

# **Narratives of the Armed Conflicts and the Construction of a Human Security Approach: The Case of Colombia**

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## **Abstract**

This is a critical analysis of how the establishment's biased positions on national security have given a new context to the full understanding of both the causes and the consequences of the armed conflict. For a long time, the Colombian situation has been addressed from a classical security standpoint, which has given priority to military actions over the treatment of the human aspects of the conflict. Thus, the phenomenon is presented to the world as a criminality issue that deprives the international community of real understanding of the humanitarian crisis experienced by the affected parties. The importance of strengthening a human security notion is acknowledged and the need to do so from an inclusive viewpoint that does not look at poverty and poverty-associated factors as threats to such security is advocated.

## **Introduction**

This article deals with the tendency of the securitization of social problems and police repression in an international context in which threats to human life bring about general fear. Poverty and underdevelopment cannot be criminalized nor treated from a paternalistic perspective, but instead must be addressed as challenges for a global economic system in which people are the priority.

A human security approach should consider all the dimensions of the conflict as opposed to what has been the practice in Colombia, where biased narratives of the issue have prevailed. These narratives have focused on the threats to national security, as conceived by the American doctrines expressed by the U.S. State Department, while the internal dimensions of the conflict are masked by military operations aimed at eradicating a problem whose origins and solutions call for a social approach. The author analyzes dominant narratives and the largely-hidden dimensions of the conflict in order to determine the key issues in a comprehensive human security approach.

## **The Construction of Security Threats**

To begin with, it is important to explain what is understood by a narrative of an armed conflict. In this case, a narrative is an argumentation system which tries to explain the causes of a phenomenon occurring somewhere in the international system. The narratives of the armed conflict in Colombia are those resulting from international relations. Dominant narratives are emphasized as they have influenced the establishment's security agenda and its policies, both internally and externally.

Internal armed conflicts are those that have taken place after the formation of modern states and whose narratives have changed throughout time. The time span considered here is the one corresponding to the government and the communist guerrilla groups' confrontation in Colombia. That is from 1964, year in which this first guerrilla group was constituted, until today.

There are three main narratives along this time period. First, during the Cold War period, the realist and the neorealist theories prevailed. Second, once the Cold War ended, new security priorities appeared, which were based on explanatory factors including selfish interests in the predation of natural resources, economic development, and state collapse. These were thought of as security threats not only to those countries where armed conflicts were actually taking place, but also to the international system at large. It was then when a series of international organizations were instrumental in redefining security principles within a liberal context. Finally, from September 2001-to-present, the security agenda was again been redefined, focusing on defense against international terrorism.

## **The Colombian Armed conflict: A Review**

The existing Colombia armed conflict is one in which political forces fight each other, sometimes using terrorist tactics financed by illegal activities such as drug dealing, extortion, and kidnapping. This is a civil confrontation in which civilians place an important role as they become both victims and key parts of the game-like conflict<sup>1</sup>. Poverty, economic marginalization, and the state's inability to govern made it able for non-state armed groups to take over the regulation of socioeconomic and political relationships in vast areas of the national territory.

Because of its long history, the armed conflict has been conceived within two

main security doctrines: anti-communism and the fight against terrorism; both which have changed according to international security policies along the second half of the twentieth century. These dominant security doctrines reflect the identity of the people who designed them, as the definition of the enemies is linked to the definer's self-image. The advancement of security policies based on what the U.S. believes are threats to their social and political system is not necessarily an objective way to understand the complexity of political violence. Hence, there is the need for a critical vision of the dominant security stands and war narratives, in order to determine their foundations, understand the context in which they originated, and assess their impact.

### **Narratives of the Armed Conflict during the Cold War Era: Neo-realism, Anti-communism, and Colombian Guerrillas**

The dominant narrative along the Cold War era is provided by "Realism"<sup>2</sup> and Neo-realism<sup>3</sup> in which internal conflicts are seen as products of the confrontation between powerful nations, an exportation of the bipolar dispute to weak countries<sup>4</sup>. Although the development of modern Colombian guerrilla groups cannot be understood outside the context of the Cold War era, and particularly outside the effects of the Cuban Revolution in Latin America, the ideological influence and geopolitical interests linked to this era do not include other factors that explain the appearance and permanence of these revolutionary groups.

The way the conflict was dealt with is a consequence of how it was understood. By reducing the causes of the conflict to only the advancement of communism, the National Security Doctrine fails to acknowledge internal conditions such as underdevelopment, land distribution and farming, as well as the long history of political violence in Colombia<sup>5</sup>. It was in the American political arena where realism and a classic vision of security came together to create a national security strategy inspired in the idea of State security as national security, which would serve as basis for the anti-communism doctrine. This policy started to be enforced before the consolidation of the Colombian communist guerrilla groups, at a time when political violence was being orchestrated by the traditional political parties. As a result, priority on the urgency of social policies and the strengthening of the state and democracy shifted to State security.

Criticism to the Colombian national security policy is leveled not only against its

direct consequences as it has given a military treatment to a rather deeply socially-rooted problem, but also against government inability, its agents, and the international system in thinking of the appearance and permanence of guerrilla groups as a complex phenomena. In this way, communism provided the ideological foundations for their justification and legitimatization but offered very limited financial support, thus causing the revolutionary groups to seek their own sources for economic funding

The national security doctrine prevailed between 1958 and 1978, a period in which the government was led by the *Frente Nacional*, the Conservative Party - Liberal Party coalition to alternate turns for the presidency and share positions in the executive and the legislative sectors evenly. In the early 1980`s the way the government dealt with the armed conflict experienced a radical change, a result of the *Frente Nacional* coming to its end, the existence of a president who distanced himself from his antecessors` positions on national security policy, important geopolitical events such as the peace processes in Central America, and the American changes in their security strategy to face the Second Cold War.

There were two main changes in the way the armed conflict had been treated. Internally, and although still linked to the Central American peace processes, there was a redefinition of the conflict to consider its social causes (objective causes) which led to negotiations with guerrilla groups. Even if not linked to the conflict at the beginning, there was the proclamation of drug dealing as a security issue by the U.S. At the end of the Cold War period, drug dealing would take the place of communism as the main threat to security, as the fight against it would shift attention from a public health issue for the U.S. to a terrorism menace for Colombia, engineered by drug cartels.

The definition of drug dealing as a security threat and its connection with the conflict's financial sources provides a new explanation: predatory economic interests. This was the narrative characterizing the 1990`s as *New Wars*, a set of conflicts believed to be ideology-free and which are explained by means of novel arguments.

### **The Conflict and the New Wars**

Although along the Cold War period several revolutionary wars were fought in the so-called system's periphery, it was in the postwar era when internal conflicts—now fewer in number—would gain more relevance. Internal conflicts in Eastern Europe, including

Bosnia and Kosovo, and in Africa would raise interest for the academic world, the general public, and international organizations. These are the conflicts being the subject of numerous analyses and generalizations which would provide the paradigms for the study of New Wars. Yet, there were other post Cold War conflicts which did not gain much attention because of their geo-strategic characteristics. One of such *forgotten* conflicts is the Colombian armed conflict, even if the policies used to deal with it in the 1990's fall within those conceived to face New Wars.

The *new wars* expression was coined by Kaldor<sup>6</sup> to describe the armed confrontations that took place around the world after the world wars. Still, the label was particularly used to refer to wars in the 1990's, in an attempt to differentiate them from the ones in the Cold War period. Outside Neo-realism, *old wars*, the ones taking place before 1989, are retrospectively seen as being revolutionary and based on grievance<sup>7</sup> or being justified. During the period after the Cold War, academicians showed interest in studying the peculiarities of the processes in conflicts in an attempt to explain their magnitude and especially the *epidemic* of internal wars extending throughout the post Cold War period.

According to Duffield (2004), the conventional approach to the study of contemporary conflicts “consists in looking for the causes and motivations, and with the same attitude of Victorian butterfly collectors, making lists and typologies of the different species found. Theories based on poverty, the communication crisis, the fights for resources, delinquency, or social exclusion are well accepted”<sup>8</sup>. Thus, *new wars* were at the center of a debate on different explanatory developments focusing on certain aspects thought to be important for conflict characterization. Four main approaches are distinguished that explain civil wars and their causes: new barbarism, underdevelopment, collapsed states, and political economy of conflicts.

The new barbarism approach considers the emergence of ethnic tensions and atavistic violence as the trigger for conflict. The Liberal approach of development looks at poverty and underdevelopment as the causes of conflict which are used by selfish leaders for their own personal benefits. The collapsed states approach believes that failed states are a threat to national security since they make it possible for violent leaders or terrorist groups to emerge without any regulatory or controlling system. Finally, and based on quantitative studies, the political economy of conflicts approach

finds a relationship between the possibility for lucrative natural resources predation and the birth of conflicts. Here, a conflict is used as an excuse, as a method to keep control of the natural resources being exploited. Therefore, conflict is simply *avarice*. It is clear, then, that each of these approaches contains important aspects that deserve to be considered and analyzed in depth.

In spite of the positive aspects of the approaches used to better explain internal conflicts, there still exists a series of critiques concerning the characterization of New Wars. This paradigm only considers those wars in which there is an international interest, so there is a risk of exclusion for the analysis of other wars, even more recent ones, which are deemed unclassified<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, this is a paradigm based on generalizations which attempt to explain and use palliative policies for every kind of internal conflict. This is the case of the Colombian conflict, where because of its long history; there is the tendency to explain it depending on the type of analytical frame dominant at a certain historical period. Thus, we have witnessed a shift from the battle against communist expansion to the war against drug dealing to the fight against terrorism. This made no distinction: guerrilla groups, drug dealers, paramilitary groups, illegal crop farmers, and ordinary delinquency were put together and given the same treatment.

Among the main explanatory narratives of conflicts is the predatory one or the theory concerning the political economy of conflicts which has been used to explain the case of Colombia, one of the most frequently cited examples, although the liberal narratives of underdevelopment and those of collapsed states have also been used to a lesser extent. But the Colombian conflict is a contrary-to-the fact illustration of new barbarism, for it is a war which does not respond to any racial, cultural, or religious motivation, in spite of the ethnical diversity of the country.

### **Underdevelopment and the Conflict**

In studying the new wars, the approach of looking at underdevelopment as a cause of the conflict is one of the explicative tendencies which has received the most attention. This stand is linked to dependency theories and became popular in the early 1980's when alternative (anti-Semitic) visions argued that the main problem was not in the South. That is, the conflict was related with the colonial legacy and with a

discriminatory international commercial order<sup>10</sup>.

The development conception looks at conflict and poverty as interconnected and interdependent factors. This is explained by stating that poor countries are at a greater risk of experiencing conflicts. It also argues that violence resulting from armed conflicts destroys the country's assets and social capital which are necessary for their development, thus leading to an unwanted link between underdevelopment and conflict. This is a sound approach, one which is strongly associated with so-called *human security*.

The positive relationship between low-development levels and the probability for conflict turns underdevelopment into a security threat. Hence, fighting underdevelopment, poverty, and inequality becomes imperative in security policy-making. It is not that the poor are dangerous people per se—in fact, they are considered victims and, to a certain extent, their claims and uprisings are legitimate—but from a paternalistic point of view, they are influenced by perverse, selfishness-driven leaders<sup>11</sup>.

The implicit paternalism in this approach is based on a strictly linear vision of development; that is, underdeveloped countries are at an economic, social, and political stage previous to that of developed countries. Therefore, it is believed that they need to be guided through a path leading to attain the same type of achievements developed nations have attained<sup>12</sup>. The weakness of this approach is that the global system helping many countries is linked to the underdevelopment of other areas around the world. But if development is to be understood as having the same benefits and commodities European or North American societies enjoy, then it is unsustainable, from an environmental and energy perspective. Thus, when taking into account people's cultural rights and the need for human diversity conservation, development as the only path to the Euro-centric economic and political system is a tricky approach that promises more than it can actually deliver.

So what should human security policies consider to safe-guard people's life and living standards? Certainly, they should look at the importance of development and assure that people can have access to better living conditions, while respecting their traditions and right to decide what is best for themselves. Therefore, development cannot be approached just from an economic or security perspective; it is necessary to conceive a social change process in which economic benefits are equally shared and

human rights are recognized and respected. Then, guaranteeing human security in Colombia will not be possible if the armed conflict persists and the country continues to exhibit the greatest social and economic inequality in Latin America. The social roots of the long history of the Colombian conflict have been extensively analyzed, using underdevelopment as an explanatory variable. What is missing is a thorough discussion of the weaknesses of this explanation.

One of the pioneering studies on the Colombian armed conflict is “Colombia: Violence and Democracy”, published in 1987, which deals with *the objective causes of violence*. This was the first serious attempt of the Colombian government to approach the conflict from a non-military perspective, which would change the structural conditions helping violence to escalate. Gaitán makes an interesting critique to the national paradigm of the objective causes of violence by using statistical evidence showing the dynamics of the establishment of non-governmental armed groups, not in rich zones but in very poor ones<sup>13</sup>. This has been acknowledged in CINEP’s database on political violence in Colombia<sup>14</sup>, which further corroborates the fact that more than the fair causes of armed uprisings are needed. In other words, there should be the possibility to have access to the resources that can allow insurgents to initiate and maintain the confrontation until they realize their objectives.

### **Colombia: A Collapsed State?**

Holsti defines “**Failing States**”, “Failed States”, or “Collapsed States” as the result of their inability to achieve the necessary strength to fully exert institutional power. These are states in which leaders resort to oppression, only to find more resistance. Thus, power is locally fragmented in the hands of different groups or individuals<sup>15</sup>.

Although Holsti believes that state weakness precedes a conflict, there are those who think this weakness is either a consequence of it or a condition in which weakness causes the conflict to provide the ground for the state’s collapse and final falling.

This approach rests upon the classical State – Nation notion which according to Weber is characterized by territorial control and force and justice monopoly. Consequently, the inability of the state to meet one of these conditions, especially its inability to keep the monopoly to use force, creates a crisis.

The absence of power, the places in which the State does not exert its capacity to



regulate social relations, provides the optimal conditions for the emergence of other types of powers which forcefully impose their presence. The failure of the classical state model in some parts of the world and the inability of certain governments to spread the presence of the state over the entire territory has been well documented.

But the absence of the state does not necessarily bring about a vacuum and anarchy. The point is that the critiques to the underdevelopment approach also apply to that of the classical state collapse, since state absence or its inability to exert power in some regions or countries does not imply absolute chaos. People have their own local organizational ways; be it factual powers, collective consensus, or the two of them regulating community's daily life. But the literature on state collapse does not usually acknowledge the existence of alternative organizational and administrative forms. Basically, what is minimized or ignored is our possibility of being witnesses to the appearance of a new, unique political dynamic of international relations, a possibility that does not fit into accepted teleological schemes<sup>16</sup>. The development theory does not pay much attention to the possibility that today's hidden sovereignties may foretell the appearance of new power formulas which dimly show in the horizon of political and economic possibilities<sup>17</sup>. In light of this, it is vital that a proposal for human security include multiple forms of social organization, different from the western or the Eurocentric systems, rather than a poverty securitization development model.

Summing up, the criminalization of violence and that of the communities deprived of the state's presence makes it impossible to see the complexity of social and political processes which are somehow linked to violence. That is, attention is paid only to the magnitude of violence inherent to the conflict, without analyzing its dynamics and how the conflict reflects pressure for change at different levels.

In the case of Colombia, we cannot think of a total collapse but of a partially collapsed state, although the "Foreign Policy" index for collapsed states has listed it as such for several years<sup>18</sup>. In fact, though Colombia is not a modern state in the classical definition, it still fully functions for a percentage of the population.

There are strong critiques against the inability of the Colombian state to exert power, especially to fight drug dealing, for "drug cartels systematically succeed in violating the law and have the resources to elude it"<sup>19</sup>. McLean argues that the country cannot yet be classified as a collapsed state, but it can become one if the current bloody

disorder continues to be a characteristic of the nation<sup>20</sup>. Yet, the author does not list the characteristics of a failed state in terms of its inability to control the territory and possess the monopoly of arms, instead he assumes that ethnically and culturally divided states are the ones that fit this category. He further believes that the Colombian State has not failed, although it could. That is, there is no evidence of failure but it might happen as a result of disorder. However, he is not clear as to what causes such a disorder.

Although Colombia is not a clear example of a collapsed state, the majority of the causative explanations of the conflict are provided by the “precariousness of the Nation-State.” The most well-known arguments on this position are credited to Daniel Pecaut<sup>21</sup>. According to him, the characteristics of the weakness of the Nation-State are visible in many respects. First, the Colombian State is incapable of exerting authority nationwide. In addition, and from the colonial period, the issue of agrarian property has not been completely taken care of but rather exacerbated in the light of emergent economic prosperity like that of rubber, coffee, or coca plantations. Thus, a condition is created in which the increasing geographical colonization borders are both social and political marginalization frontiers. Consequently, power administration in places where the state is absent has been exerted by guerrilla or paramilitary groups along the past decades<sup>22</sup>.

The political power consolidation of irregular groups in areas of the country where the state is weak or has never existed deserves full attention. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the existence of some studies on justice and conflict, since the presence of local powers has resulted in discrete justice application<sup>23</sup>. Malcom Deas (1995) points out that political violence in Colombia is a recent phenomena aimed at seeking power in those places where the state can hardly claim monopoly of force; these are zones where power-driven confrontations are not really against the state, but rather against other local powers<sup>24</sup>, as in the case of confrontations between guerrilla and paramilitary groups, among guerrilla groups, and between guerrilla groups and drug dealers. This explains why the state continues to fight emergent powers, especially paramilitary groups, even if the government is confident that it will eventually get rid of guerrilla groups.

Other studies have focused on the weakness of the State-Nation in which the

most salient claim is that in addition to its failure to exert power nation-wide, the State is not recognized as being legitimate or capable of representing the nation.

Whatever the case, state failure is a real source of preoccupation for international relations. On the one hand, the international system is based on the existence of states; on the other hand, state failure is seen as a cause of conflicts, civil wars, and a series of security threats to the people in these states<sup>25</sup>. More recently, after the attacks to the Twin Towers, and especially after the Iraqi War, state failure has come to be linked to both national and international security threats. Hence, from the new perspective of the American security strategy, failed states are perceived as the wombs in which international terrorists can freely develop.

### **The Political Economy of the Conflict**

The political economy of conflicts compiles a series of studies among which Collier's reports to the World Bank are the most important ones. These quantitative studies have focused on the factors that provide the conditions for the emergence of violent conflicts. Their methodology is aimed at finding what variables in a series may explain a specific conflict. Collier comes to the conclusion that the variable that best explains internal conflicts is the possibility to exploit those natural resources which are highly priced in the international market.

The studies on the economy of conflicts introduce a useful variable for the emergence and permanence of conflicts: the importance of securing the material means necessary to maintain the confrontation. In the case of Colombia, only the huge amount of economic resources treasured by guerrilla and paramilitary groups could explain war escalation since the 1990's.

Although the explanation of conflicts motivated by economic reasons sheds light on their analysis, it clearly reduces conflicts to criminal activities, organized crime and ordinary delinquency.

The link between conflict and organized crime is questionable, first because "the purpose of organized criminal activity is not to subvert the existent institutional order as is the purpose of the conflicting parties<sup>26</sup>. This approach does not explain why most of the resources obtained by rebel organizations are kept inside the groups<sup>27</sup>. Unlike rebel organizations, the mafia and organized crime only reinvest in strengthening their

organization until they achieve a balance that allows them to keep their activities functioning. From here on, most of the resources are used for personal benefit. In this sense, the Colombian guerrilla groups would be acting anti-economically as they continue to invest their resources in securing military objectives which are not linked to the places in which their wealth is made.

Still another critique to statistical or econometric studies is their bias as to the type of variables chosen for analysis. Since an empirical analysis should use specific models, the choice of variables whose values are used as indicators need to meet certain criteria that serve to explain what it is that generates conflicts. Collier's choice of variables is a good example of how underdevelopment has been redefined when considered a danger<sup>28</sup>.

The political economy of armed conflicts has not only internal and regional dimensions, but it also reflects the negative impact of globalization and its effort to reorganize the global economic system to fit into the neoliberal economic postulates. Therefore, the causes of the conflict should be considered from a wide perspective. The Colombian conflict and its connection with drug dealing is essentially the result of the empowerment of global commercial networks that go without state control or regulation, not just the consequence of lucrative efforts on the part of certain groups. Then, special attention must be paid to global commercial agents producing arms and war materials and to legal fiscal agencies linked to the economic dynamics of armed conflicts.

At the end of the Cold War period there was an increasing interest of the U.S. in the fight against drug dealing which was motivated by an internal growing public health problem. In Colombia, this interest only appeared when drug dealing started to be perceived as a security threat, when drug dealers openly fought the State. Economic greed as an explanatory variable replaced the grievance speech that prevailed in the early 1980's. Since the coming together of communist guerrilla groups and drug dealers, though they have separate objectives, the image of a war motivated solely by economic reasons has been built. Thus, Colombia has become an illustration of the lucrative model, one which is extensively cited in the literature on the political economy of conflict.

This vision of conflict results in an intensification of military operations against drug dealers and guerrilla groups, best exemplified by Plan Colombia<sup>29</sup>, which was

initially geared at fighting only drug dealing. In its earlier version, this Plan ignored other economies supporting the conflict, including extortion, kidnapping, privately-funded paramilitary armies, and even the influence of the American military cooperation. It has also not been said that coca is not the only source of funding for the conflict; that the injection of resources to all those taking an active role in the conflict is what has allowed an unprecedented war escalation. In other words, the variety of resources to support the conflict has changed the dynamics of the confrontation<sup>30</sup>.

Policies like Plan Colombia fail to understand that in markets operating without any state control, like that of illegal drugs, the introduction of barriers (including repression against users) creates distortions which in the case of drug dealing, lead to the strengthening of production monopoly. Therefore, the business turns into a more profitable one, as economics Nobel laureate Friedman argues<sup>31</sup>. It is because of this that in the factors hidden under the veil of the political economy of conflicts lay the very consequences of its application; that is, price increase as a result of the users' repression. Drug dealing is a phenomenon deeply rooted in globalization and as such it has the possibility to extend to anywhere in the world where the conditions are given for it to flourish, build transnational networks, and permeate legal commercial networks.

If the fight against the economic structures of the war is an unproductive strategy, it is also socially counterproductive, since the social bases that allow illegal conflicts to extend, such as the deterioration of farmers' living conditions, are not acknowledged. Theories based on economic greed as an explanatory argument ignore the fact that more than ambition, the exploitation of natural resources is the way many inhabitants of forgotten regions insert themselves into the global economic market. Coca and poppy<sup>32</sup> are not an exception. Once again, this marginalization and criminalization of farmers and poor colonizers turned economic inequality into a security issue<sup>33</sup>. Thus, war and natural resources exploitation are also paths to wealth distribution and social mobility<sup>34</sup>.

### **The Post September Eleven International Security Agenda**

Terrorism became the basis upon which the security agenda was designed after September 11. But the concept of *terrorism* is the subject of much debate. Terrorist violence is not just an additional resource, but a highly specific modality<sup>35</sup>. The U.S. and the United Kingdom know this and have consequently launched a war against it. The

European Union has also altered its security strategies to face the threat. With the change of security priorities; arms dealing, commerce, and migration started to be seen under the terrorism lenses. The Colombian government was able to harmonize its foreign policy and internal military policy with this perspective, in order to put them to the service of its war against terrorism<sup>36</sup>.

After September 11, the war against terrorism became a Colombian national interest for which international assistance was sought. Colombia's insertion in the global war against terrorism goes beyond the pitfalls of the economic narrative of the conflict. Drug dealing is associated with terrorism, ignoring its political and social character, which makes it more difficult to propose lasting solutions to the problem.

Reducing conflict to one of its many expressions— terrorism— does not eliminate the conditions that keep those involved in the conflict active and provide them with combatants and places where they substitute the State, nor does it effectively address the weaknesses of the war against drugs. In fact, portraying the FARC as lacking ideology and popular support goes against reality and limits policy effectiveness.

Talking about terrorism is talking about violence, but a particular type of violence. A terrorist action is one whose psychological impact is greater than merely its material consequences. Even if it is violence whose scope is less than that of other types of possible violence, those who carry out the violent action or instigate its execution seek to condition people's behavior by instilling fear<sup>37</sup>. Above all, terrorism shakes the bases of liberal ideals supporting the modern western Nation State and the international system.

Unlike some isolated individuals, or groups, we would not like to keep referring to terrorism without exploring the implications of the term. This has been a practice used for political purposes and sometimes with the intention to protect illegal markets.

The purpose of political terrorism is to alter the power structure and distribution and influence social cohesion and integration processes in a certain community<sup>38</sup>; that is, it is a specific method of political violence. Illustrations of this are the attacks executed by the FARC at Mr. Uribe's inaugural presidential address in 2002.

For terrorist violence to cause fear and psychological impact, it needs to be executed systematically and without notice. Here, the victims' death or mutilation is used as a message to credit the threats, which makes of terrorism both a communication

and propaganda method, as well as a method for social control. This is what distinguishes terrorism from other forms of violence aimed at avoiding publicity, as in the case of ordinary delinquency or profit-driven organized crime<sup>39</sup>.

Terrorism adopts an insurgent posture if it seeks to modify power relationships or the existent social order. Here, it is possible to distinguish its tactical or auxiliary use from its strategic or preferential use<sup>40</sup>. It is true that there have been terrorist actions in Colombia, but the conflict evolves mostly around confrontations between rival groups or military war operations.

As discussed here, in armed conflicts terrorism is used for different purposes but terrorism itself is not a purpose. What characterizes an action as terrorist is not whether its political purpose is legitimate, but rather what the means used are to achieve such purpose<sup>41</sup>. This explains why a terrorist uses terrorism for different purposes and through distinct methods. Thus, terrorism is a medium, not an objective for terrorist groups. Obviously, this does not justify terrorism, which should be openly condemned and its goals deprived of any legitimacy.

To sum up, it is important to remark that irregular armed groups, the Colombian government, and the Military Force are responsible for the existence of the Colombian conflict. The government's speech condemns extreme violence—the degradation of violence by subversive groups—but it ignores that the establishment has also promoted indiscriminate violence, not just because of omission, but actively as well<sup>42</sup>. Violence exerted by non-state agents is considered to be irrational, barbaric, and unjustified, while violence carried out by the establishment is seen as fair and preventive. It is the government's obligation to preserve stability and security but many times state security policies endanger civilian life and violate international conventions on wars and human rights. As reported by international human rights organizations, in Colombia violence against civilians is exerted by all those who are involved in the confrontation.

The considerable amount of resources Colombia gets from the U.S. has sprung numerous debates in the American Senate chamber, with economic aid being the issue that gets the most attention from both Democrats and Republicans. Their allegation is that in Colombia the army has been accused of violating Human Rights and International Human Rights and that the paramilitary movement has flourished under state military protection. The American pressure to stop human rights violations and

paramilitary actions as a condition to maintain its economic support has resulted in an effort to control military excess.

Human security is seen as being fear-free and need-free. Therefore, the first step to realize this is to assure that the State, which is the source of the distribution of social benefits, is not a fear distributor.

## **Conclusions**

The case of Colombia is used here to demonstrate that its armed conflict has been approached from explanatory perspectives which are insufficient to fully explain the war and its dynamics, in addition to having negative effects on the evolution of the conflict. These narratives do not consider all the factors producing the conflict, thus they ignore some causative factors or their interrelationships, including the link between the economy of war and the population, or that between these economies and the global economic system, in addition to ignoring the consequences of the conflict. Those narratives that render greed and offense irreconcilable fail to acknowledge that these two phenomena are in fact interrelated, something that is common in the history of wars, in general.

The way in which the Colombian conflict is explained and the constant transformation of its narratives— always evolving around a security threat— have produced a series of solutions that have exacerbated the confrontation. Though the armed groups involved in the conflict have carried out actions, most of which are clearly deplorable, it is necessary to acknowledge the social and structural foundations of the conflict: the existence of a political speech aimed at taking over power, the community that provides combatants, and the insertion of the groups to a predatory economic system.

It is argued that a critical perspective for the construction of a human security agenda should consider all the factors and implications of conflicts. It should understand them as phenomena responding to multiple interests and deviate from a simplistic securitization of poverty if it is to guarantee access to wellbeing and human rights enjoyment.

In short, an attempt has been made to construct conflict narratives that integrate grievance into the political economy of war, narratives that go beyond the classical



state security vision to become policies that understand that war and its disastrous outcome are the tip of the iceberg of profound social transformational processes which cannot be ignored and treated as security threats, but as evidence of the need to reconstruct social structures, create social consensus and have all those playing a role in the conflict commit themselves to bring about lasting solutions; this both at the national and international levels.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See Ramirez, W. (2002), “Guerra Civil en Colombia” [Civil War in Colombia], in *Análisis político* No. 46, p. 160

<sup>2</sup> According to realists, states seek only their own interest, their main objective being the attainment of power in the international order. War between states is, then, inevitable and security serves as the key aspect of international relations. In addition, domestic affairs do not play a role in international relations in which every nation seeks its own predominance.

<sup>3</sup> Neo-realism explains international events on the basis of power distribution among nations, rather than according to their military power. Here, less powerful nations are subject to the game played by more powerful nations which fight their disputes in small battle fields.

<sup>4</sup> Those countries integrated into the production system and located in the political center of the confrontation were the center of the system; those which were not integrated and had no decision power were considered peripheral to the system. This distinction is frequently used in the analysis of underdevelopment theories.

<sup>5</sup> The direct antecedent of the Colombian armed conflict is the period of *La Violencia* that goes from 1948 to 1960, approximately. This was a period of selective violence carried out mainly by the members of the traditional political parties (Conservative and Liberal) and, sometimes, by the members of the Colombian Communist Party.

<sup>6</sup> See Kaldor, M. (1999), *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Cambridge: Polity

<sup>7</sup> *Grievance* is the term used to refer to the social conditions originating and justifying revolutionary unrests.

<sup>8</sup> Duffield, M. (2004). *Las Nuevas Guerras en el Mundo Global* [New Wars in a Global World], Madrid: Catarata, p. 40

<sup>9</sup> Marchal, R. and Messiant, C. (2004). “Las Guerras Civiles en la Era de la Globalización: Nuevos Conflictos y Nuevos Paradigmas” [Civil Wars in a Global Era: New Conflicts and New Paradigms] in *Análisis Político*, No.50, p.22

<sup>10</sup> Duffield, Op. cit., p. 156

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. pp. 168-169

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 209

<sup>13</sup> Gaitán, F. (1995), “Una indagación sobre las causas de la violencia en Colombia” [An inquiry into the Causes of Violence in Colombia] in Deas, M. & Gaitán, F. (1995). *Dos ensayos especulativos sobre la violencia en Colombia* [Two Speculative Essays on Violence in Colombia], Bogotá, FONADE & DNP, p.37

- <sup>14</sup> See The Database on Violence in Colombia. CINEP, Bogota.
- <sup>15</sup> Holsti, K. (1991). *The state, the war and the state of war*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University press, pp. 99-122.
- <sup>16</sup> Duffield, Op. cit., p. 209
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid. p.209
- <sup>18</sup> Paul Oquist first used the term Partially Failed State. See Oquist, P. (1978). *Violencia política y conflicto en Colombia* [Political Violence and Conflict in Colombia], Bogotá, Instituto de Estudios Colombianos, Banco Popular
- <sup>19</sup> Holsti, Op. Cit., p. 94
- <sup>20</sup> McLean, P. (2002). "Colombia: Failed, Failing, or Just Weak?" in *The Washington Quarterly*, summer 2002, p.123
- <sup>21</sup> Pecaut. D. Colombia: violencia y democracia [Colombia: Violence and Democracy] in *Análisis político* No. 13, May/Aug. 199, pp. 35-49.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.42.
- <sup>23</sup> See De Sousa B. & García, M.(2001). *El Calidoscopio de las justicias en Colombia* [The Kaleidoscope of Injustice in Colombia]. Bogotá, COLCIENCIAS, U. de Coimbra, CES, UN, Siglo XXI Editores; Orozco, I. (1994). *Combatientes rebeldes y terroristas, Guerra y Derecho en Colombia* [Rebel and Terrorist Fighters: War and Rights in Colombia]. Bogotá, Editorial Temis, UN; Uprimny R. (1990). "la palabra y la sangre: violencia, legalidad y guerra sucia en Colombia" [Word and Blood: Violence, Legality, and Dirty War in Colombia], in *Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación 1993, las violencias en Colombia: hechos, interpretaciones y búsqueda de alternativas*. Bogota, CEREC.
- <sup>24</sup> See Deas, M. (1995), "Canjes violentos: reflexiones sobre la violencia política en Colombia" [Violent Exchanges: Reflections on Political Violence in Colombia]. In Deas, M. and Gaitan, F. (1995). *Dos ensayos especulativos sobre la violencia en Colombia* [Two Speculative Essays on Violence in Colombia], Bogotá, FONADE & DNP, p. 79
- <sup>25</sup> Woodward, S. (2004). *Fragile States: Exploring the Concept*. A FRIDE Working Paper, p. 2
- <sup>26</sup> Restrepo, J. (2001), "Análisis Económico de los Conflictos Internos" [An Economic Analysis of Internal Conflicts], in *Documentos, Ideas, Paz*. p.9
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.10
- <sup>28</sup> Duffield, Op. cit., p. 175
- <sup>29</sup> Initially submitted by the Pastrana Administration to the Clinton Administration as an economic and social program to consolidate peace in Colombia, Plan Colombia became a frontal fighting strategy against the drug trafficking and, later, against rebel groups through its military and social component, financed mainly by the United States, its most controversial activity being the eradication of illegal plantations by means of crop spraying.
- <sup>30</sup> Guaqueta, A. (2003). The Colombian Conflict: Political and Economic Dimensions, in Ballentine, K. & Sherman, J. (Edits., 2003) *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond the Greed and Grievance*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers
- <sup>31</sup> Interview with Milton Friedman, translated by Adriana de la Espriella and published in *Arcanos*, May- July of 2001, pp 40-45
- <sup>32</sup> Raw material for heroin production
- <sup>33</sup> "Drug dealing, the Transnational of the Poor", the heading of a Colombian Daily Newspaper report

- <sup>34</sup> Lair, E. (2002). A Book Review: New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era, in *Análisis Político*, No. 45, p. 105
- <sup>35</sup> Wieviorka M. (1992). Terrorismo y Violencia Política[Terrorism and Political Violence] in *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, Tercera Época, No. 2, p.170
- <sup>36</sup> Tickner, A. (edit., 2004). *Colombia y Estados Unidos, Desafíos de una alianza* [Colombia and the United States: The Challenges of an Alliance]. A Policy Paper, Bogotá: Colombia Internacional. p.2
- <sup>37</sup> Reinares F. (2003). *Terrorismo global* [Global Terrorism], Madrid, Santillana, pp. 16-18
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp. 16-18
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-18
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-18
- <sup>41</sup> Gil, L. (2004). *La ONU y el Terrorismo* [The UN and Terrorism]. An Occasional Paper of *Fundación Seguridad y Democracia*, available at [www.seguridadydemocracia.org](http://www.seguridadydemocracia.org)
- <sup>42</sup> Among them, the cases of human rights violation and international human rights violations by the Colombian Military Force, which have been extensively documented in various reports by organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

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