COLOMBIA IS KNOWN AS a violent country. Never in its history has it had a lengthy period of peace. One particularly violent period in the twentieth century was given the ultimate name in the terrorism game—La Violencia, “the violence.” Conducting a study of terrorism is difficult in a country with such a history and doubly so because Colombian society does not recognize or admit that terrorism exists. Indeed, research for this essay began with an attempt to locate a specialist on terrorism in Colombia, only to find that the academic community in that country denies the existence of such a specialty. The most one could find were specialists known as violentologos (violentologists), although even these were careful to specify that they were not specialists on terrorism because Colombia has had so little terrorism in its past. In fact, the current phase of terrorism has claimed more than thirty thousand lives and shows no signs of slowing down. This anecdote is presented as evidence of the difficulty of defining the multifaceted aspect of political violence in Colombia. Merely describing the various types of terrorism and terrorist acts there would take up all the allotted space in this book.
Colombians have developed many methods of coping with high levels of violence, ranging from constantly ducking for cover to leaving the country. This essay attempts to define the various manifestations of terrorism and the counterterrorism strategies of the national government in attempting to carry out its mandate to provide protection and dignity for all of its citizens. It will analyze the best practices evident in Colombia as well as present a discussion of which strategies have not worked.

DEFINITIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The general definition of terrorism given as a starting point for this essay is codified in the Geneva Conventions, that is, violence carried out by subnational groups intended to impose fear and through that fear achieve political objectives. The term terrorism (or terrorist act) indicates a premeditated, politically motivated violence against noncombatant targets by subnational groups, usually intended to influence the targets. The term terrorist group means any group (or a subset of a group) that practices terrorism to achieve political goals. The term noncombatant includes civilians as well as military, police, or government personnel who are unarmed at the time of the terrorist act. In Colombia, many terrorist acts are part of a larger phenomenon of politically inspired violence, which includes acts of war as well as terrorism. At times, this line between acts of terrorism and acts of war is difficult to distinguish.

VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM IN COLOMBIA

Colombia’s violence is deeply ingrained in the history of the country. On July 20, 1810, a representative council was created in Bogotá in an act of repudiation of the authority of the Spanish king in Madrid. Three years later Colombia declared its independence, although it took another six years to achieve. Gran Colombia’s first president was Simon Bolivar,1 who presided over an area that included Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama, and Colombia. His vice president was Francisco de Paula Santander, who founded what later became the Liberal Party. Bolivar himself led the Conservatives.
Colombia's history is one of conflict between these two parties, which includes two major civil conflicts—the War of One Thousand Days (1899–1902) and La Violencia (1948–65)—one said to have resulted in the deaths of more than four hundred thousand Colombians. Nonetheless, there have been only three periods of military government: in 1830 when Ecuador and Venezuela seceded from Gran Colombia, in 1854 during a civil war, and in 1953–57, when an attempt was made to stop La Violencia. Civil government and open elections have been traditional in Colombia despite this history of violence. This development is an odd juxtaposition of violence and democratic practice that often defies common historical patterns.

During La Violencia, the internecine political fighting became violent as the political parties followed the previous pattern of fighting civil wars to establish political supremacy. This time, however, a new element was introduced: Marxist communism as an ideology among some of the Liberal Party groups. When Gen. Rojas Pinillas was given political power as president with the collusion of the main political parties, the communist guerrillas refused amnesty and took to the hills to fight against the entire political system. These guerrilla groups later coalesced into what is now known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

Other armed bands appeared on the scene as well, proclaiming variations on the Marxist communist agenda. The National Liberation Army (ELN) followed the Cuban model of revolution, hoping to attain in Colombia what communist leader Fidel Castro had achieved in Cuba. The M–19, a guerrilla group with no clearly discernible ideology, was founded by middle-class students trained in guerrilla tactics by the Cuban military. Its attack on the Palace of Justice in Bogotá and its subsequent violent suppression by the army were a shock to many Colombians, long accustomed to high levels of violence. The toll in lives was 115, including 11 Supreme Court justices. Another guerrilla group, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), claimed to be agrarian by way of ideology and took Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong as its hero and mentor.

All Colombian presidents since the Frente Nacional (National Front) coalition (1957–76) have attempted to negotiate with these guerrilla groups, with various levels of success. President Belisario Betancur (1982–86) succeeded in granting amnesty to many individual guerrillas who surrendered their arms and reintegrated
themselves peacefully into society. His successors, Virgilio Barco and eventually Cesar Gaviria, negotiated amnesty and reintegration agreements with the M–19, EPL, and Quintin Lamé indigenous rights guerrilla group, granting them generous monetary and political incentives. The FARC and ELN, however, used these cease-fire and amnesty periods to regroup and rearm themselves for increased violence after the offers expired.

During the early 1970s, informal criminal organizations began to coalesce around the increasingly profitable business of smuggling marijuana and cocaine into the United States. Several “cartels” were formed, the most notorious being that of Pablo Escobar and Rodrigo González Gacha, acting as insurance and logistics brokers for multiton shipments of cocaine to North America and Europe. Attempts to bring these criminals to justice led to a new phenomenon, that of narcoterrorism, as Escobar and his cohorts launched an indiscriminate bombing campaign in Colombia to dissuade the government in Bogotá from extraditing them to the United States for justice. They preferred trial and jail in Colombia, where their incredible wealth could subvert the system in favor of low sentences and posh jails. The levels of violence escalated to the point at which three presidential candidates were assassinated prior to 1990. Escobar’s death at the hands of a National Police special unit in 1993 ended the campaign of terror, although sporadic terrorist incidents have recurred whenever the issue of extradition is raised.

A recent description of the effects of terrorism on Colombia’s society was given by a well-known journalist.

Hundreds of thousands of families displaced. Tens of thousands of citizens kidnapped. Thousands of businessmen and their families fleeing the country because of the danger. Dozens of intellectuals assassinated or threatened. Dozens of human-rights activists dead and disappeared. Hundreds of journalists exiled, kidnapped and murdered. The internal armed conflict that Colombia is living through today destroys the country and its future. Citizens from all social classes feel in their own flesh the pain of war.

Kidnappings today top 3,000 per year and represent a $700 million business (45 percent to the guerrillas and the rest to common criminals). About 6 percent of the kidnapping victims are killed during their detention, and government forces claim to rescue only about
Many Manifestations of Terrorism

There are many manifestations of any definition of terrorism in Colombia. Fear is a word used by all Colombians to express their primary concern: fear of not being able to leave their homes, fear of not making it safely through the day, and fear that their families will be kidnapped or killed at any time. One of Colombia’s basic philosophical foundations, human dignity and respect for life, is gradually disappearing from society and the national discourse. The most visible causes of this fear are the Marxist insurgent groups: the FARC, ELN, and EPR. Their strategies and tactics involve many acts of terrorism in that they kill peasants suspected of colluding with the paramilitaries and they kidnap for ransom, preying on anyone suspected of possessing wealth beyond that prescribed by their communist dogma. They also use traditional military strategies and tactics and target the police and other symbols of government presence.

As with armed units in any other internal conflict, terrorists conduct military operations with specific strategic goals. The problem is that in Colombia these strategic goals include using the civil population as a “strategic tool” to achieve military advantage. Marxist guerrillas target the civilian population for kidnapping, extortion, and threats to safety in order to obtain resources to feed their military apparatus. Criminal behavior is justified in terms of “people’s taxes” on the oligarchies, defined as anyone with enough income to pay them.

Armed private security groups, known as the right-wing paramilitaries, are loosely organized under Carlos Castano’s United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and trace their origins to the legal self-defense groups of the 1980s. Their stated purpose is to fulfill the government’s responsibility to defend the populace outside of the cities and rid the country of the scourge of Marxist guerrillas. Most of their tactics are considered to be acts of terrorism in that
they assassinate peasants accused or suspected of collusion with the guerrillas. These groups use murder as a mechanism to “clear” new territories of Marxist guerrillas and then impose their own control to dissuade the population from supporting the insurgents. Again, fear is their best ally.

These four groups—the FARC, ELN, EPR, and AUC—account for the majority of terrorist casualties in Colombia. However, a distinction must be made between the many acts of war they conduct against the armed forces of Colombia, or each other, and the acts of terrorism they conduct against the government or population in general. For instance, the massed troop attack by the FARC during November 1999 against the military posts at Puerto Inirida were an act of war; the destruction of electric pylons by the FARC and ELN in Antioquia Department during the same month were acts of terrorism in that they targeted the general population, not uniformed government forces. Ambushes of ELN columns by the AUC are acts of war, whereas AUC assassinations of peasants suspected of collaboration with the ELN are acts of terrorism calculated to intimidate the populace into refusing support to the Marxists.

Colombia also suffers from narcoterrorism, so called because the perpetrators are individuals or groups involved in the illegal drug business who carry out acts of terrorism to affect national policy related to drugs, such as the Treaty of Extradition with the United States. This phenomenon of using terrorism to affect national policy occurred with intensity during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the U.S. government was pressuring the governments of Vigilio Barco and Cesar Gaviria to extradite known drug cartel leaders. A favorite weapon in this venue was the car bomb because of the indiscriminate way in which it spread fear. There have been recent manifestations of narcoterrorism, such as when President Andres Pastrana initially agreed to extradite several Colombian cocaine smugglers to the United States in December of 1999. With the dismantling of the cartels, this tactic may well be a phenomenon of the past. Public support of Pastrana helped solidify the policy, and the bombings stopped after the first offender was extradited.

Other aspects of terrorism manifested in Colombia could be described as economic terrorism, such as the practice of kidnapping wealthy individuals for ransom or forcing farmers in areas under guerrilla control to grow quotas of coca leaf. There is a new and
increasing terrorism targeted against specific sectors of society, such as the selected assassination and intimidation of intellectuals or journalists who study or write about the war and security issues in general.

And, finally, one aspect of terrorism combines several elements of corruption, terrorism, narcoterrorism, and crime—all specifically targeted at the armed forces. There are many documented cases of FARC or ELN operatives targeting specific members of the military by attempting to blackmail them into criminal activity through force. This is the famous plomo o plata choice offered to many Colombian military or police personnel, consisting of an offer of plata (money) or some other reward balanced by the threat of a plomo (bullet) if the offer is not accepted. Sometimes the offer is money in exchange for intelligence or operational orders for the next week. Sometimes the offer is more aggressive, asking the victim to alter orders or leave certain areas of operation vacant for a period of time. Frequently, the threat is against the individual, and just as frequently it is against the family of the victim. This threat places members of the military in an untenable position, where they have to choose between loyalty to the country, the service, and their comrades in arms on the one hand and, on the other, their families, whom they cannot protect while out on operations. In a variation of the plomo o plata threat, the FARC has long offered a reward for the assassination of Air Force pilots, U.S. contract pilots conducting counterdrug fumigation operations, and, more recently, off-duty Colombian police and military personnel.

Acts of Terrorism, Acts of War

It is important to distinguish between acts of terrorism and acts of war because each has its own set of legal criteria under which government forces can act. Acts of war involve armed combatants and are dealt with primarily by political means, such as negotiations and amnesties, or through military action. Acts of terrorism, however, deal with unarmed civilians or military personnel and require a different set of legal criteria, which puts unique pressures on the national leaders involved.

Colombia has long dealt with Marxist insurgents as recognized political entities, which makes it difficult to refer to them as terror-
ists. The government deals with them through political negotiations, although they admittedly are involved in terrorist acts. Such terrorist acts can be dealt with by legal means at the national level (Colombian criminal law), international humanitarian law, or international human rights law. Unfortunately, Colombia does not have counterterrorism legislation, as its leaders prefer to use their constitutional and legal powers to dictate law or executive orders to resolve such crises in public order. An example is article 187 of Colombia’s criminal code, which punishes terrorism as criminal conduct against public security.6

The confusing situation that results from defining terrorism from different points of view can be seen in the argument between the insurgents and the national forces over the placement of police stations within city limits. Where else should a police station be placed? Police forces exist to enforce national or local law in their areas of responsibility. Building a police station outside of the city limits would be ludicrous in that it increases reaction time to the point where the forces become useless in defending the population from criminals or terrorists. However, the FARC claims that this placement of a police station within a city is a violation of international norms because it creates collateral damage when the FARC attacks police (or military) stations. Collateral damage refers to the death or injury of innocent civilians who live or work near the police station. Basically, the FARC is asking the Colombian government to vacate the cities, towns, and municipalities so that the guerrillas can attack the police stations with minimum damage to neighboring areas. Of course, this would leave the towns defenseless against the FARC predators, something it wants but also something that violates the basic documents of governance in Colombia. However, the Colombian government has developed no strategy or public relations campaign to counter this argument because it assumes that the authority of a state to place police stations within the civil society for its protection is the normal thing to do. It assumes that normal practice does not need defending.

A differentiation made regarding the various actors in Colombian terrorism is the distinction between the political Left and Right. American assistance to Colombia is based on U.S. executive policy that prohibits assistance for counterinsurgency, thus prohibiting military aid to fight the FARC, ELN, and EPR. However,
assistance can be provided for (and is usually conditioned on) fighting the right-wing paramilitary groups. There is a recent move within the nongovernmental organization (NGO) human rights community to classify the paramilitaries as a terrorist group and to apply pressure on the United States to use its antidrug assistance against the paramilitaries for their terrorist acts. These same NGOs tend to oppose all U.S. assistance to the Colombian military on the grounds that it is corrupt and heavily involved in human rights violations. However, the NGOs offer no alternative plan for assistance to government forces, thus begging the question of who will impose the law and order they promote as a requirement for reducing such violations.

THREAT PERCEPTION

A major impact of the violence and terrorism in Colombia is the aggregate level of fear resulting from the unprecedented high level of instability and terror inflicted on society in general and governance specifically. All of these different elements produce a level of terror that each on its own could not produce, engendering other situations that impact the ability of society and the government to operate in a normal manner. As stated previously, violence has always been a part of Colombian politics, but the increasing level of lawlessness and near anarchy brought on by the FARC and ELN since 1985 has created an environment in which trust—in anyone—has almost disappeared.

This lack of trust now permeates society to the point where faith in the government’s ability to deal with the security situation has almost evaporated. This situation is especially critical within the very forces entrusted to combat terrorism, increasing the compartmentalization of intelligence and information and reducing cooperation and joint action. The military and police have been forced to spend scarce resources and time investigating personnel and developing confidence-building measures within their institutions to overcome this result of terrorism. To date, this effort has met with a high degree of success. Evidence of the military and police’s ability to overcome the lack of trust is to be found in the increasing popularity of their institutions with the population at large: the military ranks
much higher in popularity polls than the rest of the government and only slightly below such traditionally popular institutions as the Catholic Church and the press.

Crime levels are extremely high, and justice is extremely rare. The U.S. Department of State report on human rights for 1999 puts the level of impunity at 97 percent, which means that only 3 percent of all reported cases of crime result in a trial. Furthermore, conviction rates are reportedly low. The net effect is severely negative, for criminals find that they can operate with impunity against a terrorized population in various forms, including kidnapping for profit (economic terrorism), forced labor (coca cultivation in FARC-controlled areas), extortion for protection (ELN threats to bomb the oil pipeline), kidnapping of minors who are forced to join the ranks of the guerrillas, and other copycat types of crime.

The effect of this terrorism is serious. Colombia is in its second year of economic recession, which is partially the result of the corruption of the Ernesto Samper administration but in great part because of the terrorism rampant throughout the country. One stated purpose of the terrorist acts conducted by the ELN is to scare away foreign investment from Colombia’s natural resources. A recent study from Florida International University indicates that there has been a tremendous increase in foreign money entering banks in Miami, to the tune of $30.6 billion in foreign deposits in 2000, up from $12.4 billion in 1998. A high percentage of that money comes from Colombia because of falling confidence in the economy of that country. Capital flight from Colombia reached $700 million in 1999 and has increased since the FARC announced a new policy of “taxing” national estates with more than $1 million in assets.

Threat Environment and Legal Framework

One complicated concept in Colombia’s legal system is that of private dignity, an individual right embedded in the constitution. The basic concept is that of natural law, in which the foundation of individual rights emanates from the individual, not from the constitution or the state. People are considered to be rational individuals with an inherent essence that is unique and individual; from this essence emanates the natural rights of man. In other words, the law and its rights emanate from the individual, not vice versa. The impact of
this concept on this essay is that Colombian law is based on the concept that acts of terrorism perpetrated against individuals violate the individual’s inherent dignity. Terrorist acts, in effect, prevent individuals from maintaining and defending their dignity. Terrorist acts prevent the individual from exercising self-determination, thus violating his or her fundamental human rights.

The significance of this legal concept is that it can be used as a strategy to counter terrorism by providing the Colombian government with a juridical framework in which to combat the terrorists. Unfortunately, this framework of individual dignity has never been used at the national level. Despite having this underpinning of natural law and a highly specific delineation of national responsibilities in the constitution, the law has not been used to provide citizens with an environment in which they can exercise natural law. In fact, adherence to natural right without national-level support has resulted in individuals taking the law into their own hands and depending on themselves for their personal safety. The absence of a counterterrorism strategy developed by national leaders has forced a situation in which the basic foundation of the national charter (natural right) is ignored with impunity at all but individual levels. Of course, those individuals with anarchical or predatory tendencies can easily take advantage of such a situation, which they do. The narcotraffickers abuse the lack of law and order to ply their illegal trade, the guerrillas abuse the lack of government presence to impose their dogmas on the population, the criminal elements prey on the undefended populace, and the paramilitary groups take advantage of the anarchy to attack their perceived enemies. The only group in Colombia that does not adequately use the national principle of natural law is the government.

Thus, despite its elegant and sophisticated constitution, terrorism is rampant in Colombia. Human rights and international humanitarian law are continuously violated, although such crimes can be dealt with through the application of international law. Given that the government is not applying Colombian law, the next recourse is to use international humanitarian law to punish terrorist acts committed by the guerrillas and self-defense groups. International humanitarian law protects the civil population and noncombatants during an internal conflict. Specifically, article 33 of the Geneva Convention relates to the protection of civilians in time of
war. It states that such protected persons may not be punished for offenses not personally committed and that collective penalties and acts of intimidation or terrorism are prohibited. Likewise, pillage and reprisals against protected persons or their property are prohibited. Other protocols in the convention include protocol II, which relates to the protection of victims of noninternational armed conflicts (adopted in 1977), and the Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts.

Of course, the use of international law supposes a force sufficiently strong to apply it, something that currently does not exist in Colombia. This argument could be used in the future to advocate foreign intervention. But as yet no one has advocated such a strategy, and no foreign country has shown an interest in taking on Colombia’s insecurity problems. Sixty-five percent of Colombians have shown an interest in this option, according to a 1999 poll responding to a question on the possibility of using U.S. troops to pacify the country.9

COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGIES

This section will attempt to describe the many counterterrorism strategies used throughout Colombia by the various actors involved. The first strategy analyzed is a feature of all recent Colombian governments: none has developed or implemented a specific strategy. Obviously, this is a failed strategy in that it has engendered much of the instability in Colombia today and has led to a reliance on the U.S. government for strategic guidance. Other strategies include muddling through crisis decision making, changing labels to counter various groups in a policy vacuum, strategic dependence on one group of terrorists to counter others, reactive strategies, the on-again, off-again strategy of extradition, attempting to accommodate illegal practices (prohibiting the payment of ransom), changing labels as a military strategy, codependency on various groups, and negotiating settlements. A case study in accommodation, the experience of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church in Colombia throughout the past decades of violence warrants special attention.
Colombia has debated and acted on counterterrorism strategies to the point of signing international agreements intended to stop specific types of terrorism. For instance, in 1963 Colombia signed the Convention on Offenses and Certain Other Acts on Board Aircraft, also known as the Tokyo Convention, which applies to actions by terrorists that affect the in-flight safety of passengers. In 1970, Colombia also signed the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft, also known as the Hague Convention, which was drafted to stop the hijacking of aircraft. The third is the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation, also known as the Montreal Convention, which applies to acts of aviation sabotage such as bombings or the armed takeover of aircraft in flight. More related to the terrorism commonly associated with Colombia, President Gaviria attempted throughout his administration to develop a national security policy on which to base strategy and tactics for combating terrorism and war. But his project failed to pass Congress and was abandoned by his successor.

As mentioned previously, one of the interesting aspects of studying how Colombians deal with high levels of violence is that until very recently few acknowledged that terrorism exists in the country. The society is so acculturated to violence that everyone talks about specific acts of terrorism but few treat the issue as a whole. Among academics, no one is considered an expert in terrorism, although there is a specific branch of sociology dedicated to the study of violence—violentologia. Specialists in this discipline acknowledge the political objectives of the perpetrators but hesitate to acknowledge that such acts meet the general definition of terrorism. The impact on government of this phenomenon is serious, as these academics have traditionally been called on to serve as presidential advisers for security issues. Because they do not recognize the problem as one of terrorism, they do not advise the government to develop counterterrorism strategies, preferring instead to recommend military solutions, negotiated settlements, or police strategies to deal with specific acts, such as kidnapping for ransom, bank robberies, or bombing campaigns conducted by drug mafias.

Society, in effect, has been left on its own, resulting in the development of various nongovernmental counterterrorism strategies, some of which cause serious security problems for the government.
Wealthy businessmen and members of the rural landowning elite, for instance, often take matters into their own hands, pooling resources to finance self-protection forces, known variously as self-defense groups under differing legal regimes, as right-wing militias, or as paramilitary death squads. Legitimate or not, these forces perform a basic function normally performed by government forces. In the absence of an effective government presence throughout most of the country, these groups are the primary defense against the depredations of the Marxist insurgent forces.

A second consideration relating to the development of counterterrorism strategies is the idealism of most of the actors. Most studies of Colombia’s problems begin and end with statements relating to the need to develop an environment in which law and order exists, a genuine commitment from all the parties in the conflict to respect the human rights of the civilian population, or some such other idealistic scenario. None of these statements acknowledges the reality that Colombian society has become inured to or tolerant of high levels of violence and tolerant of terrorism as political dialogue. None considers that only those sectors of society concerned with respect for the rule of law are not part of the conflict but instead are the victims of terrorism. The warring parties (the Marxist guerrillas, the paramilitary groups, and select sectors of the government) have a definite objective in mind and use terrorism and the violence of war to achieve it. Law and order are the last things on their minds, unless law and order can reduce the risks that they take during combat operations.

Thus, the guerrillas and paramilitaries talk of negotiations, pacification, or humanization of the conflict and make promises to respect law and order while continuing the indiscriminate use of violence and terrorism. The government must take this fact into consideration when developing counterterrorism strategies to confront these groups.

Crisis Decision Making

A third consideration for developing a counterterrorism strategy is the way in which decisions are made in Colombia. Part of the reason for the lack of a comprehensive policy (security and otherwise) is the tendency among Colombian leaders to not formulate a plan
before crises erupt. Thus, policy tends to be reactive and the decision makers are constantly overwhelmed by events. They end up reacting to crises, never getting far enough ahead to think through and plan objectives and the way to achieve them.

In the case of counterterrorism policy, the president has in place a bureaucratic apparatus to advise and assist him in enacting policy. According to the 1991 constitution, the president has at his disposal a crisis management committee to develop policy and guidance for governance. This committee consists of himself, the vice president, the minister of defense, and the military chief of staff. This group has historically been convened to deal with major security threats such as the war against the FARC and ELN; seldom, if ever, has the committee been convened to deal with terrorism per se or to develop a policy for countering terrorism. As a committee the group has no direct authority other than that given to its members in their individual offices. Moreover, the group is empowered to act only in an advisory capacity.

The decision-making methodology used in Colombia has been one of reacting to the intense pressures of the various actors in the conflict. For example, the severe level of violence used by Pablo Escobar in the early 1990s, which was aimed specifically at President Gaviria’s efforts to extradite him to the United States, pressured Gaviria into changing his interpretation of the extradition law. Pressure by the United States then forced another change in the law, this time under President Samper, allowing the extradition. Remnants of this flip-flop were evident in 1999 when President Pastrana began extraditing drug smugglers to the United States under a new interpretation of the 1979 U.S.-Colombia Treaty of Extradition. This kind of situation results in a zero-sum game in which a gain for one side causes a loss to another, and also a loss to Colombia, no matter what the outcome.¹⁰

The constant changes in policy, each manifesting a bow to extreme pressure, represent a reactive strategy that attempts to cope with pressure from terrorists and other groups. The fact that the government changes its policy under pressure gives the terrorists hope that their objectives can be met and encourages more terrorism. The only way to escape this cycle is to find an effective leader capable of withstanding the pressure long enough to develop a coherent and stable policy and then demonstrate the strength to im-
plement it. Pastrana used this strategy when he hardened his position on extradition in the face of violence, ending the flip-flop cycle and providing Colombia with a rare example of a successful counterterrorism initiative. It must be recognized that Gaviria’s defeat of Pablo Escobar and Samper’s success in jailing members of the Cali cartel changed the level of power of the actors, leading to Pastrana’s success.

Lack of a Cohesive Strategy

As stated previously, Colombia has never developed a coherent or coordinated counterterrorism strategy or policy at the national level. The only written national security policy I have been able to document was the 1932 law that united the state militias into one army to confront a Peruvian invasion (called the Leticia Incident). The next similar policy was the unwritten guidance provided to the military and police during La Violencia, which basically stated that the military was to protect the cities and leave the rural areas to their own devices. President Gaviria initiated the next attempt in 1990 by creating a group of security advisers to develop what was called the National Strategy against Violence. His plan was to force the political class in Colombia to assume responsibilities ignored for too long, to create a Ministry of Defense under a civilian minister, and to form a National Security Council, all in an effort to develop a strategy for planning the future pacification of Colombia. But bureaucratic inertia overtook this ambitious project, and the Escobar bombing campaign in response to his agreement to extradite drug traffickers to the United States effectively ended this unique attempt to end the cycle of violence. Of note, Escobar’s escape from prison (La Catedral) after bribing his police and military guards damaged this project as much as the bombing campaign did.

Offensive tactical successes have been achieved in specific instances, such as the destruction of the FARC’s Casa Verde headquarters in 1990 (not altogether proven to have been a good idea) and the assault against M–19 terrorists who had taken over the Supreme Court building (not exactly considered a success, given the high number of casualties incurred). Several attempts have been made to develop such counterterrorism policies, although none has gained success at the strategic level. Most attempts at
counterterrorism have been made at the tactical level and have resulted in poorly conceived and executed policy, with many overlapping responsibilities, missions, and authorities. The end result for most has been an uneven distribution of authority and budget allocation and a resulting disaster in terms of operations and successes. Few groups are formed with organic expertise, and thus there is a dependence on foreign or external sources for training, doctrine, and equipment.

As an example, President Samper attempted in 1996 to strengthen the ability of the judiciary to deal with terrorism, primarily by amending existing laws and creating new ones to protect prosecutors, judges, and witnesses from intimidation. The basic premise of this reform was to provide a measure of anonymity for the judiciary by permitting “faceless judges” to try high-profile cases in which there was a credible threat of intimidation or subversion by the accused. But these faceless judges were used for purposes other than the original intent, providing the judiciary with a venue susceptible to corruption and “business as usual.” Such misuse of judicial power tends to cast doubt on the validity of judicial decisions and increases opposition from international groups.

Reactive Strategy

Current counterterrorism strategies tend to be based on reactions to specific cases rather than on a dispassionate analysis based on rational, long-range policy. As mentioned previously, Colombia is a signatory to three major international counterterrorism agreements, although all relate specifically to aircraft hijacking. There has been little dialogue in Bogotá on the subject of changing this system, and thus most strategies have evolved as a reaction to the increasing and ever-changing face of violence in the country. Examples of this are the independent courts established in 1991, the kidnapping law of 1996, the specialized judicial system of 1999, and the on-again, off-again nature of the extradition agreement being developed with the United States (analyzed elsewhere in this essay). Reacting to specific cases as a strategy may work in a country in which terrorism is infrequent, but in Colombia this is a failed strategy in that there is simply no chance of catching up to the point of preventing the crime.
Following the U.S. Lead

One major component of the current Colombian government’s strategy in countering the terrorism of the Marxist insurgents, illegal paramilitary groups, and various criminal factions inflicting terror is to substitute U.S. national policy for that of Colombia in exchange for American foreign aid. Early on, during the Pastrana administration, the military spoke in public of its principal mission of reducing the threat to national sovereignty of the FARC and ELN. After the first mention by Gen. Barry McCaffrey, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), of a possible U.S. aid package totaling more than a billion dollars, the U.S. Congress asked Pastrana for a coordinated plan for spending the assistance monies. Pastrana responded with Plan Colombia, a package cobbled together from elements of the U.S. Southern Command’s military advice, the State Department’s goals and objectives for Colombia, and part of his campaign platform (originally called Plan Colombia). That the program (now called Plan Colombia) was not completely Colombian was evident in the repeated calls received by the author of the plan from Colombian news reporters seeking a copy of the plan: apparently it was not available in Bogotá or in Spanish for at least six weeks after its publication! The plan has been amplified and expanded considerably since its initial publication, especially after the U.S. Congress approved a $1.3 billion aid package, as it forms the legal and practical basis for using this assistance.

After Plan Colombia was published, the military no longer referred to its role in countering the FARC and ELN but rather spoke of countering the threat from the narcotraffickers. Drugs became the overriding concern for reducing the threat from the Marxist guerrillas. And at first glance this concern makes a certain sense: the guerrillas are financed substantially by the illegal drug business; the United States promises aid if antidrug operations are increased; the principal source of income for the Marxist guerrillas is removed; and the guerrillas, starved for cash, sue for peace. But this approach ignores the reality that in more than four decades of fighting the war on drugs no one has made a significant dent in the availability or price of the drugs, the principal means of measuring successful antidrug operations.

Thus, it is evident that Colombia has sacrificed its own interests
in favor of the $1.3 billion offered by the Clinton administration, ceding its national security interest (combating the guerrillas) to the interest of the United States (combating drug production). As a counterterrorism strategy, this one has yet to run its course, but given the lack of concern among the population for the drug problem, and given its real concern for the lack of security, it is doubtful that this strategy will outlast the term in office of its major Colombian proponent, President Pastrana. Combating the guerrillas is Colombia’s most pressing security problem at this time, and any strategy that detracts from this concern also detracts from Colombia’s security. Diverting troops and resources from this problem to serve the U.S. concern for stopping the flow of illegal drugs will only prolong the war. As such, then, Plan Colombia can be categorized as one of the many failed counterterrorism strategies that Colombia has adopted. Given the low price for which Colombia is getting this strategy ($1.3 billion), this could easily make it one of the worst practices Colombia has adopted.

Changing Labels as Strategy

Because the civilian government has not provided strategic guidance on which the military can base its doctrine and adequate intelligence collection plans, the military leadership has attempted to fill this gap by creating a national security policy and submitting it to the president for approval. This effort, generally developed in the National War College in Bogotá, has produced several counterterrorism strategies, all predicated on finding new or unique legal means of dealing with the insurgent groups. Several of the armed forces chiefs have worked to develop a definition of what the military calls violence-provoking agents in an effort to find a legal justification for carrying out the military mandates in the constitution. For example, during the early 1990s the FARC and ELN subversives were labeled common delinquents (criminals). This allowed the military to use its mandate to defend the constitutional order from the threat of common delinquency. This strategy also allowed the military to bend the rules of posse comitatus, the authority to arrest citizens. And so, for instance, the military resorted to “arresting” those captured during battle and holding them for interrogation prior to handing them over to the national penal system.
Many times throughout Colombia’s history, and most recently during the 1980s, the government has authorized the formation of private self-defense groups to provide rural areas a measure of protection from the Marxist guerrillas. These were declared illegal by the 1991 constitution; at this point, the military variously labeled them delinquents, narcotraffickers, local militias, or paramilitary groups. Currently, the labeling strategy has returned to attempting to apply the “common delinquents with drug trafficking connections” label, to a great extent as a result of intense pressure from the human rights NGO community and the U.S. government. By using these various labels, the military hopes to bring into force various differing sections of Colombia’s legal system and thus differing responsibilities for the military and police involved. For instance, political prisoners require a specific set of legal protections, such as the kind of penal uniforms they can be required to wear, the courts that have proper jurisdiction over them, and the length of time that they can be held before trial. Likewise, common criminals can be treated in various ways depending on the political situation: during “periods of exception” like states of siege, when civil liberties are restricted, criminals can be held incommunicado without being charged for a much longer period of time than is possible under peaceful conditions. Drug traffickers, under yet another part of Colombian law, are subject to extradition to the United States, a punishment that need not concern domestic terrorists.

This labeling process has varied according to the whim of the senior military officer and his particular philosophy of rule. But the efforts to change the labels and control legal authority were, in effect, attempts to fill the void of civilian leadership and in so doing find a way to carry out the constitutional mandate to provide security to the population. Thus far, none of the various legal regimes appealed to by military leaders as counterterrorism or counterinsurgency strategy has succeeded. But the failure is not the result of inaction by the military; it is directly attributable to the lack of support of the military by the rest of the government. Colombia has not yet witnessed the various parts of its government working in concert to defeat or at least reduce the terrorism, insurgency, and crime that increasingly make it impossible to live and prosper within its borders. Indeed, it could be argued, as do Heyman and Smart, that such efforts at labeling “criminal behavior” serve to
coalesce resistance to the state’s coercive measures and, furthermore, delegitimize the state by proving how inadequate is its ability to suppress illegal behavior.\textsuperscript{13}

Strategic Reliance on the Paramilitaries

One strategy advanced by a renowned Colombian scholar of his country’s violence, Dr. Eduardo Pizarro, is that of codependence on the illegal paramilitaries for strategic objectives.\textsuperscript{14} According to this theory, the military is not directly linked to the paramilitaries in the fight against the Marxist insurgents in that there is no institutional link. There may be individuals in the military at all rank levels who have contact with members of the paramilitary groups, colluding with intelligence or operational and tactical orders, but it is doubtful that this contact rises to the level of collusion on an institutional level. Instead, the military tacitly relies on the presence of the paramilitaries to control certain areas of the country, thus saving scarce resources that can be used to fight the FARC and ELN elsewhere. The link may be strong in those areas in which many Colombian soldiers desert or leave the military and then return to their hometowns to join the paramilitaries. In that situation, the deserters maintain their knowledge of military tactics and operations. Thus, they can serve as a force multiplier for the local military commander, even without his knowledge or permission.

Given the Colombian use of the theory of natural law and the emphasis on the dignity of the individual, the use of self-defense groups throughout the many periods of instability makes a certain sense. In the absence of a government presence, individuals capable of defending themselves do so or band together to work for self-defense. Within this tradition, and in the absence of a specific policy to defend the rural population, it is natural for self-defense groups to form and seek advice or guidance from the local military groups. There was a long tradition of reliance on these groups as force multipliers for the military in the role of force augmentation or intelligence assets. When they were declared illegal, there was no provision for their replacement. It is understandable, then, that military commanders at all levels seek to use philosophical fellow travelers in their conflict with the Marxist rebels. As a military strategy, this approach is probably quite successful, as these illegal groups may pro-
vide intelligence on the FARC and ELN and carry out their own counterinsurgency operations. As a political strategy, however, it runs counter to the national leadership’s orders and subverts the rule of law and the legal balance in civil-military relations.

Extradition

When it became apparent that the Colombian judicial system was incapable of bringing the cocaine cartels to justice, the U.S. government began pressuring Colombia to enforce the 1979 U.S.-Colombian Treaty of Extradition. As mentioned previously, the extreme pressure brought to bear by Escobar and his bombing campaign created a change in policy, with the Colombian Constituent Assembly finding the treaty unconstitutional and imposing a prohibition on extradition. Escobar’s death ended the bombing campaign, but the Cali cartel took up his cause, primarily through a combination of bribery and selective assassination rather than a highly visible bombing campaign. In 1997, Congress again lifted the prohibition on extradition but pushed through a reform that made it not retroactive for crimes committed prior to 1997. The first extradition of a Colombian national took place in November 1999, effectively ending the pressure by the cartels to stop enforcement of the treaty. Again this procedure proved to be a difficult strategy to implement, but persistence and a significant change in personalities (the demise of the Medellin cartel and the jailing of members of the Cali cartel) helped end this extreme manifestation of terrorism. Extradition thus became a rare example of a successful counterterrorism strategy in Colombia.

The Anti-kidnapping Law: Making Ransom Illegal

One counterterrorism strategy attempted in the effort to curb kidnapping was a law passed to make payment of ransom illegal. As is the case with most Colombian law, it assumes that the country is in a state of peace and that kidnapping is an infrequent occurrence, although neither assumption has been true for decades. This law has proved to be unenforceable and was later declared unconstitutional, as few of the thousands of kidnapping cases are reported to law enforcement authorities. Public confidence in the latter’s ability
to deter kidnapping is low, and the probability of paying a ransom to keep kidnap victims alive is high. Few report a kidnapping incident to the authorities. With payment of ransom being illegal, fewer people still reported having paid one to obtain the release of family members. Statistics indicate that the National Police successfully resolve only 20 percent of reported kidnapping cases, too low a percentage for anyone to place much trust in the state forces. Thus, as a counterterrorism strategy this law proved to be an abysmal failure, ignored by most of those affected, and it was eventually discarded. The failure has also demonstrated that as a counterterrorism strategy the law has no deterrence effect on terrorists.

Coexistence as a Strategy

The following case is that of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Colombia, outlining the various strategies it used in coexisting with all the forces arrayed against it throughout Colombia’s recent history. The principal strategy is one of accommodation—at times with the Catholic Church during the early 1900s, the Liberal bandits of the 1950s, and the FARC and ELN of more recent years. With few exceptions, the strategy worked well until 1998: no SDA minister had died at the hands of Catholic or Liberal bandits. Since then, reports indicate that all Protestant churches have suffered heavily, with a total of thirty-eight ministers killed between 1998 and 2000, dozens of churches closed throughout the country, and members left at the mercy of the terrorists.

Until the 1950s, Roman Catholicism had a privileged position in Colombia’s legal system. Protestant religions had long sent missionaries to Colombia, however, under the guise of businessmen, educators, or health care workers. One such case was the SDA church, which began working first in the San Andres and Providencia Islands and then on the mainland, setting up schools and clinics throughout the country. Preachers, however, were forced to disguise their work because the Catholic Church and the government fiercely protected the legal religion’s monopoly in spiritual matters, arresting and persecuting all Protestant ministers. The first strategy developed by the SDA (and this is a worldwide practice) was to avoid getting involved in political issues, a strategy that became critical during the period of La Violencia. A second
strategy was the use of disguises, with ministers passing themselves off as traveling businessmen, families on vacation, or refugees from the violence.

These strategies worked well during La Violencia, when the SDA preachers developed the reputation of being nonpartisan in the conflict. This reputation endured the transition from Liberal bandits to Marxist guerrillas; ministers caught at the *pescas milagrosas* or other roadblocks were encouraged by church leaders to show their credentials as ordained SDA ministers instead of the government-provided national identification card. In one incident, a FARC leader recognized the SDA credential and interrupted the *pesca milagrosa* to lecture the captured bus passengers on the basic beliefs of the SDA church, concluding his remarks by pointing to the minister as someone who genuinely cared for the *campesinos* (peasants): “We fight to protect your political interests, and this man works to protect your spiritual interests.”

Until 1998, no SDA minister had been harmed by the Liberal bandits or any of their successor Marxist guerrilla groups, thus proving that the strategy of remaining politically neutral and using disguises can be successful. However, Colombian SDA leaders reported that in mid-1989 the FARC and ELN became much more intolerant of church activities, demanding a stop to all tithe collection and education activities for youth. Pastors were given strict geographical limitations, generally not to go beyond the town or village in which they lived, and church meetings and activities were severely curtailed. As a result, most SDA activity ceased outside of the major cities. One SDA minister who violated the FARC’s orders was stopped on his way home from visiting a church member who lived out of town and was murdered for his infraction. A visiting colleague who accompanied him was told to spread the word that FARC rules were not to be violated. Church members have not been targeted specifically because of their religious affiliation, although youths are frequently lectured on the Marxist dogma of atheism.

The SDA is not alone in this latest change of strategies. All church personnel, Catholic and Protestant, have operated under similar conditions in rural Colombia since the FARC and ELN imposed their restrictions in mid-1989. Most have responded by yielding to the terrorism, retreating into the churches or deserting the rural areas completely, leaving their parishioners at the mercy of...
the guerrillas. It is interesting to note that the so-called paramilitary groups have demonstrated no interest in the religious activities of churches or individuals. The SDA reports that several members have been killed because their business activities appear to support the guerrillas (selling gasoline, for instance) but never because of their religious affiliation.

Reportedly, SDA leaders have attempted to meet in secret with leaders of the FARC and ELN insurgency movements, in order to present a view of church activities as a nonpolitical element in Colombian society. But such a strategy is fraught with danger in that any group perceived as lenient or deliberative with these groups is immediately targeted by the right-wing terrorist groups or the government for their complicity. In effect, the government and elements of society conspire to counter any counterterrorism strategy that involves dialogue with the insurgents. Thus, practically any effort by the church to protect its assets and personnel will create a new set of dangers, reducing the viability of the current counterterrorism strategy.

The SDA is not the only church affected by the lack of stability in Colombia. Recent analysis indicates that Marxist insurgents are increasing their attacks on churches throughout rural Colombia to the point of assassinating thirty-seven church leaders, thirty-six of them Protestant. Catholic priests have been expelled from the demilitarized zone in El Caguan, churches have been closed throughout the country, and many Protestant families have been forced to leave their homes for fear of persecution. The SDA strategy of coexistence has apparently failed since 1998 because the terrorists have changed the rules and now challenge the very presence of religious groups in areas under their control.

As a counterterrorism strategy, accommodation does not work in the long run, as demonstrated by this case study. True, there were no casualties for decades, but when the aggressor changed the rules no amount of accommodation could satisfy the new requirements. It follows that as a strategy for the rest of society or the government, accommodation of the FARC or ELN will not work either. The FARC’s attitude toward the Pastrana government’s efforts to negotiate a settlement to date seems to back up this assessment.
As mentioned previously, the president is charged in the constitution with being the primary authority in providing security to Colombia. On paper, there are plenty of forces and agencies provided for this role. But the key point here is that they exist mostly on paper: when they exist in reality, they are overwhelmed with the magnitude of the problem, and many are limited by law and practice in what they can accomplish.

Most of the actors involved are in the Ministry of Defense, including the military, the national police, and the intelligence community. Other players include the judiciary, the prosecutors, and some nongovernmental groups that actively play a part in the government’s plans and programs for countering terrorism.17

The Intelligence Community

The Colombian intelligence community can trace its roots through the National Police to the 1941 Law 8, which created the police as a force dependent on the national executive and charged with investigating threats against life and liberty. Interestingly, however, few of the descriptive or founding documents mention terrorism except as it relates to international agreements or cooperation in combating international organized crime. None mentions terrorism in terms of domestic insecurity or the terrorist acts of the insurgents at both ends of the spectrum. This failure to mention terrorism is indicative of the mentality of Colombia’s leadership even today, in that what is elsewhere defined as terrorism is considered either as a valid and accepted form of political dialogue or as a symptom of political warfare in Colombia.

The current intelligence community was reorganized in 1995 through Presidential Decree 2233 to more fully confront the various actors in the nation’s violence. The primary agency is the National Intelligence System (known by its Spanish acronym, SINAI), basically an overarching committee comprised of the heads of the various specific agencies. Its function is to coordinate policy; strengthen cooperation; increase efficiency; and foster the planning, collection,
analysis, and diffusion of intelligence. Its members include the intelligence directors of the Joint Staff, army, navy, air force, National Police, and Administrative Security Administration (DAS) organized into two basic directorates along functional and organizational lines. Both directorates perform similar coordination and planning tasks but do so at different levels. The National Intelligence Technical Council works at the national level, coordinating policy and objectives with the ministers of defense, justice, and interior and the various directors of national-level security forces. The Sectional Intelligence Technical Council operates at the state level, coordinating policy and objectives with governors, brigade commanders, and state police directors. The SINAI’s involvement in countering terrorism relates more to policy objectives than operations in that it translates congressional or presidential directives into national policy on which the operational groups can base counterterrorism operations and tactics.

**Military Intelligence**

The Military Intelligence Service is comprised of the directors of intelligence of the various services and serves to coordinate policy and operations within the armed forces. All military intelligence entities function to provide usable information to their specific commanders so that they can carry out the objectives inherent in their mission: to defend national sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and constitutional order. The latter has traditionally been interpreted widely, which allows the military to operate against the Marxist insurgents, right-wing paramilitary groups, illegal drug traffickers, and other criminal elements involved in insurgent, criminal, or terrorist acts against the government or society. Intelligence-planning documents are reviewed annually by the National Technical Intelligence Council and are used to set the priorities of the various intelligence components of the military intelligence directorates (army, navy, and air force). Within the past eight years, these directorates have taken over greater responsibility for controlling the border regions and for fighting the subversive guerrilla movements.

**Civilian Intelligence**

The preeminent component of the National Intelligence Service, the DAS is directly responsible for state security, immigration, and emi-
gration. The primary divisions within the DAS are internal and external intelligence, analysis, operational archives, counterintelligence, and regional intelligence.

The National Police Intelligence Center (CIP) was formed to unify the various intelligence groups dealing with police intelligence. The primary operational groups include the operations, judicial police, intelligence analysis, counterdrug, special services, and anti-kidnapping and extortion directorates. These groups work together to provide the police with intelligence relating to specific issues.

Of note, in the CIP publication describing the national intelligence services of Colombia counterterrorism is only mentioned twice: in terms of international cooperation with treaty organizations such as the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) and the Organization of American States (OAS); and in terms of bilateral relations with neighboring countries or the United States. The inference, again, is that there is no terrorism in Colombia, only violence. This seems to be a variation on the military’s tactic of changing labels to find different legal regimes that can deal with the issue of terrorism.

**Colombian National Police Integrated Counterterrorism Strategy**

The national strategy to counter violence bounds the general action to confront the groups bent on inflicting terror on society. The strategy develops an integral framework of action that involves government leaders, the public forces, the state security forces, and the regional governments in the planning and operational phases of measures to combat the various destabilizing groups in the country.

The strategy involves policies involving the strengthening of the many institutions involved in all phases of governance: the administration of justice, public forces, human rights, social and economic rehabilitation, and the peace process. It also involves special measures to arrest the different factors altering the public order, such as drug trafficking, guerrilla forces, common and organized crime, paramilitary groups, and private justice.

Terrorism in Colombia is only one of the manifestations common to the different factors that alter the public order, one requiring a tactical approach involving the coordination and unification of the efforts of the judicial, penal, and operational aspects of the justice and security forces.

The National Defense and Security Council is responsible for articulating the different policies to be carried out in coordination
with the Ministry of National Defense, involving thus the military and police forces. The Ministry of National Defense, through the military forces, develops the operations carried out and coordinated throughout the national territory against the terrorist groups, which in Colombia are primarily the guerrilla groups.

The national police develops strategies to be implemented by the various specialized units such as the National Police Intelligence Service, the Police Judicial and Investigation Center (DIJIN), and counterextortion and kidnapping groups (GAULA). These groups have specific missions to neutralize terrorist activity in Colombia.

Finally, in the framework of the National Intelligence System, the Colombian government has established a coordination system among the various intelligence agencies through the National Intelligence Plan to develop operations to neutralize and minimize the impact of terrorist activity throughout the country. (Policia Nacional Direccion de Inteligencia, Reflexiones de Inteligencia #4)

Police Forces

The principal method of dealing with the high level of kidnapping has been to create special anti-kidnapping groups, although more time seems to have been spent on organization and protection of turf and budgets than on reducing the level of kidnapping. The two primary groups formed were the National Anti-kidnapping Committee (CONASE) and the Joint Action Groups for Personal Freedom (GAULA).

**CONASE**

When President Samper developed the anti-kidnapping laws, he also included a special presidential force in response to the increase of kidnapping for ransom by the insurgents and criminal elements. All existing anti-kidnapping groups were disbanded, and the new groups were made dependent on the presidency through an anti-kidnapping czar. The czar was a cabinet-level appointee (ostensibly the head of the Procuraduria, or prosecutor general) with additional responsibilities as head of CONASE. Administratively, the personnel and maintenance of CONASE are handled through the Ministry of Justice, however.

The main action groups, known as the Anti-kidnapping and Anti-extortion Groups (UNASE), are a continuation of the search groups of the same name founded under President Gaviria in 1990. They
consist of a combination of forces drawn from among all the police and military services and formed into urban and rural counterterrorism forces with the primary function of hostage rescue. They are divided into four sections: intelligence, administration, analysis, and action. On paper, these groups seemed to provide an ideal method of dealing with the smugglers and terrorists, but in practice the attempts failed because of their lack of experience with joint operations. Service rivalries, inadequate funding sources, and the lack of an organic intelligence function virtually guaranteed failure. There were occasional and early successes at the tactical level, primarily involving antidrug intelligence collection, the capture of guerrilla leaders, and hostage rescue operations.

The most striking success of the UNASE groups was the dismantling of the Cali and Medellin cocaine cartels. The ability to work in small, disciplined groups within an environment of security (no leaks of information), coupled with a high level of technical ability (specifically, signals intelligence such as phone taps and radio monitoring), allowed these “search blocs” to close in on Pablo Escobar and kill him. This one operation succeeded in eliminating the motivating force behind the bombing campaign against the government’s extradition policy and demonstrated to the other criminal groups that they were not secure either. It directly contributed to the dismantling of the Cali cartel by forcing its leaders to negotiate a surrender rather than face extradition or death at the hands of government forces.

**GAULA**

A more successful force is comprised of the GAULA groups, which also trace their origins to President Gaviria’s UNASE. These include military, National Police, and civilian DAS intelligence personnel working closely with prosecutors to investigate and prevent kidnapping and to rescue hostages when necessary. Strategy and policy are coordinated by a high-level committee consisting of the president, the minister of defense, the commander of the armed forces, the director of the National Police, the president of the Criminal Chamber of the Superior Judicial Council, and the president of Pais Libre (an NGO created to counter the threat of kidnapping).

The GAULAs are divided, like the UNASE groups, into rural and urban units, with the National Police forming the urban units and
the military operating in the rural areas where there is little police presence. Constant and perennial problems with the group’s inefficiency include the lack of adequate funding, a dependence on other military or police units for intelligence, and a lack of adequate training for specialized jobs such as evidence handling. A high turnover rate is a serious problem under this system, especially in the military GAULA, which tends to reduce their effectiveness.

The primary strategy devised for the GAULA was that they could serve as crime-prevention groups, providing information to and depending for intelligence on a centralized data base. For this purpose, the basic structure consists of the following divisions: general secretariat, press officer, operations, strategic and tactical intelligence, kidnapping data base, extortion data base, national central data base, personnel, and electronics and communications. The operative units themselves are structured according to need: the elite GAULAs have more resources for more sophisticated operations, such as psychological operations, commandos, intelligence analysts, organic administrative personnel (for cover stories), “technical” groups for special weaponry, and public prosecutors to deal with captured criminals. Most groups, however, consist of a commando section dependent on a centralized administrative structure.

According to one military official, since 1995 the GAULAs have rescued 1,089 hostages and freed more than 100 persons under pressure (defined as forcing the kidnappers to flee and leave the hostages behind). They have lost 262 hostages during thirty-nine failed rescue attempts. This means that the GAULAs have put a 20 percent dent in the 2,100 per year kidnapping industry, by no means a successful effort but a significant one nonetheless.

Military Forces

In the past two years, the Colombian military has created several organizations aimed specifically at countering terrorism. The army has organized and trained an antidrug battalion designed to support the National Police’s efforts to stop the illegal drug trade, which fuels the terrorist and criminal elements in the country. More battalions are being trained for the same purpose. These battalions will in time be organized under an antidrug brigade.

An intelligence center has been created in Tres Esquinas to act as
a joint intelligence collection, analysis, and dissemination entity to fuse tactically actionable information. This intelligence product can then be provided to action battalions such as the Marines’ riverine combat elements (RCEs), the antidrug battalions, the National Police counterterrorism units, and the military’s GAULA units. It will be some time before these fusion centers are operational, but the effort has begun and hopefully will soon begin producing results.

The army has created a rapid deployment force in the northern areas, based in Cundinamarca, which can operate against terrorists if provided with the proper intelligence and operational orders. The basic concept is to create and train forces capable of rapid response to any terrorist activity. Current forces include three army mobile brigades and a special forces brigade. When adequately equipped and trained, this could prove to be a credible force in countering terrorism in Colombia’s northern regions. But, given the lack of available resources, these new assets will probably be used for counterinsurgency or antidrug operations, not for counterterrorism activities.

ANALYSIS

One of the major conclusions of this essay is that Colombia has a history of conducting peaceful negotiations with insurgent groups without accountability. At the end of each negotiation, the various actors agree to a general amnesty for all the combatants on both sides. The result has been leaving in place an incentive to continue or start new insurgent movements because there is no punishment attached to the many acts of terrorism inflicted on the society by the combatants. The solution would be to develop a comprehensive negotiation strategy that separates acts of war (or insurgency) from acts of terrorism and holds the latter to account while negotiating the former.

A second major conclusion is that Colombian leaders have not developed the national security strategy required for a national negotiation strategy. Absent such a strategy, leaders cannot call into play all the instruments of national power. Thus, the military, police, justice, treasury, interior, and development agencies cannot develop specific strategies to combat terrorism, insurgency, or
even common crime. These elements of national power can only develop tactics for coping with the overwhelming threat to national sovereignty. Society, too, is left on its own to cope as best it can, sometimes following the government’s lead, sometimes ignoring it in order to survive. Colombian *violentologo* scholar Eduardo Pizarro has described this phenomenon as a “partial collapse of the state” that has resulted in a kind of anarchy in which each individual is responsible for his or her own survival, a dangerous mix of violence, impunity, and lawlessness that has all the elements of a total collapse of the state.20

At a minimum, the Colombian government needs to recognize that, according to international norms, it is in a situation of internal conflict. This situation exists in the anarchy of Colombia’s governance (or the lack of it), which makes it difficult to establish a distinction between ordinary crime, terrorism, and insurgency. The guerrillas pretend to be Robin Hoods, promising better government and more benefits for the citizenry, but in reality they are more akin to the Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden, fully engaged in a conflict in which acts of terrorism are as prevalent as acts of war. This reality presents the Colombian government with two strategic options: use the label terrorism or use international humanitarian law to resolve the conflict. The first means to consider all the combatant groups to be terrorists and refuse to discuss or negotiate and thus accept the current situation as normal and let the killing continue. The second means to establish basic rules to protect the civilian population through international humanitarian law, creating ad hoc tribunals with international oversight or supervision to punish violations of the agreements.

Neither of these options would be easy. As always in Colombia, acts of terrorism are tied to huge economic profit. This link to profit, however, provides an indication of the solution based on the recognition that a purely military solution will not work. The solution requires fundamental changes in the workings of society and culture, not just imposition of the military will of one group over another. Society is, after all, the object of fear among all the combatant groups. Government forces are not yet a source of fear; they must work to protect society as a whole and citizens as individuals. Colombia must find a balance between the use of force against the combatants and guaranteeing the respect of law and human rights.
Some Strategies Work, Some Don’t

Many of the twelve counterterrorism strategies identified and analyzed in this essay are interrelated and cannot be acted upon in isolation. For instance, the strategy of having no national security policy is intimately linked with the facts that most policy decisions have been made in times of crisis and that one of the pressures on that system is the national security interest of the United States. This being an academic study, the various strategies will be listed in this section with a value judgment on how they have worked or failed in their objectives (if any).

The first strategy, and one with a long history in Colombia, was that of negotiating with the various actors involved in terrorism. Most studies of this aspect of Colombia’s history present the ability to negotiate as a positive thing in terms of conflict resolution. But the fact remains that, despite this history of negotiating, the guerrillas and terrorists are stronger than ever in Colombia today. One negative impact of negotiations is the lesson left for others to follow: if a terrorist group becomes strong enough to make its mark felt, the government will negotiate an amnesty and peace treaty, freeing the group from all responsibility for the acts of terrorism or war carried out during its lifetime. Thus, while an amnesty worked in the short term to put an end to the M-19, the Quintin Lamé, and similar groups, others have formed or broken off to start their own movements. In the long term, amnesty reduces the accountability society normally demands of its members, allowing certain groups to live outside the law with impunity of action, and encourages others to do likewise. Additionally, this strategy has been used by the FARC several times as a venue for recovering from combat defeats and for rearming for future warfare. Thus, this strategy must be categorized as a failed one in terms of its success as a counterterrorism measure.

A second strategy used throughout Colombia is based on the constitutional philosophy of natural law, which gives everyone ultimate responsibility for his or her physical safety. Whether this philosophy is being invoked openly or tacitly is subject to debate, but it is the legal underpinning used to create self-defense groups at both ends of the political spectrum. The problem for the government and society comes when, as in 1991, the legal underpinning for overt self-defense groups is removed. The military grew accustomed
to using such groups as a force multiplier against the Marxist insurgents. Such groups are difficult to manage and doubly so in a situation as inherently violent as that which exists in Colombia. Now the rules have changed, and the military has been given no replacement forces. Senior military leaders continue to rely on the self-defense forces (illegally) for intelligence and as strategic partners against a common enemy. Thus, this strategy has proved to be a mixed one for Colombia in that it allows for common defense for groups outside of the government’s area of control but has proven to be a legal stumbling block both domestically and internationally because of these illegal groups’ use of violence and terrorism.

The third strategy is one of omission. The lack of a security policy has been a serious detriment to Colombia, although it is difficult to argue that Colombian leaders adopt this strategy consciously. It is more likely that they adopt it through bureaucratic inertia and ignorance, in that few civilians understand the use of a state’s power and its monopoly on the use of violence. In a country at peace, this is not such a bad strategy. However, this is not the case in Colombia. In adopting this strategy, Colombian civilian leaders force the military to play the charade of stringing together a series of tactics masquerading as strategy, hoping to keep the tactical inertia on their side. However, this is the strategy that most consistently fails in Colombia because in the absence of guidance from the civilian policymakers the military is not winning the war and frequently loses tactically also. The military is required to perform on the battlefield with no definition of what a victory is, an impossible task under any circumstances.

The fourth strategy is that of poor leadership. It is difficult to determine whether the lack of a cohesive strategy is a specific government strategy or the result of poor leadership and the government’s inability to get ahead of the terrible circumstances of Colombian security issues. In past decades, presidents have spent most of their tenures attempting to react properly to a myriad of crises without taking the time or allowing for sufficient resources to plan ahead. The result has been a series of bad decisions designed to resolve short-term crises and never a planned, cohesive strategy. The impact of these two interrelated strategies (lack of strategy and reactive crisis decision making) is that the illegal Marxist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitary groups, having issued clearly defined strategies and ob-
jectives, have the upper hand in the conflict. Very little that the government does brings it nearer to a victory, while the illegal groups succeed merely by staying alive. Thus, as a counterterrorism strategy the lack of a cohesive policy, the continued use of crisis decision making, and reliance on a reactive policy fail significantly.

The fifth strategy, which is also related to the failed strategies, is the practice of relying on the United States. This strategy has tended to divert attention from the real problem by focusing the Colombian government forces on the symptoms of the problem (human rights violations and illegal drugs) rather than on the threat closest to home (the FARC and ELN). The result of this reliance will be to prolong the war, with the possibility of threatening the sovereignty of the state. In the case of Colombia, as a counterterrorism strategy, reliance on the United States is a policy failure. A more successful strategy would be that of Peru, where then-President Alberto Fujimori forced a resolution of the conflict and then tackled the symptoms of state weakness.

A sixth strategy being attempted as a result of increased U.S. pressure to counter the illegal drug business is for the Colombian military to begin to force coordination of the various intelligence organs of the state. While the emphasis is on antidrug operations in the Tres Esquinas area, the end result will be an improved ability to collect and analyze intelligence on the Marxist insurgents. Ironically, this kind of effort was the principal strategy used by President Fujimori in Peru to counter the Sendero Luminoso in 1991. As of now, this kind of coordination is insufficient in Colombia and responds primarily to U.S. interests, which results in a failed policy. But it has the potential to become a key strategy in resolving Colombia’s terrorism problem if it is properly supported. Thus, as a counterterrorism strategy, increased coordination within the intelligence community has the potential to become a successful strategy.

A seventh strategy, employed by the military over the years, has been to change the labels it uses in describing the insurgents and paramilitary groups. As a strategy, this device has functioned to provide military strategy in the absence of national policy, thus allowing the military to use various legal regimes in dealing with the illegal militias. But in the end, because this use of various monikers and legal regimes has failed, and because it serves primarily to mask the lack of government policy, it does not allow the military to coordinate
its actions with other government agencies or bodies. The lesson is that only the national level leaders of government can write policy, not a subordinate command with a vested interest in a specific result. Thus, as a counterterrorism strategy this practice is a policy failure.

The eighth strategy is the military’s reliance on the now illegal paramilitary groups. This strategy may prove to be successful in the short run in that the paramilitaries may serve as a force multiplier. But it will prove to be a failure in the long run, as these groups do not share the values of law and order required of the government forces. The fact that they use terrorism as a primary strategy is proof enough that they have a different future in mind for Colombia. It does not matter that there is a long history of self-defense groups or that there is a hint of constitutional natural law in the formation and justification the paramilitaries use. The paramilitaries are terrorists themselves, at odds with government policy, and should not be factored in as part of the military’s strategy. At the very least, international condemnation should be proof enough that this is a failed strategy.

A ninth strategy is the extradition of criminals from Colombia for trial in the United States, a measure used to counter the extreme terrorism these criminals occasionally impose in an attempt to retain the status quo. Colombia’s history with extradition has not been a pleasant one, given the extremes to which Pablo Escobar and his cohorts were willing to resort. Certainly, extradition should be upheld when it is merited, that is, in cases of criminals sought in the United States for trial and punishment. But past attempts have been seen as admissions that Colombia’s judicial system is incapable of trying and punishing criminals at home and as such represent a failed strategy from Colombia’s point of view. A better strategy would be to strengthen the judicial system to the point at which such trials would be possible. Thus, although extradition may prove to be a successful strategy in the short term, it fails to satisfy domestic demands for security and law and order and fails as a long-term strategy to counter terrorism.

A tenth strategy is the attempt to legislate against terrorism by making the payment of ransom illegal. This strategy failed miserably for the same reason it was passed: kidnapping is too prevalent because the state does not have the ability to impose law and order. The population has too little confidence in the state’s ability to pro-
tect it, and in the state’s hostage rescue forces to perform effectively, and thus does not report incidents of kidnapping. As an attempt to counter terrorism, this strategy has proved to be an abysmal failure, with no deterrent value against either the criminals or the families of the victims who refuse to report the crime.

The eleventh strategy is that of the case study of the SDA church and its accommodation with its oppressors, which seemed to work for a long time. In the end, accommodation depends entirely on the goodwill of the aggressors, which left the church at the mercy of the terrorists. When the FARC changed the rules in 1998 and began closing churches and assassinating preachers, the SDA’s vulnerability became apparent. Another strategy had to be developed, which involved closing churches and withdrawing from areas under terrorist control. Thus, as a counterterrorism strategy accommodation has proved to be a failure.

The twelfth strategy, the formation of military and police antiterrorism groups (UNASE and GAULA) that work in conjunction with the intelligence community, actually seems to have a positive record. The problem is that they are not supported well enough to show significant results. Lack of experience in joint operations, service rivalries, inadequate training, and low budget levels all work together to reduce the effectiveness of these groups. In essence, the GAULA and UNASE groups are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem and as a result are capable of handling successfully only about 20 percent of the cases reported. The victims generally lack the confidence in government forces to report all the incidents of kidnapping, so official statistics are probably low, which means that the percentage of victims rescued by the GAULA and UNASE groups is even lower than 20 percent. Yet their efforts represent one of the few examples of a successful counterterrorism strategy in Colombia, with the potential for even more success if they are properly supported.

CONCLUSION

Terrorism and violence are rampant in Colombia today, and have been for decades, because of a combination of reasons that almost defies comprehension. Some of these reasons are tied up in the
historical forces involved in the foundation of the country, and others involve the basic formulation of society and its traditions. But this assertion need not be the final excuse for Colombia: historical precedents need not dictate the future. There are, however, several conclusions that can be deduced from the high levels of violence in Colombia, specifically conclusions relating to counterterrorism strategies. Perhaps the most important is that there is a complete lack of national consensus on just what constitutes terrorism in Colombia and what should be done about the current instability and lack of governance. There are perhaps as many solutions to the conflict as there are Colombians and certainly as many as there are separate and distinct sectors of Colombian society. Recent polling, for instance, indicates that upward of 60 percent of the population favors some kind of use of government force against the Marxist guerrillas. Likewise, the numbers can be added up to indicate that upward of 50 percent favor some kind of negotiations with the same groups. But President Pastrana’s strategy, embodied in Plan Colombia, shows no evidence of his having consulted the national will prior to its development.

This lack of national consensus has led to a lack of national strategy. Absent a clear mandate, or at least one that national leaders are willing to follow, the presidency has thus far not written a single, integrated plan that addresses the role of each of the elements of national power in confronting the violence and terrorism that are imposing such incredible levels of fear in Colombia. The military, for instance, is the element of government normally turned to in such situations, but there has been no definition of the armed forces’ role in combating the FARC or ELN since their founding in 1967 and 1964, respectively. How Colombia hopes to win a war without telling its military to do so is hard to understand, but perhaps this appraisal explains the lack of success in attaining victory thus far.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of this lack of consensus and strategy is the lack of trust that it has engendered throughout society. The electorate mistrusts the politicians, the military mistrusts the civilian leadership it is sworn to uphold, and politicians mistrust the armed and police forces that protect them. Everyone mistrusts everyone else because the lack of consensus and strategy has resulted in governmental anarchy. And, of course, this lack of trust is the very thing terrorist organizations seek
through their use of violence, to break down the bonds between individuals and political institutions and between leaders and society. This mistrust is as strong a weapon as dynamite, only it favors the elements within society that seek to break the country apart. Colombian leaders must work hard to regain that sense of trust, and they can only do so by finding a national consensus upon which they can develop a national strategy. Only then can Colombia develop effective strategies to combat the many factions seeking to impose terrorism as a means of attaining national power.

In the absence of an effective national leadership, two forces have stepped in to fill the vacuum—the Marxist insurgents and the paramilitary self-defense groups. Both use acts of terrorism to achieve their objectives. Government control has been reduced to such low levels that in the midst of negotiations with the FARC, guerrilla leaders have publicly announced their plans for a dual-track strategy (negotiations and conflict) and have promulgated “laws” that aim to tax the entire population. The paramilitary groups openly defy government policy, stating that they will not honor the demilitarized zone in the state of Bolivar declared by President Pastrana as a way to initiate negotiations with the ELN. Such open defiance of government authority is indicative of how badly counterterrorism strategies have failed.

Recommendations

One of Colombia’s weak points in combating terrorism is the extreme violence of which its citizens are capable. President Gaviria was forced to yield to such an extreme in dealing with the drug cartel leaders (Gonzalez Gacha, Escobar, and the Ochoas) when they, calling themselves The Extraditables, initiated a severe campaign of bombings in Bogotá and Medellín. President Pastrana faced the beginnings of such a campaign when he announced the new arrangement for extraditing drug traffickers to the United States in 1999. Luckily, he stuck to his guns, and the bombings stopped. Granted, the drug traffickers Pastrana battled were not of the caliber of those his predecessor faced, but the same mix of conditions existed: extradition policy, terrorists, and bombing campaigns.

One way to achieve the balance between the need to wage war and guarantee law and order is to use the existing constitution’s
legal framework for rules of exception, such as the Declaration of Interior Emergency, localized use of the state of siege, or the Declaration of Interior Commotion. Such measures imply limiting the exercise of nonessential legal rights in specific geographic areas—rights such as assembly, association, mobilization, and the ownership of weapons. As it is currently configured, the Colombian state cannot guarantee even the most basic of human rights in most of the national territory—rights such as life, personal integrity, and freedom of thought. To consider the other rights mentioned as inviolable borders on the ludicrous. No one is suggesting that these restrictions become permanent but rather that temporary measures should be required in order for the government to restore the rule of law in areas where it has lost such control.

A second recommendation is to tackle the problem of illegal funds, which the terrorist organizations require to maintain their organizations. In most cases in Colombia, the combatants depend on the illegal drug business, kidnapping for ransom, or blackmail (protection money) to purchase weapons and equipment, pay its soldiers, and conduct psychological operations in the campaign for political support. There is ample evidence that the Marxist guerrillas meet a significant portion of their fiscal needs from the solicitation of ostensibly charitable, humanitarian, and philanthropic contributions, some of which are diverted to fund terrorist operations.

The lesson for Colombian leaders is clear. Waffling in making decisions about, or caving in to, terrorists leads to more terrorism; standing firm in policy and action succeeds in breaking the cycle. Yielding to the terrorists led to a temporary cessation of the bombing, but it increased the pressure from outside (specifically the United States) for Colombia to honor its legal agreements. And the terrorists were granted breathing room to continue their illegal acts. Thus, the primary recommendation resulting from this study is for Colombia to increase its ability to meet its obligations to its citizenry by combating the terrorism that so seriously affects it. The Colombian government must strengthen its resolve, policy, and forces to the point at which it can guarantee to its citizens the ability to live and act in safety and dignity, free from the lack of trust and high levels of impunity and terrorism that permeate the country today. In the long run, a strong and just state is the only successful counterterrorism strategy possible.
IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, had a significant impact on Colombia. Attitudes have changed, if only by deepening the population’s dissatisfaction with the continuing insecurity and the government’s approach to the terrorists. President George Bush’s speech defining the role of the civilized world and its responsibility to fight terrorism, delineating those who are for us (law and order) and against us (terrorists or terrorist-sponsoring states), has raised hopes that there will be movement against the forces of terror. While this has not been translated into action in relation to U.S. policy toward the FARC and ELN, it has been interpreted by many as intimating the possibility of more international assistance to Colombia.

The FARC has not changed its attitude, however. In mid-January 2002, an unnamed field commander voiced the group’s objectives: “Our goal is to take power, whatever the means. If that means by rifle, so be it. So, with or without the peace process, we shall continue with our plan.” He estimated that the final offensive would be launched in a couple of years. The context for this comment was one of international diplomatic scrambling to salvage the stalled peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC. President Andres Pastrana, following the pattern of almost all his predecessors during the thirty-eight-year-old insurgent war, had declared his intent to stop talking and begin fighting—in the final year of his presidency after spending the past three years pushing an ill-conceived and poorly planned program of negotiations. On January 9, Pastrana suspended talks with the FARC, and ordered military action to recover the zona de despeje (the Switzerland-sized area vacated by the government and used as the location for the peace talks). He left the door open for further talks by giving the FARC time to meet his demands, which included a plan to declare a cease-fire.

Why all this flurry of activity to keep alive a project that few believe will produce results? Pastrana’s proposal was greeted with optimism four years ago, as no one before had been willing to remove all possible objections (on the government’s side) to allow talks to begin. But a careful analysis of Plan Colombia, as the process is called, showed deep flaws in the strategy. In fact, strategy, as the
term is normally used, was almost totally absent from the plan. A major flaw, in relation to a counterterrorism strategy, is that the government continues to act as if the country is at peace. The legal regime employed is one based on the ideal of a country ruled by law, by peaceful coexistence, where differences are settled without resort to violence—this in a country with such an infamous reputation for illegal acts that it has spawned a branch of sociology dedicated to understanding it, violentología.

The national military’s role in the war has not yet been defined: should it defeat the insurgents, or achieve a strategic balance? Government direction of the military has been accomplished by informal directive, a method that can change daily, removing from the military the ability to formulate long-range plans and strategies.

The Colombian government, having developed no strategy of its own, has adopted foreign ones in exchange for assistance. The worst case is the adoption of U.S. military strategy in exchange for $1.3 billion, which has subverted the priority of pacifying the nation to antidrug operations that offer little or no hope of producing peace. Another case is the subversion of counterinsurgency operations to nebulous peace plans in the hope of assistance from European nations that insist on dialogue with the insurgents. It is in light of this attitude that Colombia has welcomed the changes in world opinion that occurred after September 11. The logic runs thus: increased attention to terrorism translates into increased counterterrorism funding, Colombia has a major problem with groups recognized by the U.S. State Department as terrorists, and therefore these factors should translate into increased assistance to Colombia.

As has been stated throughout this essay, the primary problem is a lack of strategy on the part of the government as it confronts forces that have a strong strategic vision. As long as Colombia tolerates this lack of planning by its leaders, it will continue to experience the paralyzing effects of the war of terror imposed by the FARC, ELN, AUC, and other irregular forces. Evidence of such planned terror tactics abounds. The FARC is increasing in size and strength, as is the AUC. Coordinated attacks continue against the government forces, and there is evidence that the FARC is planning to take over any territory ceded by the ELN during its negotiations with the government. Furthermore, the FARC uses its strategy to shape future events and forces; it has repeatedly attempted to as-
assinate the leading presidential candidate, Alvaro Uribe Vélez, whose platform on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency includes strengthening the national military forces, coordinating and increasing their efficiency in carrying the fight to the insurgents, and not negotiating from a position of weakness. Obviously, the FARC knows its enemies and works to ensure that they do not reach positions of power.

Unfortunately, it is painfully obvious that Colombia has no real plan for achieving peace any time soon, so any statement on its future involves more of the same, a hope for muddling through. Until politicians begin making the difficult decisions needed to unify the national effort to counter terrorism and insurgency, there will be no peace or security in Colombia.