revenues of between USD\$100 million to USD\$500 million by the year 2000.³⁹ These revenues would have allowed the FARC to consolidate its tactical gains, thereby establishing a strategic advantage against the military, which in turn may have ended the comfortable military impasse upon which the war system in Colombia has rested for the better part of its 40-year long conflict, as well as usher in a political triumph for the FARC. However, such a possibility was one that Washington was not willing to accept given its post-Cold War hegemonic position in the world system and the threat to its regional interests a FARC victory could entail. The US viewed the FARC as a destabilizing force that could help to undermine its strategic interests in the Andean region.⁴⁰

Within the Clinton administration, by then beleaguered by the Lewinski affair and facing impeachment proceedings in the US Senate, the CIA report and the poor performance of the Colombian armed forces gave rise to a re-evaluation of the US position on Colombia. This new position was based upon a hardening perception that Pastrana was caving in to the FARC, acting more like a mediator between the FARC and the armed forces than as head of state.⁴¹ The tipping point came in February 1999, when a unit of the FARC first kidnapped and later assassinated three US activists working for an American NGO. This act provided enough ammunition for the Republican Congress to abort Clinton's support for peace negotiations, again putting US policy on a collision course, both with the Colombian insurgents and with Pastrana's peace initiative.

In August 1999, Thomas Pickering, the Undersecretary for Political Affairs, and Barry Mcaffarey, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, visited Bogotá and communicated to Pastrana that if he continued his concessions to the FARC he would risk losing US support. At the same time, they also offered Pastrana a carrot: a substantial increase in the US military aid to Colombia provided that Pastrana adopted a comprehensive plan to revamp the military and reinvigorate the anti-drug war.⁴² The contours of this plan were subsequently formulated by the State Department in consultation with their Colombian counterparts and other US agencies, and baptized "Plan Colombia."

Plan Colombia, approved by the US Congress in July 2000, represented a qualitative leap in the magnitude and scope of US involvement in Colombia's war system. For one, the US committed USD\$1.3 billion (of which more than \$860 million were assigned to Colombia and 80 percent of which were earmarked for military purposes) over a three-year period to upgrade its war against drugs in the Colombian theater, particularly in the southern parts of the country (Putumayo, Caqueta, Guaviare). To put this in perspective, in 1995, Colombia received only USD\$30 million in US support. By 1998, that amount had increased threefold to

USD\$98 million and, by 1999 to USD\$294 million. In total, between 1999 to 2002, the US gave Colombia USD\$2.04 billion in aid, 81 percent of which was for military purposes.⁴³ The US provision of these considerable resources brought Colombia into the orbit of American strategic importance on a level just below Israel and Egypt, traditionally the two largest recipients of US military assistance. This was a qualitative leap in the US decision-makers' approach to Colombia, and one which served to integrate Colombia more tightly than ever before into the international political economy of the US war on drugs, with all of its political, military, security, and economic implications.

A. Plan Colombia and Incentive Structure: the Military

Clearly, the military institution is a formidable player in the political economy of war and peace. In Colombia, the military institution has long occupied a position of paramount influence in the management of public order and security. This dominance stemmed from a 1957 accord under which the military agreed to relinquish direct political power in return for autonomy in administering public order, national security, the military budget, and a free hand in administering its military courts to prosecute both its own members as well as those civilians accused of undermining public order. Taken together, these measures assured the military a strong position of power *vis-à-vis* civilian authorities. Whenever the civilian leadership sought to undertake a negotiated solution to the conflict, the military had the power to protect its competing agenda. The evidence in support of the spoiler role of the Colombian military is abundant. In 1985, at a time when the Betancur government was pushing for a negotiated peace, the M19 (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*) attacked the Supreme Court of Justice in the center of Bogota, only a few metres away from the presidential palace. The military seized upon this event to gain broader policy powers in the areas of defense and security, and demand an end to peace talks. It was a virtual political coup.⁴⁴ While Betancur finished his term, his peace initiative died in the ruins of the Justice Palace. Another illustration of the divergent approaches of the military and civilian authorities toward the conflict was the 1990 attack by government forces on Case Verde in La Uribe, the headquarters of the FARC since 1984. This attack was launched amidst peace negotiations and on the same day as elections to the Constitutional Assembly – elections that were to provide an authoritative mandate for drafting a new constitution. This attack effectively derailed negotiations with the FARC, despite two subsequent attempts to save it in Caracas, Venezuela, and Tlaxcala, Mexico.⁴⁵

The military did not undergo any change of heart under the government of Pastrana (1998-2002). Indeed, during this period the military's recalcitrant position was reinforced by two important changes in the war system environment, both heavily influenced by Washington: Plan Colombia and the War on Terrorism. From the start, the Pastrana government's peace efforts confronted

serious resistance from the military, particularly after Pastrana's controversial proposal to withdraw the state's armed forces from five municipalities, which he had conceded to the FARC in return for its agreement to enter into peace talks. The military responded by refusing to leave its military base in Cazadores (Caqueta), one of the five municipalities designated for withdrawal. After political wrangling that lasted more than five weeks, the military reluctantly withdrew, making public their dissatisfaction with the outcome.

The military's opposition to the peace process was also manifested by their continual disagreements with Pastrana's chief negotiator and close aide, Victor G. Ricardo. The generals were particularly incensed by the manner in which the process was being managed by civilian authorities, that is, with little, if any, consultation with senior officers. This anger reached a dangerous level when then Minister of Defense Lloreda was left out of the process, an action that served to firmly align the minister with the generals against the process.

A direct confrontation between the military and the president came in May 1999, when Victor Ricardo announced that the government was considering extending the withdrawal from the five municipalities for an indefinite period of time. Lloreda resigned in protest, believing like the military that the government had already made too many concessions to the FARC, a view that by then was also widely accepted in Washington. Subsequently, Lloreda and his military backers vehemently opposed the renewal of the demilitarized areas. In due course, the military's high command used this occasion to present a show of force and submitted the collective resignation of 12 generals, 20 colonels, and 50 other officers.⁴⁶

This en masse resignation was the largest in the country's history and illustrated the widening breach between the civilian and military authorities. In the wake of this crisis, Pastrana's political position was weakened considerably. He was forced to undertake major concessions in order to reconcile the military, which undermined his position even more. The most important of these was that the military would henceforth be consulted on the management of the peace process and that any renewal of the demilitarized areas would be made conditional on the FARC's compliance with a set of terms determined by the military.⁴⁷ The 1999 crisis significantly altered the civil-military balance, effectively tying Pastrana's hand in the negotiation process. Indeed, in the wake of this crisis government negotiators were instructed not to cede to any more of the FARC demands.⁴⁸

One reason the military and their conservative allies were so opposed to Pastrana's initiative for a negotiated settlement was its proposed terms. According to Alfredo Rangel, a leading Colombian security specialist, the 1998-2002 peace process was the first time that the issue of the military reform was on the negotiating table.⁴⁹ During the 1990 negotiations with M-19, military reform was not included, due to the weakened position of that organization and the adamant

opposition of the military. By May 1999, however, the terms of settlement included the FARC's demand for radical reform of the military, specifically a redefinition of the military's role in the areas of national security and public order, and severing its links with right-wing paramilitaries.⁵⁰ For a military indoctrinated by Cold War ideologies that remained deeply entrenched within its top ranks, this prospect was tantamount to a "nightmare scenario." The political discourse of the military describes the guerrillas as "bandoleros," thieves, "bandidos," robbers, and "narcoguerrillas," and, after 11 September 2001 as "terrorists" and "narcoterrorists." These are expressive symbols that reflect the ideological baggage of the institution which in turn defined the boundaries upon which its identity was constructed and its interests formulated.⁵¹ Fearing the loss of their economic and political privileges, and against the backdrop of their conservative ideology, the generals were in no mood to acquiesce to an ambiguous peace initiative that might undermine their interests. This was so despite the fact that between 1996 and 1998 the military had suffered its most serious battlefield defeats at the hands of the FARC. Indeed, these defeats and the insecurity they engendered only redoubled the tenacity of the military's opposition to the peace process. The military remained convinced that the price of peace requested by the FARC was too high, and too threatening to the power and privilege of the military institution. In this fashion, the views and actions of the military institution worked to consolidate the inertia of the war system.

What made the military's opposition consequential to the fate of the Pastrana initiative was the backing it gained from Plan Colombia and the changing mood in Washington. For the military, Plan Colombia was a blessing that insulated it from having to consider, let alone accept, the FARC's demands for far-reaching military reform. Moreover, the increase in hardware and professionalization of its troops that was made possible through Plan Colombia's massive infusion of US assistance created an additional, and powerful, incentive for the sustenance of the war system.

By mid-1999, then, the military had shifted from a defensive to an offensive posture. This new offensive posture was reinforced by the newly acquired fleet of 18 US-made Black Hawk helicopters, which included six UH-60.⁵² Indeed, between 1998 and 2001, the total number of helicopters in the military's arsenal increased from 82 to 172, thanks to US assistance.⁵³ By 2004, Colombia had 200 helicopters.⁵⁴ Likewise, American-supplied troop transport aircraft increased from 126 to 223, while the US also provided three stealth planes with night vision equipment, as well as reconnaissance planes.⁵⁵ The re-equipment of the army was paralleled by an increase in the number of professional or volunteer soldiers during this same period, from 22,000 to 55,000, that is a 150 percent increase, and regular soldiers, including high school draftees, from 46,000 to 73,000.⁵⁶ A US-trained anti-narcotic force, Battalion No. 1, and the Central Anti-Narcotic Intelligence Unit were already deployed by the end of the 1999. After 11 September 2001, the US upgraded its intelligence-sharing with its Colombian

counterparts under the aegis of the War on Terrorism, by among other things, providing real-time information about guerrilla movements and troop-concentrations.⁵⁷

This unprecedented reinforcement of military strength and technical capacity led to a general reversal of forces on the battlefield.⁵⁸ By 2003, the number of military-initiated attacks against the guerrillas exceeded those launched by the guerrillas. Overall, the number of military confrontations rose to 2,312, an increase of 73 percent from the 2002 level, most of which were initiated by the army.⁵⁹ Alongside these measurable changes in military strategy and performance was a change in the perceptions and incentive structure of the military leadership. Prior to the advent of Plan Colombia, the commonly held perception shared by both the military and guerrillas, as well as by the business elites, political leaders, and important sectors of academe, was that the Colombian conflict had reached an impasse approximating Zartman's "mutually hurting stalemate."⁶⁰ However, with the inception of the plan at least one party – the military – had undergone a reassessment. Jorge Enrique Mora, then-commander of the army and later commander of the armed forces, best expressed this change when he stated:

I would like to clarify two important misperceptions about Colombia's conflict. The first is the claim that neither the army nor the guerrillas are capable of winning this war. This is not true. Today we have the capabilities to win the war. The second misperception is that, if the peace process ends, a terrible war will ensue that will destroy the country. This is not true, because we are already in that war.⁶¹

The military's new perception, its confidence both that the war was winnable and that government forces were already winning it, makes clear its preference for a peace reached through the defeat and surrender of the FARC, rather than through negotiation. The biased intervention in the form of the US-backed Plan Colombia explains why Pastrana's negotiations never really had a chance to take hold and why, too, the conflict began to escalate during the negotiating period. (See Figure 1)

However, during the last few years, the combined resources of the Colombian state and its US ally have fallen short in decisively altering the balance of forces. In that time, too, the FARC has adapted its military tactics to offset the government's air power advantage by re-employing guerrilla warfare tactics, moving in small units, and dispersing its forces into larger areas. Currently, the US military aid is about USD\$680 million, leaving the Colombian state to find alternative resources to fund a burgeoning defense bill that is estimated at more than USD\$4 billion per year, approximating 5.3 percent of its GDP.⁶³ To finance the war, the Uribe government is running a budget deficit of 6 percent of the country's GDP, which is well-above the 2.5 percent limit set by the IMF.⁶⁴ Further, the constituency of taxpayers (only 32,000 individuals bought the so-

called “peace bonds”) that helped in financing the first part of Uribe’s “Democratic Security Plan” contributed less than USD\$1 billion, again exposing the fiscal limitations of the state to pursue a robust counterinsurgency campaign. Now this same constituency is rebelling against paying any more taxes, thereby increasing the pressure on Uribe to draw on foreign reserves to finance his war.⁶⁵

Given the inefficient structure of the military – which has one of the highest ratios of administrative versus operational expenses in the world (8:1 compared to 3:1 in the US military) – more money is unlikely to resolve the fiscal crisis that Plan Colombia has brought about. Nor will more money be sufficient to tip the strategic balance decisively in the military’s favor. More than 66 percent of the military budget is spent on salaries and pensions rather than on improvements to the military’s operational capabilities. This latter receives less than 11 percent of the total defense budget.⁶⁶ And, if the conventional wisdom of the counterinsurgency doctrine is correct – that a successful counterinsurgency requires a force strength of 10 soldiers to every insurgent – then the Colombian military will need to double the current complement of its professional and regular soldiers. At an estimated cost of about \$465 million per year, such reforms would cost more than USD\$1 billion per year.⁶⁷ This type of expenditure is definitely beyond the fiscal capacity of the state, where only 740,000 citizens in a nation of 42 million pay income taxes and where only 13 percent of government revenues are from taxes.⁶⁸

In sum, whereas Plan Colombia succeeded in reinforcing the incentive structure of the military, contributing to derailing the negotiation process, it failed to alter the balance of forces in any significant manner, despite some signal improvements in the performance of the armed forces. In light of the current structure of the military and the limited fiscal capacity of the Colombian state, a military build-up needed to match the insurgency’s challenge will not be possible. Preoccupied with its own domestic deficit and the spiralling costs of its Iraq adventure, as well as its commitments to rebuilding Afghanistan, the US is clearly in no position to shoulder more of the burden.⁶⁹ In all, the repercussions of the biased intervention by the US in the Colombian conflict validates Richard Betts’ observation that “half-measures” only confuse belligerent actors and generate false hopes for victory.⁷⁰ US intervention has not been decisive enough to enable the Colombian military to defeat the guerrillas. Five years after the introduction of Plan Colombia there is no victor in sight, nor have the guerrilla forces shown signs of serious weakening.⁷¹ This in turn, validates my argument that the biased intervention ended up reinforcing the inertia of the war system rather than breaking the system in favor of the state.

B. The Agribusiness Elite, Paramilitaries, and the War System

The agribusiness elite is a constellation of social groups that include cattle ranchers, large landowners, and owners of enterprises investing in export oriented cash-crops, such as coffee, flowers, African palms, bananas, rice, and sugar. Combined their share of the GDP is 13 percent.⁷² One key sub-group within the agribusiness elite is the narco-bourgeoisie, which has acquired significant political and economic weight in the rural economy during the last two decades. The narco-bourgeoisie, having found investing in rural areas an effective method for laundering their narco-dollars, have amassed about 4 million hectares, that is to say about 48 percent of the country's most fertile lands, with a calculated dollar value of USD\$2.4 billion.⁷³

Although this segment of the dominant classes is socially differentiated, politically they are united in their strong opposition to a negotiated settlement with the insurgency. They are vehemently against insurgent demands for land redistribution in the economically strategic areas of Bolivar, Antioquia, Cauca, Sucre, Cesar, Casanare, Cordoba, Santander, North Santander, and Magdalena Medio, demands that threaten their key economic interests. To avert such a possibility, significant sectors of the agribusiness elite in these departments have helped in creating paramilitary forces to accomplish two main objectives: in the short-term, to defend themselves from guerrilla-demanded war taxation; and, in the longer-term, to form a political counterweight to prevent any land reform in their areas of investment. The paramilitaries' determination to drive out the guerrillas and their support base from these areas has led to an escalation of the conflict, resulting in numerous massacres and the forced displacement of more than two million people since the 1980s.⁷⁴ In part, the paramilitaries' counterinsurgency strategy has achieved its goals in a number of areas, such as Cordoba, Uraba, parts of Bolivar, Cesar, and Magdalena Medio, and has yielded mixed results in Casanare, Putumayo, Arauca, and North Santander. These successes have enhanced the political power and military reach of the paramilitaries as well as their financial sponsors, making them important players in the political economy of war and peace in Colombia. By 1999, they had become a force with enough power to spoil the then on-going peace process. In 1997, the paramilitaries founded a national umbrella organization to coordinate their counterinsurgency strategy. This umbrella organization, the AUC, was led by the ACCU (*Autodefensas Campesinas de Cordoba y Uraba*) of Carlos Castano and Salvatore Mancuso, and remained functional until the electoral defeat of Pastrana by Alvaro Ulrike Velez and the end of the Pastrana-led peace process in 2002.⁷⁵ Organizing nationally allowed the AUC to project their political power more effectively, reaching a level of political influence unprecedented in the history of the conflict. In a span of three years (1997-2000), the AUC augmented its military capacity from less than 3,000 fighters to more than 8,000 fighters.⁷⁶ Such a significant leap altered the correlation of forces between the insurgency and its opponents. It also changed the dynamics of the war system and its structure.

Notably, the war system was reshaped from a bipolar conflict between the guerrillas and the state to a multipolar conflict among the guerrillas, the state, and non-state paramilitaries. During the same period, the paramilitaries reaped significant economic resources from narco-trafficking and protection rents, allowing them to finance their war machine. Their annual income ranged between USD\$600 million and USD\$1billion.⁷⁷

The powerful growth of the most conservative elements of the agribusiness elite and their paramilitaries coincided with the beginning of the peace process in 1999, adding yet another obstacle to those discussed above. Although the agribusiness elite is not the most endowed in terms of wealth, and hence, in terms of their position in the economic structure, they feared that they would end up paying an inordinate cost from a peaceful settlement with the insurgency, especially if it were to entail significant land redistribution, as was considered in the Pastrana-led process. Jorge Visbal, president of the Federation of Cattle Ranchers (FEDEGAN), articulated the core concern of the rural elite regarding a negotiated settlement with the guerrillas, when he argued that:

If Colombia has a maldistribution of income, it is not in the rural sector. If twenty economic groups are owners of the 70% of the industrial activity, and one banker owns 42% of the financial sector, then we should not deceive ourselves, where is our (cattle ranchers) wealth!⁷⁸

This statement reveals two main issues that are pertinent to this analysis. One is the schism between the agribusiness elite and the economic conglomerates (*cacaos*), which has been aggravated by disagreements over who will bear the greater costs of a negotiated peace. The agribusiness elite has argued that the *cacaos* should pay a share of the costs of social and economic reforms that matches their economic might.⁷⁹ Second, the increasing concentration of land held by cattle ranchers, large landholders, and narco-bourgeoisie, enabled by the growth of opportunities brought about by the protection provided by the paramilitaries, has created a relatively new dimension of the war system, and another impediment to economic development and peace.⁸⁰ Given this development, it has become more difficult than ever to conceive of a viable peaceful solution that does not include provisions for equitable land distribution to landless and poor peasants within an overall sustainable developmental strategy.

In 1999, the agribusiness elite, alarmed by the prospect of a negotiated settlement between the Pastrana government and the guerrillas, decided to resist. They were able to do so because of their alliance with the increasingly powerful paramilitaries and also due to the lack of a clear negotiating strategy by the Pastrana government. The agribusiness elite preferred the continuation of the war system rather than risk losing parts of their landownership to a settlement reached under a balance of power that would not decisively protect its interest.⁸¹ In various iterations, this reasoning explains why the agribusiness elite has been dodg-

ing a political solution to the agrarian problem for over eight decades.⁸² But it is also a position that has cemented the inertia of the current war system, and explains why the continuance of war is, for this economic sector, still the least costly and most promising route to terminating the conflict.

As with the state military, the inception of Plan Colombia injected new hopes among members of this group for another chance to defeat the insurgency, thereby avoiding any meaningful land and political reforms that could open new possibilities for the landless peasants and small land-owners, whose exclusion from the nation's wealth has been a continuing reason for the insurgency.⁸³ The large infusion of US aid was also attractive to large landowners, who resist the imposition of higher taxes on their properties to support the war.⁸⁴

The current president of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Velez, is closely linked with the agribusiness elite in terms of his class origins, ideological orientation, and political views. Uribe proved very adept at capitalizing on the weaknesses of Pastrana's ill-conceived peace process. Uribe sailed successfully to the helm of political power with the help of the winds that started blowing from Washington in early 1999. During the peace process (1998-2002), he positioned himself as the champion of the opposition camp that included the most conservatives elements of the dominant classes and successfully built a significant support base within the middle class, which was disenchanted with the slow pace of the peace process and pinched by the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The emergence of the Uribe factor made it more difficult for Pastrana to garner critical political support from the agribusiness elite and, increasingly, from among other sectors that had initially supported his initiative for a negotiated peace settlement.⁸⁵

C. The FARC and its Role in the Process of Peace

In 1998, FARC's willingness to engage in peace negotiations was motivated by a number of factors. One was its desire to obtain political space that would allow it to strengthen its political credentials at the national, regional, and international levels. This objective was within the FARC's strategy of accumulating power that would enable it to prevail in its struggle, as well as achieve its long sought goal: the status and legitimacy of a recognized belligerent.

In retrospect, the peace talks did provide the FARC with an opportunity to expose its political views to a wider sector of the Colombian society, as well as to the international community, bringing it closer than ever before to reaching the status of recognized belligerent. In February 2000, a joint FARC and government delegation toured various European countries, including Italy, Spain, Norway, Sweden, France, and Switzerland. During this trip, the stream of ambassadors and other foreign dignitaries, including the president of the New York Stock Exchange, that met with the FARC negotiating team in the demilitarized zone

attests to the recognition this group won during the peace process. Nonetheless, the central question lingers as to whether, in taking these steps, the FARC was genuinely interested in reaching a negotiated accord.

It is necessary to keep in mind that in 1998 the FARC was at the zenith of its military power as it had proved on the battlefield. At the time the FARC was pursuing a maximalist agenda, a 10-point program that included radical reforms to the military institution, extensive land distribution for the benefit of poor and landless peasants, a renegotiation of contracts with multinational companies, an increase in social spending to a 50 percent of the total public expenditure, and reform of the neo-liberal economic model of development.⁸⁶ However, any negotiation of these points was preconditioned by the FARC's non-negotiable demand for an exchange of prisoners and a firm state commitment to fight the right-wing paramilitary groups. These tough demands could be interpreted to mean that the FARC leadership was not yet ready to compromise for the sake of peace.

Given that the government at that time did not yet have a mandate from the dominant classes to negotiate the 10 points requested by the FARC, nor even the 12 points that the FARC and government negotiators agreed to negotiate in Machaca 1999 (*Agenda Comun Por el Cambio Hacia Una Nueva Colombia*), the initial talks remained stalled in procedural disputes about the direction of further negotiations.⁸⁷ In some respects, this delay was convenient to the Pastrana government, which was not in a position either to overcome the stiffening congressional opposition to the FARC's demands, particularly concerning prisoner exchanges, or to assume a more aggressive policy against the paramilitary groups in the face of the reticent stance of the military.

Within the Pastrana team, the dominant perception was that a stalled negotiation was better than none, because it lowered the intensity of the conflict, and gave the government time to restructure its armed forces, rearm, and prepare in case the negotiations failed.⁸⁸ Conveniently, the costs of such military restructuring were underwritten by Plan Colombia.⁸⁹ Indeed, as it happened, the FARC did reduce its armed attacks during the negotiation period. (See Figure 2) But the military expenditure simultaneously increased from a 4.5 percent of the GDP in 1999 to 5.2 by 2002.⁹⁰ The stalemated negotiations also yielded some benefits to the FARC. Alongside the gains mentioned above, the FARC used the demilitarized zone to recruit, train, and regroup its troops and to launch attacks against government forces positioned on the borders of the demilitarized zone.

However, the political benefits derived by the government from these stalemated peace talks were short-lived. The FARC's continuing military actions – which included the high-jacking of an aircraft, the assassination of a Liberal Party leader, Diego Turbay, and his mother, and finally its apparent role in the killing of a prominent figure of Vallidupar, the Minister of Culture Consuelo Araujo Noguera “Cacica” – alarmed hardliners and intensified their criticism of Pastrana's peace plan. In addition, the FARC was behind the killing of three US

citizens working with the indigenous communities of Arauca. Taken together these acts put Pastrana's team on the defensive and provided ammunition to one of his main opponents, Alvaro Uribe Velez.

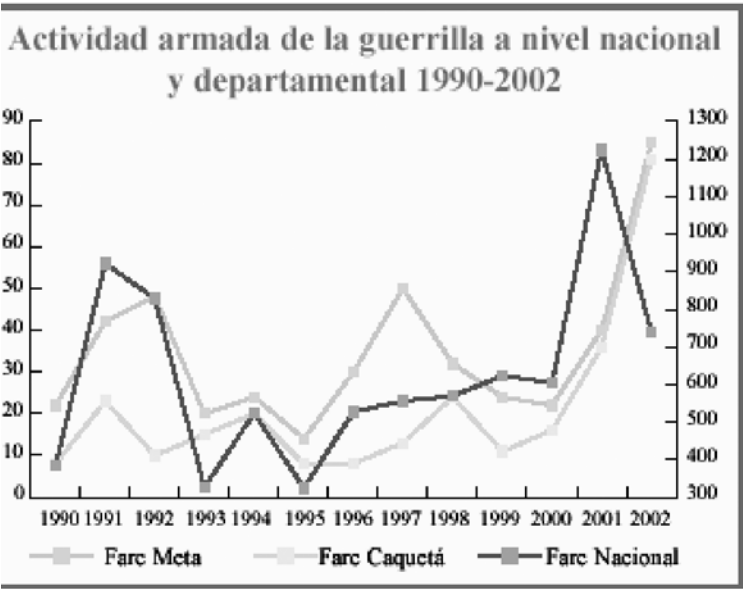
The introduction of Plan Colombia was received by the FARC as a clear sign of renewed warfare. One of its military commanders, Jorge Briceno, said of Plan Colombia: "we are going to war and its results are uncertain, either we win it or end up negotiating in a remote village in Germany," suggesting that if FARC were defeated, then they might be forced to negotiate their surrender in Germany.⁹¹ Briceno's view of the options as two extremes – either decisive victory or decisive defeat – is suggestive of what Zartman calls a "fluctuating stalemate," a dynamic process that has characterized the war system since the introduction of Plan Colombia. The key aspect of this new phase is that while the military is on the offensive in some areas the guerrillas are exploring the weaknesses and limitations in another, which could allow the FARC to retake the initiative. In fact, the FARC had put the military on the defensive during last few months of 2005. Cases in point are the attacks that the FARC staged in Puerto Inirida, Uraba, Dabeiba (Antioquia), Narino, Choco, and Teteye, among others.

Even while continuing to participate in the peace talks the FARC began to prepare for the new phase of war that it anticipated would follow US intervention. This necessitated securing additional sources of funding to counter balance the influx of US aid to the military. In April 2000, three months prior to the US Congressional approval of Plan Colombia and after President Clinton's visit to Colombia in which he promoted Plan Colombia, the FARC issued its 002 Law. This law instructed individuals with assets of USD\$1million and more to pay a "peace tax" to the FARC under penalty of detention.

At the operational level, FARC also changed its military tactics, abandoning its policy of "mobile war" and returning to guerrilla war tactics. In addition, after 2000, the FARC reduced its military operations at the national level and in its stronghold of Meta and Caqueta. (See Figure 2) These steps were undertaken to consolidate its forces after it suffered several important military reversals that started in 1999 and increased between 2000 and 2001. These reverses were mainly due to the military's increasing air power, particularly its newly acquired US helicopters.

However, between 2002 and 2004, the FARC not only managed to stem these battlefield reversals but also to retake the military initiative. This is demonstrated by the rising trend of FARC-initiated attacks that increased from 227 per year between 1998 and 2002 to 450 per year in the 2002-04 period. By contrast, the number of military-initiated attacks decreased from 2,414 in 2003 to 1,975 in 2004.⁹² These figures indicate the onset of a condition of "fluctuating stalemate" and an end to the comfortable impasse of the Colombian war system.⁹³

Figure 2. FARC Military Activity 1990-2002



Source: *Vicepresidencia de la Republica*, Informes 2004.

Overall, Plan Colombia introduced significant changes to the incentive structures of the conflict's key actors that, in hindsight, proved detrimental to the already vulnerable peace process. The plan also profoundly changed the political economy of the war system: by providing assets for the government's campaign against the FARC, the plan triggered a new cycle of financial and military countermeasures by the FARC that together contributed to the maintenance and inertia of the war system.

CONCLUSION

As this analysis has sought to explain, neither Pastrana nor the FARC initiated the peace process, nor were they motivated by a desire to achieve a viable peace. Rather, they were both enticed by the prospect of immediate political gains made possible by the intervention of UN mediators. Quite plausibly, this neutral intervention reduced the then escalating trend in the war system's dynamics, but this abatement lasted only a few months. Indeed, it remained limited to the initiation of the process due to the opposition of both the government and the insurgency. By the time the two parties accepted the facilitation of the UN special envoy in January 2002, the process already faced imminent collapse and was

beyond saving.⁹⁴ In this respect, it is worth noting President Pastrana's critical evaluation of the role of the UN special envoy, James Lemoyne, who was "confused between his role of facilitator and mediator, which created more damage than good in salvaging the process."⁹⁵ This point of not confusing the roles of facilitator and mediator may be a good lesson to learn and avoid in any future peace processes.

In 1999, the seeds of another type of intervention, this one biased by US national interest, were planted that would eventually lead to an escalation in the scope and intensity of conflict that was unprecedented since 1990, and that continued its upward swing well into 2004. This escalation was primarily due to the impact of the military aid and assistance administered by the US to the Colombian military.

That this cycle of renewed violence began with the military is demonstrated by the fact that from 2001 until 2003, most attacks were initiated by the military; during this period, the FARC assumed a largely defensive posture. The ability of the military to undermine Pastrana's peace efforts was strengthened not only by US support but by the powerful domestic alliance of the agribusiness elite, narcobourgeoisie, and their paramilitaries.

Neither type of third-party intervention led to the termination of the conflict, a fact that appears to support the thesis that third-party interventions are seldom conducive to peace, as argued by Regan, Betts, and Carment and Rowlands. But, this analysis also validates the thesis of Balch-Lindsay and Enterline that neutral interventions reduce the inertia of the war system by helping to decelerate the rate of violence, while biased interventions accelerate inertia, bringing the war system to a new point of violent equilibrium. As became evident in 2004, biased intervention affected the inertia of the war system but not enough to induce a change that could lead to its collapse. A case in point was the decrease in the number of combats. The number of military initiated attacks declined by 18 percent from their 2003 level while the number of attacks initiated by the guerrillas decreased by 19 percent, which means the inertia is helping the war system to secure its new state of motion.⁹⁶

The contemporary war system in Colombia has entered Zartman's phase of "fluctuating stalemate" – that is to say, it has moved away from a comfortable impasse to a stage where the military is on the offensive and the guerrillas on the defensive, dodging down, spreading its forces, avoiding large concentrations of troops, or major battles that could make their forces vulnerable to the military's new air power advantage. However, it is only a question of time before the guerrillas reinforce their anti-aircraft defenses – as the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) did when they acquired Sam-7 missiles during the last phase of the Salvador's civil war, thereby re-establishing an equilibrium in the war system.

Endnotes

1. James Fearon, "Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer Than Others," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004), pp. 275-302.
2. Ibid.
3. This categorization is borrowed from Caroline Hartzell, Matthew Hoddie, and Donald Rotschild, "Stabilizing the Peace After the Civil War: An Investigation of Some Key Variables," *International Organizations* 55, no. 1 (2002), pp. 183-208.
4. I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Paul Collier, Anke Hoefler, and Mans Suderborn, "On The Duration of Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004), pp. 257-73.
5. James Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995), pp. 379-414; Fred Ikle, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), Chaps. 1 and 2.
6. Barbara Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 71-107.
7. Cynthia Arnson, ed., *Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1999), Chaps. 1 and 2; Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), Chap. 1.
8. Fred Ikle, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), Chaps. 2 and 4; Paul Pillar, *Negotiating Peace, War Termination as a Bargaining Process* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); John Stedman, *Peacemaking in Civil War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner, 1991).
9. Nazih Richani, "The Political Economy of Violence: The War System in Colombia," *Journal of International Studies and World Affairs* 39, no. 2 (1997), pp. 37-81; Richani, *Systems of Violence*, Chap. 1.
10. Along with the UN and the United States there were also other actors involved such as the *ad hoc* group of ambassadors, the members of the European Union, and the Catholic Church.
11. Richani, *Systems of Violence*, Chaps. 1 and 7.
12. <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary>.
13. Walter, *Committing to Peace*, pp. 92-168; Pillar, *Negotiating Peace*, Chaps. 2 and 3; Ikle, *Every War Must End*, Chaps. 1 and 2.
14. Walter, *Committing to Peace*; Arnson, *Comparative Peace Processes*, Chaps. 1, 2, and 3; Stephen J. Stedman, Donald Rothschild, and Elizabeth Cousens, eds., *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2002), Chaps. 4-6.
15. Patrick Regan, "On Third Party Intervention and the Duration of Intra-state Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (February 2002), pp. 55-73.
16. Dylan Balch-Lindsay and Andrew J. Enterline, "Prolonging the Killing? Third Party Intervention and the Duration of Intrastate Conflict, 1944-92," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Seattle, WA, 25-27 March 1999. See also Ibrahim Elbadawi and Nicholas Sambanis, "External Interventions and the Duration of Civil Wars," presented at the workshop on the Economics of Civil Violence, Princeton University, 18-19 March 2000; David Carment and Dane Rowlands, "The Role of Bias in Third Party Intervention: Theory and Evidence," International Security Program, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, unpublished paper, October 2001.

17. Alfredo Rangel, *Fuerzas Militares Para la Guerra* (Bogotá: Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, 2003), pp. 13-39; Nazih Richani, "The Political Economy of Colombia's Protracted Civil War and the Crisis of the War System," *The Journal of Conflict Studies* 21, no. 2 (Winter 2001), pp. 50-77; Richani, *Systems of Violence*, Chap. 5.
18. This account is based on several interviews with individuals that participated in the Quirama meeting and its preparation. Alvaro Camacho, one of the main academics that was instrumental in preparing the Quirama meeting, interview with author, Bogotá, July 2003. Alfredo Manrique, UNDP official, interview with author, August 2003.
19. This information was provided to author by Professor Alvaro Camacho, Andes University, January 2005.
20. Ibid.; Alfredo Manrique, UNDP official, interview with author, August 2003.
21. Edgar Tellez, Oscar Montes, and Jorge Lesmes, *Diario Intimo de Un Fracaso* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2002), p. 13; Andres Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2005), pp. 45-55, 132.
22. Tellez, et.al., *Diario Intimo de Un Fracaso*, p. 16; Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, pp. 46-52.
23. Tellez, et.al., *Diario Intimo de Un Fracaso*, p. 23; Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, Chap. 8.
24. Informant, US State Department, interview with author Washington, DC, Spring 2003.
25. Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, pp. 47-48.
26. *El Tiempo*, 24 February 2002.
27. George Modelski, "International Settlement of Internal War," in James Rosenau, ed., *International Aspects of Civil Strife* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964).
28. Eduardo Pizarro, a prominent Colombian academic, interview with author, Princeton, NJ, 24 May 2003.
29. Ricardo Correa, Secretary General of the ANDI, interview with author, Bogotá. 24 July 2002.
30. Ibid.
31. Gabriel Mesa, Chief of Staff of President Andres Pastrana, interview with Author, Bogotá, August 2004.
32. Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*; Donald Wittman, "How a War Ends: A Rational Model Approach," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 23, no. 4, pp. 743, 63; David T. Mason, Joseph Weingarten, Jr., and Patrick Fett, "Win, Lose, or Draw: Predicting the Outcome of Civil War," *Political Research Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (1999), pp. 239-68.
33. In El Billar the army fatalities were 63 dead and 43 prisoners; in Mutata the army suffered 39 fatalities, and in Miraflores the army suffered 30 fatalities, 50 injured, and 100 soldiers were taken as prisoners.
34. After the July 1999 FARC offensive, the State Department, Southern Command, and US intelligence agencies started rethinking their alternatives in Colombia.
35. The shift from guerrillas tactics to "mobile warfare" was formally adopted by the FARC's Eight Conference in April 1993, in which FARC proposed its platform for a pluralist and democratic national government for reconstruction and reconciliation. For example, Miraflores, a city of about 5,000 people in the department of Guaviare, remained under FARC control until February 2004, that is to say for about seven years during which FARC consolidated its social base by recruitments, governing the area, providing services, and organizing economic activities including the coca economy.
36. US State Department informant, interview with author New York, April 2003.

37. It was estimated that about 56,000 hectares were planted with coca, that is about 60 percent of the country's total and the highest concentration of coca plantations in the world.
38. The Republicans in the US Congress mobilized their forces in opposition to a rapprochement with the guerrillas. Keeping in mind that the US role was pivotal to bringing the peace negotiations to a successful conclusion in cases such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and, in more recent times Sudan. In this context it is important to indicate that the Clinton administration was coping with the aftermath of the Lewinski scandal and impending impeachment procedures. Plausibly, the Republican-controlled Congress alongside the Lewinski affair undermined Clinton's initial approval to engage the FARC.
39. State Department informant, interview with author, Washington DC, June 2003.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. State Department informant, interview with author, New York City, April 2003.
43. USIP, "Civil Society Under Siege," *Special Reports* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 2004).
44. Jaime Castro, who was a minister in Betancur's cabinet in 1985, argues that with the occupation of the Justice Palace M-19 sought to foment a general popular insurrection that could allow it to take power; that is why Betancur refused to negotiate and accepted instead the military option. Interview with *El Tiempo*, 14 November 2004.
45. Rafael Pardo, *De Primera Mano: Colombia 1986-1994* (Bogotá: CEREC, 1996), pp. 132-33.
46. Francisco Leal Buitrago, *La Seguridad Nacional a la Deriva: Del Frente Nacional a la Posguerra Fria* (Bogotá: Alfaomega, CESO-Uniandes, and FLACSO, 2002), Chap. 5.
47. Ibid.
48. Ricardo Correa, Secretary General of the Andi, interview with author, Bogotá, 24 July 2002.
49. Alfredo Suarez Rangel, *The Peace Process in Colombia and the U.S. Policy* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2000), p. 54.
50. Rangel, *The Peace Process*, p. 54; FARC informant, interview with author, Bogotá, August 1998; Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, pp. 187-228.
51. Charles Tilley, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Chaps. 2 and 3.
52. Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, p. 265; Marricio Cardenas, Ximena Cadena, and Carlos Caballero, "Análisis del incremento en el Gasto en Defensa y seguridad: Resultados y Sostenibilidad de la Estrategia," in Alfredo Rangel, ed., *Sostenibilidad de la Seguridad Democrática* (Bogotá: Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, 2005), pp. 139-76.
53. Buitrago, *La Seguridad Nacional a la Deriva*, Chap. 5; Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, *Fuerzas militares Para La Guerra: La Agenda Pendiente de La Reforma Militar* (Bogotá: Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, 2003), pp. 139-76.
54. Rangel, *Fuerzas Militares Para la Guerra*, p. 51.
55. Buitrago, *La Seguridad Nacional a la Deriva*, Chap. 5; Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, *Fuerzas militares Para La Guerra*, pp. 40-86; Cardenas, et al., "Análisis del incremento en el Gasto en Defensa y seguridad," pp. 139-76.
56. Rangel, *Fuerzas Militares Para la Guerra*, pp. 60-67; Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, p. 267. The professionalization of the armed forces included three main components: first, substituting the high school conscripts with a volunteer force by promulgating a statute which defines the

normative aspects of the professional soldier, his pension, and ascending scale; second, creating a school for that purpose; third, opening the possibility for those that did not serve in the mandatory service as well as those that have served to join as professional soldiers.

57. Buitrago, *La Seguridad Nacional a la Deriva*, Chap. 5.
58. Andres Villamizar and German Espejo, "El Gasto Militar en Seguridad y Defensa: de la Contencion a la Ofensiva, *Occassional Paper* (Bogotá: Fundacion Seguridad Y Democracia, 2005); Villamizar 2003.
59. *Vicepresidencia*, 2003, p. 10.
60. Richani, *Systems of Violence*, Chap. 5; Eduardo Pizarro, *Insurgencia Sin Revolucion: La Guerrilla en Colombia en Una Perspectiva Comparada* (Bogota: Tercer Mundo, 1996), Chaps. 1, 2, and 3.
61. Semana, "Estamos Ganando," *Semana*, 27 August 2001.
62. For a more elaborate discussion on the impact of Plan Colombia and the state's rent-seeking potential on the balance of power, see Nazih Richani, "Multinational Corporations, Rentier Capitalism, and the War System in Colombia," *Journal of Latin American Politics and Society* 47, no. 3 (Fall 2005), p. 113-44.
63. These estimates are based on data provided to author by the Department of National Planning, August 2003. See also *El Espectador*, 7 July 2003; and Alfredo Suarez Rangel, "El Gasto en Seguridad," *El Tiempo*, 19 November 2004.
64. Contraloria General de la Republica as cited by *Caracol* 26 January 2004, found at Caracol.com/noticias/106752.
65. *El Espectador*, 2003; Cardenas, et al., "Análisis del incremento en el Gasto en Defensa y seguridad," pp. 171-75.
66. Some estimate that the costs of the military pensions will double by 2010. See "Los Costos de la Guerra," *Dinero*, no. 152, 8 March 2002, p. 31. See also Richani, "Multinational Corporations, Rentier Capital and the War System," pp. 113-44.
67. The estimated cost of a professional soldier is 17.2 million Colombian pesos, that is about \$6,800 per year. Calculated at an exchange rate of 2,500 pesos per dollar, a regular soldier costs about 6.2 million pesos, that is about \$2,400 per year. The average costs of regular and professional is \$4650 X 100,000 new soldiers= \$465.000.000 The costs of a soldier per year are cited in *Dinero*, "Los Costos de la Guerra," p. 30.
68. *Andes 2020: A New Strategy for the Challenges of Colombia and the Andean Region*, Report of an Independent Commission (New York: Council on Foreign Affairs, Center for Preventive Action, 2004), p. 4.
69. Business groups such as ANDI, ACOPI, and others, are protesting Uribe's attempts to increase taxes, leaving his military plan in limbo.
70. Richard K. Betts, "The Delusion of Impartial Intervention," in Chester Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson, eds., *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), pp. 333-43.
71. Rangel, "El Gasto en Seguridad"; Alfredo Suarez Rangel, "La 'Sostenibilidad Militar de la Seguridad' en Sostenibilidad de la Seguridad Democrática," in Alfredo Suarez Rangel, ed., (Bogotá: Fundacion Seguridad y Democracia, 2005), pp. 51-66.
72. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/DSTATISTICS/0,,contentMDK:20523710~hlPK:1365919~menuPK:64133159~pagePK:64133150~piPK:64133175~theSitePK:239419,00.html>.

73. Ricardo Rocha, "La Economía Colombiana y la Producción de Drogas Ilícitas: Alcances y Perspectivas," PNUD, (Bogotá, 1999); Ricardo Rocha, "Colombian Economy After 25 Years of Drug Trafficking," UNDCP, 2000.
74. Consultoría Para los Derechos Humanos y El Desplazamiento (Codhes), Informe, 2004.
75. Carlos Castano was ousted from the AUC and the subject of an assassination attempt in April 2004; it is not yet clear whether he survived the attempt. Currently, 10 commanders representing different geographic areas govern the AUC, and Salvatore Mancuso, a wealthy cattle rancher from the department of Córdoba, has become the most visible leader of this group.
76. Richani, *Systems of Violence*, p. 123.
77. This estimate is reached based on two sources: Roberto Steiner's estimate of the global income of narcotrafficking that according to him could range from a \$1.5 billion to \$2.5 billion; and the official estimate that claims that the paramilitaries control about 40 percent of the narco trade. Roberto Steiner, "Los Dolares del Narcotráfico en Cuadernos De Fedesarrollo," no. 2, 1997. If this is correct then it is plausible to estimate that they could be generating between \$600 million and \$1 billion per year,
78. Jorge Visbal, President of FEDEGAN as quoted in *El Tiempo*, 23 October 2003. Visbal was contrasting the sizable wealth of the large economic conglomerates, *cacaos*, with that of the large landowners. In 1998, I interviewed Mr. Visbal and he in effect expressed the same sentiments, particularly his fear of a political settlement with the guerrillas in which they will be the ones sacrificed while the other sectors of the dominant classes, such as the *Cacaos* to which he made reference in this quotation, will pay less. Richani, *System of Violence*, Chap. 6.
79. Visbal, interview with author, Bogotá, December 1998.
80. See Richani, *Systems of Violence*, p. 118; and Ricardo Rocha, "The Colombian Economy after 25 Years of Drug Trafficking," UNDCP, 2000, pp. 119-30.
81. This observation is based on my interviews with Visbal and also the former president of the SAC, Jesus Bejarano who was assassinated 1999. Visbal, interview with author, Bogotá, December 1998; Jesus Bejarano, interview with author, 1998.
82. See Leon Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Catherine LeGrand, *Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia, 1850-1936* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).
83. Richani, *System of Violence*, Chap. 5.
84. *El Tiempo*, 16 February 2004.
85. Sabas Pretelt, Former President of the National Federation of Merchants, FEDERACION NACIONAL DE COMERCIANTES DE COLOMBIA (FENALCO), and currently Minister of Interior and Justice, Interview with Author, Bogotá, August 2003; Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, pp. 466-85.
86. FARC: El País Que Proponemos Construir (Bogotá: La Oveja Negra, 2001), pp. 35-115.
87. In May 1999, the FARC and government negotiators agreed on a common agenda of 12 points, which included social and political rights, agrarian reform, reforming the military institution, congress and judicial system, administrative decentralization, illicit plants' substitution, foreign investments, foreign debts, and revising the economic model. Mesa, 2004; Isacson, "Was Failure Unavoidable," p. 19; Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, pp. 187-88.
88. Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, pp. 514-27.
89. Correa, interview, 2003; Mesa, interview, 2004; Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, pp. 232-33, 516.

90. Based on data provided by *Planeacion Nacional*, (Bogotá, 2004).
91. As quoted in Leon Valencia, *Adios a La Política, Bienvenida la Guerra* (Bogotá: Intermedio Editores, 2002), p. 79.
92. Rangel, "Sostenibilidad Militar de la Seguridad," pp. 51-66.
93. Richani, *Crisis of the War System*, p. 71; Richani, *Systems of Violence*, Chap. 6.
94. Isacson, "Was Failure Unavoidable," p. 21.
95. Pastrana, *La Palabra Bajo Fuego*, p. 461.
96. Rangel, "Sostenibilidad Militar de la Seguridad," p. 59.