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Access Details: [subscription number 778576704]
Publisher: Routledge
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Conflict, Security & Development

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713411970>

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Online Publication Date: 01 October 2007

To cite this Article: Guáqueta, Alexandra (2007) 'The way back in: Reintegrating illegal armed groups in Colombia then and now', Conflict, Security & Development, 7:3, 417 - 456

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/14678800701556545

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14678800701556545>

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Analysis

The way back in: Reintegrating illegal armed groups in Colombia then and now

Alexandra Guáqueta

Back in the early 1990s, Colombia reintegrated five left-wing guerrilla groups. Whether as groups or individuals, these guerrillas found space for legitimate political participation at the local and national levels. Society accepted them and they embraced democracy and contributed to the strengthening of liberal political ideas and human rights norms in the country. Fifteen years later Colombia is once again attempting to reintegrate ex-combatants, 33,000 from the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, the so-called 'paramilitary'—a right-wing force that sought to fight guerrillas—and about 11,000 'individually demobilised' combatants of FARC, ELN and

AUC who have since 2002 deserted their group. This time, however, the task of transforming illegal armed groups into legitimate political entities is proving to be harder. In particular, the reintegration of the paramilitary has elicited wide criticism from Colombians and the international community. Why are things different today? By examining and comparing the processes of political reintegration of the M-19 and the paramilitary this article will argue that there are at least four critical factors that either allow or bar former combatants from becoming legitimate players with a capacity for political interlocution: the international and

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domestic political and normative contexts; the nature and behaviour of the illegal armed group (how much power they command, to what extent groups use war for personal profit and whether they commit egregious crimes); the terms of the peace negotiation; and the practical dimensions of exercising political interlocution.

Introduction

Colombia has been a democracy for most of the 20th century, has no ethnic or religious divides and it is ranked as a mid-level developing economy. Nevertheless, internal violence in the form of armed conflict has been a critical feature over the past decades. Seven left-wing guerrilla organisations emerged between the 1960s and the 1980s, along with a series of right-wing illegal forces loosely grouped as *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), the so-called ‘paramilitary’. Through their armed struggle against the state, Marxist guerrillas aimed at redressing grievances related to inequality, social exclusion and the concentration of political power in the hands of a few, and most proposed installing a socialist regime. Paramilitary forces, on the other hand, sought to repel guerrilla influence and, as we now know, frequently served as natural allies of the state security forces in the battlefield.

Five out of the seven guerrilla groups, the *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (M-19), the *Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame* (MAQL), the *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (EPL), the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* (PRT) and the *Corriente de Renovación Socialista* (CRS)—totalling approximately 5,000 combatants—demobilised after peace negotiations in 1989–1994. At that time, government and society expected them to become ‘relevant political forces.’ None survived as a political party, yet it is possible to argue that guerrillas underwent a relatively successful *political reintegration*.¹ M-19 became the core of *Alianza Democrática M-19* (AD M-19), was joined by EPL and some PRT members, had significant electoral triumphs in its initial stages, but soon lost at the ballots and disappeared. CRS initially considered becoming a political party but desisted;² and the MAQL never even tried. In addition, more than 1,000 of the guerrillas that demobilised were assassinated over the years by the usual peace spoilers in Colombia, paramilitary forces, drug traffickers, members of the public security forces and remaining guerrilla groups.³ Still, political reintegration did occur. Guerrillas accepted democracy; in fact, the content of their initiatives contributed to a strengthening of liberal political ideas and

human rights norms since the early 1990s, and society accepted their political participation. Such political reintegration took place in the form of sustained and active participation in politics, policy-making and public debate through political movements, social organisations, think tanks, NGOs and journalism from those days onwards. Whether as groups or individually, guerrillas found space for legitimate political participation at the local and national levels—despite the continuation of war waged by the remaining armed groups, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and the paramilitary.⁴

Fifteen years later Colombia is once again attempting to reintegrate ex-combatants, 33,000 from AUC and about 11,000 ‘individually demobilised combatants’—members of FARC, ELN and AUC who have since 2002 deserted their group. This time, however, the task of transforming illegal armed groups into legitimate political entities is much harder than before. AUC’s reintegration, which began in full in 2005, has elicited criticism from around the globe. Individually demobilised combatants have experienced social rejection, such as the demand by Bogotá citizens in 2005 that reintegration hostels be relocated ‘far away’.⁵ And surely FARC and ELN, the two guerrilla groups that chose not to participate in the early 1990s peace processes and remain active, will encounter higher entry barriers when they do demobilise, as their popularity among Colombians and the international community has eroded.⁶ Before, bringing guerrillas in was not only convenient from a security standpoint; it was seen almost as a moral obligation because of their grievances and even as connoting a positive contribution to social order given their ideals. In contrast, demobilisation and reintegration, in particular of the paramilitary, may today be convenient but it is undoubtedly less palatable to Colombian society and the international community.

Why are things different today? By examining and comparing the processes of political reintegration of the M-19, who took the lead in the former peace processes, and the paramilitary this paper will argue that there are at least four critical factors that either allow or bar former combatants from becoming legitimate players with a capacity for political interlocation: the international and domestic political and normative contexts; the nature and behaviour of the illegal armed group (how much power they command, to what extent groups use war for personal profit and whether they commit egregious crimes); the terms of the peace negotiation; and the practical dimensions of exercising political interlocation. The analysis does not focus on the menu of incentives that drove these illegal armed groups to demobilise but rather on the barriers of entry. These factors relate to issues of acceptance and permanence. Acceptance into the sphere of legitimate

politics results from the consistency between the explicit and implicit rules that allow entry (the normative, legal and political contexts) and combatants' identity and behaviour. As to permanence, the capacity to perform as a political party, an NGO or a public official is often conditioned by more practical aspects of the transformation process, such as political and organisational skills and the availability of funding.

The question of political reintegration is the key for practical reasons. Power sharing, in particular within a democratic framework, is a way to reduce the potential for renewed violence because it may harness illegal armed groups' motivations and capacity to resort to violence. Current academic and political debates on conflict resolution and peace building, though, have tended to downplay or elude the issue. This may be explained, in part, by the 'economic turn' in the analysis of armed conflict which has highlighted the economic dimensions of civil wars and portrayed fighters as greedy individuals who do not have legitimate political causes and therefore can or should not be politically reintegrated.⁷ In addition, greater access to information regarding the conduct of illegal armed groups on the ground (which has exposed the cruelty of many); the reduced salience of prior 'good causes', such as rebellions against dictatorships, due to democratisation and the globalisation of liberal political ideas; a deeper internalisation of human-rights norms and other anti-crime regimes; and the War on Terror that followed the events of September 11, 2001 and the US security policy have shaped the debate and contributed to shunning the issue of political reintegration. Rebels no longer hold the same idyllic aura of former 'well-intended rebels'; note that the term 'guerrilla' is hardly used anymore and many armed organisations are now labelled 'terrorists.' As a result, the reintegration of rebels, criminals and terrorists today faces different political and legal challenges. For instance, opponents of AUC's demobilisation and reintegration have alluded to the group's close connections to the drug trade, its mafia-style behaviour, and its relatively high degree of influence over economic and political transactions in certain Colombian localities, and their appalling human rights record as reasons why they should be barred from politics. However, even though greed can be an important variable in conflicts and moral imperatives call for strict punishments for perpetrators of human rights abuses, the practical issue of what to do with combatants (that are not imprisoned) after demobilisation and how to stop them from re-arming remains.

The article is organised as follows: the first and second sections examine the M-19's and AUC's experiences respectively; and the concluding remarks reflect on the above-mentioned critical dimensions affecting acceptance and permanence.

The good old days: the reintegration of the M-19

The M-19 emerged in 1974 in response to a reported case of fraud in the 1970 presidential elections, which favoured the Conservative Party's candidate, Misael Pastrana. The group was formed by urban middle-class progressive activists, intellectuals, communist youths, disgruntled members from Alianza Nacional Popular (ANAPO)—the party that had lost the elections—and former FARC and ELN members, and defined itself as a nationalist, democratic, revolutionary movement. The guerrilla group demobilised 791 combatants in 1989–1990 during peace negotiations with the Virgilio Barco government (1986–1990) and became a political party, Alianza Democrática M-19 (AD M-19), joined later by EPL and PRT members. It had important victories at the local and national levels and obtained the second largest representation in the National Constituent Assembly that redrafted Colombia's constitution in 1991, a process that consolidated key democratic reforms and introduced modern liberal ideas on human rights. However, AD M-19's popularity then declined and the party disappeared after the 1998 elections. A first question for this case is how did M-19 become a legitimate political party and why did it decline in later years? It must be noted that AD M-19's decline as a party did not end the group's political reintegration process. After that, political reintegration took other forms. Many of its leading members, like Antonio Navarro Wolf and Gustavo Petro, remained active in politics and have become cornerstones of the Polo Democrático (PD) party. Created in 2003, PD has become the first social democrat/leftist party with national appeal in the history of Colombia, a remarkable development considering the country's 150-year-old bipartisan tradition that had privileged both the Liberals and Conservatives. For the sake of brevity, the section will focus on the AD M-19 party and not the developments thereafter. It is suggested, though, that many of the same elements that allowed AD M-19 to exist can also explain the political survival of many of its leaders up until today.

A politically favourable window of opportunity

The M-19's peace agreement and demobilisation occurred in tandem with substantial political reforms, carried out through a one-off National Constituent Assembly, which updated Colombia's 1886 constitution. Both events were perceived as key in overcoming the deep national crisis caused by weaknesses in Colombia's democratic institutions. It was

a unique moment of great optimism and hope in which the M-19's entrance into the political arena, as well as that of other guerrilla groups that demobilised right after the M-19, symbolised Colombia's passage to an improved political stage based on democratic values.⁸

The moment also provided respite from the anguishing sense of crisis and chaos that had emerged because of increased violence and crime in Colombia in the mid-1980s. The illegal drug industry flourished, traffickers amassed great wealth and power and launched a war against the state to prevent anti-drug laws that could land them in jail and, in particular, to avoid extradition to the US. The war led by Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel featured the assassination of government officials, politicians, journalists and judges. For this, cartels had trained squadrons of mercenaries, the *sicarios*. Drug barons also resorted to targeted and indiscriminate bomb attacks in Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. 'Narco-terrorism' combined with the systematic bribery of authorities and the contamination of legal politics, extravagant spending and money laundering, which distorted the economy, and the use of violence to settle vendettas.⁹

Drug-trafficking and drug-related violence intertwined with conflict. In the 1960s and 1970s, guerrilla groups had remained small, survived on petty theft and extortion, recruited in less populated rural areas and acted as authority figures in localities with little state presence. Confrontation with the armed forces was infrequent and usually occurred far from Bogotá. Besides, unlike other Cold War conflicts, neither side was supported by the US or the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, in the early 1980s, illegal armed groups, especially FARC, began to swell.¹⁰ To fund its military expansion, FARC taxed the production of cocaine and the farming of coca bushes that was by then gaining ground in Colombia. Estimates in 1985 claimed that FARC earned \$99 million in a single year through such practices.¹¹

Boosted by the illegal drug industry, but also by other sources of funding (ELN, for example, relied more on extortion and kidnapping) the guerrillas gained power and in turn served as a trigger to the rise of AUC. In the 1980s, right-wing paramilitary groups emerged as independent counterinsurgency forces in different parts of the country, supported by cattle ranchers, emerald traders, agricultural entrepreneurs and large landowners frustrated at the lack of state protection.¹² In time, some of the old leadership of these paramilitary groups was replaced by drug-traffickers and their allies. Other paramilitary groups, like the *Muerte a Secuestradores* ('Death to Kidnappers'), were from the start directly tied to drug traffickers and aimed to protect their business and ill-gotten

properties from extortion. It was then when the struggle took the form of a 'dirty war' against guerrillas and the left in general, waged by *sicarios* and the paramilitary, at times in collusion with public security forces.¹³ Conflict and crime combined to claim some 20,000 deaths per year;¹⁴ and, driven by the drug-based economy of war, Colombia went from a few hectares of coca bushes in the early 1980s to approximately 40,000 hectares in 1990.¹⁵

Colombia's problems overwhelmed state institutions and the political system, which had remained weak and outdated. Slow and partial reforms and fringe improvements (like anti-corruption purges in state security forces) were deemed insufficient. Therefore, many in Colombia began calling for 'structural' changes to solve what was seen as the root causes of conflict and crime, such as the lack of security guarantees and legal opportunities for the left, the concentration of power in Bogotá and in the hands of the elites, the absence of the state in many parts of the territory, administrative weaknesses of the public sector and poverty, inequality and underdevelopment.¹⁶

Against this turbulent landscape, the peace talks with the M-19, officially announced in 1989, and the settlement of March 1990 came as a much-needed respite. Most political forces received the breakthrough positively, as a step to save Colombia from 'chaos'.¹⁷ The optimism was also connected to the political reform underway, which was in part a product of the peace process, as the M-19 had requested as a condition for its demobilisation that the government commit to a deep constitutional reform through a national assembly.¹⁸ The mood was reflected in the *Séptima Papeleta* student mobilisation in the first months of 1990, which summoned constituents to vote in favour of an assembly and managed an impressive 86% turnout.¹⁹ The feeling among many was that Colombia was being catapulted into a new age and shedding some of its backwardness.

This political context and the related perception of the conflict as a legitimate expression of social grievances helped the reintegration of the M-19 in several ways. First, it garnered public support for the peace accord and the reintegration of guerrillas into the legal political system. A transformed the M-19 with relevant political participation embodied Colombia's change. Second, by demobilising through a widely accepted peace process and through political discussions with the government, the M-19 was able to frame itself as a 'political actor' in the public sphere.²⁰ Third, the state of institutional flux caused by the reforms provided bureaucratic and legal flexibility, which eased M-19's transition. The M-19 quickly registered as a party with no checks on whether it complied with the rules, and it was granted the *circunscripción especial*, two guaranteed seats in Congress.

Fourth, the Assembly also served as a unique forum to construct a new political identity and as a window for public relations.

M-19 trustworthiness and the terms of the agreement

The terms of the peace negotiations also helped generate a favourable reception of the M-19. On the one hand and unlike President Betancur (1982–86), who was criticised for being too lenient with FARC, Barco advanced a ‘Peace Initiative’ that combined carrots and sticks and was thus able to gain the credibility of the armed forces and main political sectors. The legitimacy of the peace negotiations bestowed legitimacy on the outcome: the birth of AD M-19. On the other hand, the way the M-19 managed the negotiations portrayed them as ‘serious’ and ‘trustworthy,’ genuinely committed to peace and democracy and as worthy of becoming a legal political force.²¹ When the rebel group held initial conversations with Barco’s team in 1988, it had already decided to demobilise whatever the outcome of the deal as long as basic guarantees were met: a legal pardon and the physical protection of M-19 members.²² Accordingly, the M-19 made important concessions, especially taking into account that the group had not been defeated: it committed itself to a unilateral ceasefire and agreed to demobilise even though the government’s political-reform bill was facing setbacks in Congress (the Barco government chose to withdraw the bill in late 1989 because corrupt legislators had introduced amendments that favoured drug traffickers).

Norms and the M-19 conduct at war

Legally and socially pardoning M-19 members and thus morally accepting them rather than treating them like pariahs was relatively uncontroversial, which also contributed to their subsequent legitimacy as political actors. Between two and three per cent of M-19 members were imprisoned for acts other than ‘political crimes’ (typically homicides committed out of combat),²³ but most combatants, leadership and rank and file received full pardons for their ‘political crimes,’ including the hostage-taking of the Dominican Republic Embassy and the Palace of Justice and kidnapping, defined back then as a political crime connected to rebellion. There was a sense that forgiveness was fair given the flaws of the state and the undeniable existence of some of the ‘objective’ causes behind

rebellion, such as poverty and inequality. Besides, the normative and legal contexts were conducive to forgiveness. At that time, the national human-rights regime was still underdeveloped. There was little public awareness regarding human rights, the issue was not a priority in the state bureaucracy and investigative capacities were weak.²⁴ For instance, neither the Ombudsman Office (Defensoría) nor the Fiscalía and its Human Rights Unit existed at the time. It was afterwards, during the intensification of armed conflict beginning in the mid-1990s, that tolerance towards violence decreased and legal dispositions hardened. In fact, former guerrillas played an active role disseminating human-rights norms in their work through NGOs and think tanks, a case in point being the work of former EPL combatants. Something similar occurred with regard to drug trafficking. Colombia had always endorsed the drug-prohibition regime, but there was a certain degree of social leniency vis-à-vis trafficking. It was only after the narco-terrorist wave of 1989–1992 and the subsequent degradation of war, fuelled by the increasing participation of illegal armed groups in the illegal drug industry, that anti-drug laws were stiffened and the public began to view drug trafficking as an evil.

However, if Colombia afforded the guerrillas relatively lax standards or low barriers of entry, it is also true that M-19's identity played in its favour. The M-19 departed from the more militaristic, Colombian Marxist insurgency groups, such as FARC, that hoped to install a communist or socialist regime. The M-19 leadership perceived orthodox communists waiting for an urban proletariat critical mass to form, or rebels seeking an authoritarian regime *à la* Fidel Castro in Cuba or a peasant uprising as in China, as disconnected from Colombia's realities.²⁵ What the country needed, they argued, was not communism but political and economic reforms that would open up the elite-controlled bipartisan system and effectively channel the interests of 'the masses', not just the oligarchy. In that respect, the M-19 was far less radical than the other guerrillas and even legal parties to the left and expected to become a broad-based political force that could compete in democratic elections. These ideas and expectations shaped M-19's conduct during the war with regards to the use of violence. 'Shooting is not the way to take over power. Power is not obtained that way here. The thing is that this democracy is so closed, so bipartisan . . . that bullets are needed to get some attention', said one member.²⁶ Rather than engage in military combat with state security forces, launch indiscriminate attacks on civilians or gain territorial control through coercion, the M-19 often opted for symbolic actions and selected political targets for its attacks. Of course, operations could go astray, as happened with the Palace of Justice takeover of 1985, when more than 100 persons died including

magistrates, public security officials, dozens of civilians and even M-19 members. However, in this case, much of the blame was placed on the armed forces and the police, who apparently disobeyed orders and used overwhelming force to avoid bargaining with the M-19.²⁷

Much like other illegal armed groups, the M-19 stole from banks, food trucks and armoured vehicles.²⁸ Moreover, it has been claimed that the M-19 was the first rebel group to experiment with drug trafficking and arms-for-drugs deals and that it introduced kidnapping as a way to raise funds, not only to exert political pressure.²⁹ However, M-19's involvement in extortion, kidnapping and the illegal drug industry was not systematic.³⁰ In fact, during the 1980s, there was much debate among M-19 leaders on these specific issues. Leaders feared a revolutionary expansion would push the group deeper into drug-trafficking and increased kidnapping and thereby tarnish the group's image (as has effectively happened with FARC today).³¹ Then, in 1989, when narco-terrorism intensified and as the group was demobilising and preparing to enter legality, the organisation publicly condemned drug-trafficking and spoke of its 'harmful effects' such as 'corruption' and 'violence'.³² In general, the M-19 as well as all the other guerrillas, managed to escape the degradation of war that occurred following their demobilisation.³³

An enabling international atmosphere and the absence of foreign players

The international context also had an enabling effect on M-19's reintegration. The end of the Cold War brought a favourable climate for the resolution of ideologically driven conflicts in the Third World, while the concomitant triumph of liberal political ideas spurred the 'third wave' of democratisation in Eastern Europe and the South. As a result, former outcasts could be rehabilitated, especially if their grievances had related to authoritarianism and as long as they embraced Western democracy. This was also the time of relatively generous amnesties, offered to both rebels and dictators and justified in the name of democracy. Amnesties were possible, at least for a while, as the human-rights regime and other laws defining and punishing criminal behaviour had not yet become particularly robust or globalised. For instance, transnational NGO advocacy of human rights had not focused on Colombia and the few existing investigations and pronouncements by organisations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch

dealt solely with the flaws of the government, at times implicitly siding with the guerrillas. Given this context and the features of the Colombian conflict, the international community generally welcomed the early 1990s' peace negotiations and political reforms.

International support, however, did not translate into mediation, assistance or any type of pressure to shape the terms of the settlement or collaborate with the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former fighters. Often, international actors have played leading roles in ending armed conflicts and in the peace-building process thereafter.³⁴ However, neither foreign states nor international institutions like the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation of American States (OAS) influenced the Colombian peace negotiations of the early 1990s. The US gave its approval but refrained from interfering—an unusual course of action given its record of intervention in Latin America, its 'backyard'. The *laissez-faire* approach stemmed from the particular friendship between the two states since the 1920s and the consequent 'prudent distance' maintained by the United States with regard to Colombia's armed conflict and domestic politics, which had provided Bogotá a free hand to solve the guerrilla problem according to its own preferences.³⁵ In the end, the external presence in Colombia during the peace-process was limited to a handful of representatives from the Socialist International, the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE), the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and the Dutch NGO Pax Christi, who served as witnesses during protocol events and played a marginal role in verifying disarmament and in economic reintegration programmes.³⁶

In retrospect, and when compared to the recent paramilitary demobilisation and the attempts to lure FARC and ELN into a peace settlement, it seems that the limited foreign presence reduced the political complexity of the peace negotiations and avoided vetoes to the reintegration of former combatants.

M-19 at the ballots

The transition from an illegal armed group to a political party required not just domestic and international political acceptance, but also the resolution of certain practical issues, beginning with the entry into electoral competition. Since the M-19 had all along envisaged becoming a party, it explicitly addressed the point during the negotiations and secured its entry in the 1990 election. The amnesty removed possible legal obstacles in running for public office and the so-called *circunscripción especial*, the formula invented

to provide former guerrillas with a concrete political landing strip, offered the M-19 two guaranteed seats in Congress for the 1990–94 term.³⁷ The *circunscripción especial* was both a symbolic concession, part of the give-and-take of peace and democracy, and a technical advantage justified on the grounds that the M-19 had no previous electoral experience and was therefore not in a condition to compete against the traditional parties.³⁸ In addition, the M-19 was allowed to keep its financial assets, which it used for early proselytism,³⁹ and government subsidies for maintenance further helped its members finance their time in politics. Total expenditure in DDR programmes for M-19, PRT, EPL, MAQL, CRS and deserters (approximately 2,500) during 1990–2002 was estimated at \$108.594 m.⁴⁰

The M-19 was officially reincarnated as AD M-19 just days after the settlement and it achieved outstanding electoral results during its first years of existence. The charismatic M-19 leader, Carlos Pizarro, obtained third place for the mayorship of Bogotá and gained much sympathy as a presidential candidate—however, he was assassinated in April by the Medellín drug mafia. Antonio Navarro took his place and obtained 12.5% of the votes for the presidency, an important third position vis-à-vis the Liberal and Conservative parties that no other force had occupied since 1970. This result prompted the winning party to offer AD M-19 a permanent position in the cabinet, the Ministry of Health. In December 1990 when the National Constituent Assembly was voted in, AD M-19 obtained 19 of 70 seats, the second largest representation, and managed to set up a tripartite presidency shared with the Liberal Party and a dissident faction of the Conservative Party, the Movimiento de Salvación Nacional. At the Assembly, AD M-19 led important developments such as the inclusion of ample human-rights guarantees in the new charter. In 1991, it won 22 seats in the new Congress instated after the constitutional reform and in 1992; it obtained promising results at the provincial and municipal levels. However, AD M-19's appeal began to wane in 1994, when the party obtained only one vote for the lower chamber, no votes for the Senate and just 3.7% of the presidential ballot. Then, in 1998, AD M-19 was massively defeated.⁴¹ In addition to the context and to Colombia's political cultural traits (clientelism and its relatively conservative tradition), a number of other important factors influenced the rise and decline of AD M-19 (Table 1).

One of them was strategy. The M-19 believed that communism had little appeal among Colombians, an idea that had shaped their initial identity as a rebel group. It was also aware that its past as an illegal organisation could play out negatively unless voters were assured of its transformation into a democratic actor.⁴² Accordingly, to send the right signals and come across as a 'safe option' to a broader audience, AD M-19 resorted

Table 1. AD M-19 in local and national elections

1990 (regular local and national elections)

2/161 Representatives

2 Mayors

5 Municipal council members

12.5% of the votes for the presidency, third place

December 1990 (election of the National Constituent Assembly)

the second largest representation, 19 of 70 seats

1991 (special Congress and Governorship elections after the reform)

9/102 Senators

13/165 Representatives

5 Governors, elected in coalitions with other parties

1992 (first local elections after the reform)

17 Provincial Assembly members

1 Mayor

260 Municipal council members

10 *Ediles* (town-neighbourhood representatives)**1994 (local and first national elections after the reform)**

1/165 Representative

3.79% of the votes for the presidency in the first round, third place

7 Provincial Assembly members

5 Mayors, elected in coalitions with other parties

129 Municipal council members

40 *Ediles* (town-neighbourhood representatives)

Source: Ministerio del Interior, *Huellas de paz: los desmovilizados y su participación en los escenarios de elección popular* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 2000)

to an inclusive discourse that referred to 'democracy', 'peace', 'national reconciliation' and 'consensus'.⁴³ Going beyond rhetoric, they invited public figures from other political tendencies to join their lists, such as Carlos Ossa Escobar from the Liberal Party and retired anti-Communist military General José Joaquín Matallana, and indistinctly struck alliances with other parties for local elections. Initially, this seemed to have yielded the desired outcome. Later, however, the M-19 was criticised for being 'more of the same' as opposed to a real alternative.⁴⁴ In retrospect, M-19 leaders argue that their discourse and proposals became too vague.⁴⁵

Another issue was AD M-19's relation with its constituents. M-19 was a small rebel group but an efficient communicator, and therefore, was able to make the most of its public appearances and the media during the peace talks and the National Constituent Assembly sessions, which were given ample coverage in television and the radio. This served as a positive publicity campaign. However, M-19 was unable to build a more

structured relationship with its constituents to guarantee their loyalty at the ballots over the long term. The government had agreed to social investment in key areas of interest of the former guerrilla groups, a form of 'peace-dividends' that could be capitalised on by AD M-19 for electoral purposes.⁴⁶ However, once demobilised and without a vertical structure in place, it was hard to keep contact with the base; the activities and routines attached to rebellion goals were no longer in place and communication among members became less frequent. Moreover, as time passed, middle- and lower-rank combatants grew increasingly preoccupied with day-to-day life, their interest in politics fading. As for new 'enthusiastic sympathisers', those discontent with both the Liberal and Conservative parties and expecting some kind of structural change, the party 'never figured out how to make them part of AD M-19 . . . we thought about registration cards, but never did much', admitted Vera Grabe, who was elected to Congress in 1990.⁴⁷

'We simply did not know how politics was actually done', she added. Specific political skills were needed. The M-19 was not a peasant organisation; its leadership and middle tiers were educated, accustomed to political debating and familiar with urban life, which clearly facilitated the group's entrance into the Colombian political arena. Nevertheless, AD M-19 was still a 'beginner' at politics and did not know how to manage a party, the inner workings of the Legislative or bargaining with the Executive. AD M-19 also suffered collective action problems that led to internal power struggles. All this led Otty Patiño, former M-19, to conclude that the transition from war to peace should be seen as a relatively long process and that new political parties must be given minimum safeguards in terms of electoral advantages for several terms to ensure their survival in difficult moments.⁴⁸

Still, with all the difficulties encountered by AD M-19, it is remarkable that the former guerrillas who joined the party did not return to conflict.⁴⁹ They effectively became peaceful, law-abiding citizens, and many of the leadership and middle tiers became recognised public figures or members of NGOs, universities and think tanks advancing democracy and human rights norms. More significantly, former M-19 leaders have become instrumental in the consolidation of the PD party. In 2006, the PD was joined by a small leftist party, Alternativa Democrática, and together they obtained 11 out of 102 seats in the Senate and 9 out of 166 seats in the lower chamber in the Congressional elections that year, while the presidential candidate Carlos Gaviria came in third.⁵⁰ PD is expected to pose as an actual competitor in the coming 2010 presidential elections.

Efforts to reintegrate the paramilitary: a different game in a different time

The scattered independent paramilitary groups of 20 to 100 combatants that emerged in the 1980s formally turned into AUC in 1997, an organisation with a loose federate structure financed by drug money, extortion payments and voluntary contributions by sympathisers, such as businesses seeking protection from FARC and ELN. During those years, AUC expanded and launched a fierce anti-guerrilla campaign across Colombia, one of the features of the escalation of conflict. The paramilitary phenomenon had not been systematically combated by the state—‘self-defence organisations’ had even been legal in certain periods—but from 1998 onwards, they were more frequently targeted. Neither had a peace process with paramilitary forces been envisaged before. Peace processes, most believed, were for rebels fighting the state, and the paramilitary, albeit illegal, were not technically challenging the state.

However, not long after Álvaro Uribe’s inauguration as president in August 2002, the AUC signalled to the government its willingness to ‘demobilise’.⁵¹ The ‘exploratory talks’ officially began in December 2002 and the first Santa Fe de Ralito agreement, almost a letter of intent to demobilise, was initially signed in July 2003 by 22 of 26 AUC blocks (all except for the Bloque Central Bolívar, the Bloque Élder Cárdenas and the so called ‘Eastern Alliance’). Talks continued, more blocks joined and in May 2004, another agreement was finalised, this time with details about concentration zones, disarmament procedures and other practical aspects of the DDR packages (monthly allowances, retraining, employment opportunities). Actual demobilisation began in December 2003, when the Cacique Nutibara block returned home to Medellín. The others officially withdrew from the conflict in a staggered calendar of demobilisations from November 2004 to April 2006 and entered, at first, an 18-month reintegration process. The reintegration programmes were lengthened in 2006, the exact time would depend on the individual characteristics of former combatants.⁵² In all, about 30,400 combatants claimed to have demobilised. Some of the terms of the agreement were written in the 72 article-long 2005 Justice and Peace Law and the related regulating decrees (4760 of December 2005, Constitutional Court ruling C-370, 3391 of September 2006 and 315 of February 2007). These were the object of heated public debate, discussions in Congress and court ruling from August 2003, when the first draft of an ‘alternative justice’ law

circulated in Congress up until 2007 when the last implementation decree was issued. It should be noted that the actual verbal or written agreements made between High Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo and AUC during their secret talks, and which gave origin to the first legislation drafts passed by the government to Congress, have not yet been disclosed to the public.

Whereas the transformation of guerrillas into political parties had been a desirable and unquestioned development in the early 1990s, the future of the paramilitaries following demobilisation became a major political legal issue in Colombian and international policy-making circles. Most observers insisted on the imperative need to disarticulate paramilitary structures, meaning not just disarming the groups but making sure their political and economic influence over local, and even national authorities ended too. Whether the AUC could participate in politics was a most contentious point and gained heightened visibility since the demobilisation was completed just as the 2006 electoral campaigns began. For some, the 'paramilitarisation' of Colombian politics had to be avoided on moral grounds. Many politicians, business leaders and citizens felt the need to dissociate publicly from paramilitary 'contamination' or hush about existing contacts. In the 2006 elections, Uribe's new Partido de la Unión party and *Cambio Radical*, another pro-Uribe party, purged suspected paramilitary supporters and demobilised paramilitaries from their lists to defuse allegations that Uribe had benefited politically from the bargain offered to the AUC by securing the votes of AUC sympathisers or controlled populations.⁵³ In the words of León Valencia, former CRS member, critics of the paramilitary demobilisation process argued it was '*illegitimate* to legalise the money and power acquired through a terror campaign.'⁵⁴ At the same time, however, others concluded that the paramilitaries were a *de facto* political force by virtue of their power and thus impossible to isolate; they had to be let in but carefully checked. Still others argued that several blocks had actually won legitimate support in their respective territories by mending the troubles caused by decades of state neglect, and therefore, that they were worthy of political acknowledgement and acceptance by society.⁵⁵ Why such acute discrepancies among some audiences? Why was AUC participation in politics seen as anathema by many? Alternatively, as the paramilitary themselves often argued, why the difference in treatment? Were they any different from the guerrillas that demobilised in the early 1990s, or from FARC and ELN, who also engaged in crimes?

The paramilitary: part criminal, part political

The deep concerns and often-outright rejection of paramilitary participation in the 2006 election related to the specific features of the paramilitaries' identity and conduct. AUC was not a 'common' rebel organisation. Like the guerrillas that remained active in the Colombian conflict during the phase of degradation, the paramilitary had committed grave crimes. However, they were particularly notorious for perpetrating brutal massacres. Before their confessions, their involvement in several massacres was already known to the public. At least 300 peasants had died in the Trujillo killings of 1988–1995; in Mapiripán in 1997, approximately 70 alleged FARC collaborators were tortured and killed, their body parts thrown into the Guaviare river; in 2000 in Carmen de Bolívar, paramilitaries of the Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá tortured, beheaded and raped more than 40 peasants; and in 2001, the Farallones Block killed 46 indigenous persons of the Naya with machetes and chainsaws. In all, the press had registered at least 64 massacres from 1988 to 2003.⁵⁶ Their extreme cruelty was later confirmed in 2007, when demobilised combatants revealed how they had been trained on assassination techniques, including cutting people's bodies into pieces while still alive.⁵⁷ Besides, the fact that the paramilitaries often received collaboration from public security forces, in the form of information, equipment or military support during operations, further eroded their reputation.

In addition, the paramilitary were heavily entrenched in drug-trafficking rings. It was predominantly paramilitary forces, including those led by the Castaño brothers, who filled the vacuum in domestic and international smuggling left by the dismantling of the Medellín cartel in 1993 as well as the fall of the old Cali cartel in 1995.⁵⁸ For instance, Jairo Antonio Muso Torres, who participated with Fidel Castaño in the infamous 1988 Córdoba massacres and at one time personally commanded 350 paramilitaries, was identified in 2000 by the US Drug Enforcement Agency and Colombian authorities as the main producer and trafficker based in the Sierra Nevada mountains, with control over routes and shipments from the AUC block commanded by Hernán Giraldo.⁵⁹ Others, like 'The Mellizos', 'Gordo Lindo', 'Johny Cano', 'El Tuso' and 'Don Berna' were originally drug-traffickers who later joined the paramilitary either because it increased their power and helped their illegal business interests by deflecting police and military control (the public security services generally give greater priority to insurgents and the narco-industry than

to the paramilitaries),⁶⁰ or to claim political status in an eventual peace process, thereby gaining access to legal privileges such as amnesties or an exemption from extradition to the US.⁶¹ Paramilitary forces were also engaged in many other illicit businesses like gasoline theft and contraband, buying and selling land forcefully appropriated or left by displaced persons and arms trading.⁶² They laundered and invested money in legal activities, from jeweller shops in Margarita Island, to stocks in Panama, to gold mines, pharmacies, transport companies, armoured vehicles, car dealers and agri-business.⁶³ They also engaged extensively in extortion and in 'paid security protection' to raise funds, control local populations and compromise key business-leaders or politicians by virtue of their illegal payment. Particularly commanders and middle-rank combatants made sure to profit personally from war and crime. Their enormous wealth and individual profiteering clearly differentiates them from Colombian guerrillas. The Central Bolívar block, for instance, announced it would allocate 53 million dollars in the form of properties, cattle and cash to reparations.⁶⁴

Another feature of paramilitary conduct was the manipulation of local politics, which had reached enormous proportions and therefore became a true menace to state legitimacy. While 'armed clientelism'—the practice of using elections and public office as a tactical war instrument—had been used by prior guerrilla movements, the paramilitary forces managed to perfect and extend this practice, thereby gaining control of entire regions and even affecting national politics. The common practice was to intimidate local voters through massacres and selective murders, bribe or strike political alliances with politicians if needed, hand pick their own candidates and often intimidate opponents to reduce competition for mayor and governorships, and then organise voting districts to maximise the results for Congressional posts. In 2005, paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso boasted having 35% of the Congress in paramilitary hands. Later on, in 2007, the true reach of paramilitary involvement in politics was uncovered in the 'para-politics scandal': several mayors and congress members, including Álvaro Araujo, brother of Minister of Foreign Affairs Consuelo Araujo, were imprisoned. Reports claim that at least 11 of 33 provinces in Colombia, including César, Córdoba, Magdalena and Sucre, became true paramilitary bastions.⁶⁵

In sum, the paramilitary were a special breed of combatants. Like many others, they wore military fatigues and engaged in armed fighting, but they also had intricate economic and political networks, part legal and part illegal. These networks were built through extreme violence and deep corruption and served as solid pillars from which to exercise

great power—greater than any other illegal armed group in Colombia's history. While their crimes against humanity elicited stark condemnation, their wealth and ties to the drug business raised many discussions about their identity and motivations behind the deal struck with the government that led to the collective demobilisation. Were they drug traffickers or 'true' anti-guerrilla paramilitary claiming state failure as a justification for their actions? Were the paramilitary formations actually criminal organisations in disguise or were they 'political' like other armed groups, namely guerrillas, and thus deserving of a shot at rehabilitation? Moreover, had AUC actually demobilised to adopt legal and democratic ways of doing business and politics or was it all a cover to defuse prosecution?

The issue of the 'identity' of the paramilitaries deserves further consideration. It is worth noting that many aspects of the Justice and Peace Law and connected decrees that set the terms of paramilitary demobilisation depended on establishing whether the paramilitary were 'political' in nature or not. Some could define the paramilitary as overgrown vigilantes preoccupied mainly with the security of select populations.⁶⁶ At the same time, their close connection to drug trafficking, seen through the lens of the greed-and-grievance debate, underscores their economic motivations and drive for personal profit.⁶⁷ However, the description offered above shows a far more complex picture and a political dimension to the paramilitary phenomenon. This does not mean buying into the paramilitary's own self-serving discourse. Since before their demobilisation, the paramilitary made an effort to portray themselves as a politically motivated organisation. For example, they began using language that alluded to an 'ideological platform' and that referred to the 'natural right' of 'legitimate self-defence', the state's duty to defend its citizens and the right to protect private property.⁶⁸ As the debates around the Justice and Peace Law and its related decrees progressed, paramilitary leaders continued to make an effort in that same direction: 'it must be acknowledged that using arms to defend your own life, given the weaknesses of the state... is as political as using weapons to attack the state,' claimed a paramilitary article posted on the AUC website.⁶⁹ Of course, there was much at stake in gaining a political status due to legal technicalities; the Colombian law specifies that political criminals (as opposed to drug traffickers, for instance) can be exempted from extradition. With such political status, they were also seeking to reduce their time in prison and the requirements for reparations and asset forfeiture.

Still, discourse and legal intricacies apart, it is possible to claim that the paramilitary are 'political' albeit in a way substantially different from that of Colombian guerrillas. Carlos Alonso Lucio, a former M-19 but also a 'friend' of the paramilitary makes an interesting

point that can solve the puzzle, ‘the paramilitary are more a *political phenomenon* as opposed to a *political organisation*’.⁷⁰ The political character of AUC stems from exercising power over important parts of the territory, mediating in disputes among inhabitants, providing security and regulating economic transactions. This may be different from being a cohesive rebel organisation with a specific political ideology articulated in a public discourse and with a defined and comprehensive public agenda on how to run the state for the common good (the guerrilla ‘political’ identity), but it is nevertheless ‘political’. Despite criminality, paramilitary forces constructed an alternate order in many localities in Colombia and they were even recognised as the local authority. In this way, they gained some degree of legitimacy—even if it ran counter to the Colombian mainstream culture and foreign Western standards of legitimacy in a democracy. Such appeal, even despite their non-democratic behaviour, was clear during the first round of court hearings. Commander ‘Macaco’ from the Central Bolívar block, for instance, was cheered by more than 600 fans outside the court during his first voluntary deposition; they wanted to ‘welcome him with whistles, drums and chants supporting his social work—according to fans—in eight provinces around the country.’⁷¹ What does this mean for reintegration?

Being ‘political’ is not a blank cheque in terms of justice, but does raise the question of what to do with the paramilitary. Since disarmament and demobilisation had not necessarily dismantled their power networks, the risk that irregular and grey-area practices, not to speak of violence, could still be used to determine the outcome of elections was for many precisely a reason to keep the paramilitary away from politics. They believed that it was better to keep paramilitaries out of politics altogether so as to avoid this ‘shadowy’ way of doing politics. Others, such as Senator Rafael Pardo, who had been a leading figure of the Barco and Gaviria administrations during the peace processes of the early 1990s, suggested letting them in so as to exercise explicit control over their political conduct. In practice, this would have meant checking party and personal bank accounts, implementing transparency best practices and inducing self-constraint to keep extremists out (as the Partido de la Unión and *Cambio Radical* had voluntarily done with the purges). The argument of many others was that it did not matter whether the paramilitary were political or not, the main theme had to be their egregious human rights violations and that on such grounds they had to be punished and barred from becoming legal political entities.

In the end, neither Colombians nor the Justice and Peace Law really settled the issue. Demobilised combatants were allowed to create civil-society organisations—such as the

NGOs Corporación Democracia from the Cacique Nutibara block, the Fundación Iniciativas por la Paz close to commanders Mancuso and Báez, Buscando Caminos Buenos and Semillas de Paz from the Central Bolívar Block, and Senderos from the Mineros block—but they were not allowed to create political parties. On the one hand, the law granted them the ‘political treatment’ they were asking for in the form of being exempted from extradition, as long as they complied with certain rules; made no reference to their ‘political reintegration’ (understood as the legal exercise of politics); acknowledged their economic dimension by stating they had to repay victims with their own assets. However, on the other hand, the law tried to differentiate paramilitary from drug traffickers by setting criteria on ‘eligibility’ for the legal benefits of Justice and Peace law, such as being an illegal group that was not originally created for trafficking or illicit enrichment purposes.

Changed political and normative contexts

The domestic political and normative contexts of paramilitary political reintegration, more than a decade after the first wave of guerrilla demobilisation in the early 1990s, were very different and presented high barriers of entry. The progressive degradation of armed conflict from 1996 onwards undermined people’s willingness to accept illegal armed groups, whether guerrillas or paramilitary, back into society and politics: many wanted punishment. Besides, the system was now endowed with tougher human rights and anti-drug regimes.

In the mid-1990s, Colombia’s conflict witnessed another turn in magnitude and severity.⁷² FARC, ELN and AUC grew and expanded their influence across the country, transforming the conflict dynamics. FARC went from having a couple of thousand combatants in the early 1980s to approximately 15–18,000 in 2000, ELN reached its peak, 4–5,000, in 1996, and AUC was estimated at 6,000 in 1999 and at 13,500 in 2003—although the figure nearly tripled during the 2004–06 demobilisation.⁷³ Expelling and blocking one another from territories and obtaining new sources of funding to sustain a bigger war became key objectives for guerrillas and paramilitaries. For that, they sought tighter territorial control, resorting to coerced cooption and bribery of local authorities, military combat against opponents, selective murders, massacres and forced displacement of civilians, all with increasingly gruesome methods. All groups stepped up extortion, illegal trading and theft, the paramilitary and FARC delved deeper into coca production

and drug trafficking, while FARC and ELN invented mass kidnapping. Meanwhile, the Colombian security forces intensified their response, first under President Pastrana and then more vigorously with President Uribe's Democratic Political Security, by recruiting more troops, improving intelligence-gathering and combat capacity and strengthening coca eradication. Eventually, the conflict began to take its toll, constituting, to some, a true humanitarian crisis: two million people were internally displaced,⁷⁴ more than 3,000 kidnappings occurred per year,⁷⁵ around 100 small towns were wiped out annually, and even the big cities—previously isolated from the conflict—began witnessing bomb attacks.⁷⁶ In addition, Colombia turned into to the world's largest coca producer: in 2000, illegal crops reached an all-time high of 136,200 hectares, 74% of total world cultivation.⁷⁷

In 1997 and 1998, thousands of Colombians took to the streets in unprecedented massive demonstrations against violence.⁷⁸ At first, this prompted another round of peace-talks. In 1998, the Andrés Pastrana administration (1998–2002) launched new negotiations with FARC, and invited the international community to support the process politically and economically. It was the first time Colombia had called for international help. The UN and EU responded by increasing economic and humanitarian assistance, while the US helped with Plan Colombia, a large anti-narcotics, anti-terrorist aid package with a strong military component, designed as the hard persuasion component of the peace strategy. Pastrana offered FARC a temporary demilitarised zone, but the rebel movement used this locality for further training and regrouping. Domestic and international observers began to question whether FARC had turned into a greed-based criminal organisation. At the same time, the state stepped up the pressure on AUC, which was also increasingly in the limelight because of its involvement in criminal activities.⁷⁹

The collapse of peace talks with FARC and the growing public perception of illegal armed groups as greed-driven tilted the balance back in favour of stick rather than carrot. President Uribe, who proposed tougher security measures, was elected with a 22% margin over his rival in the first round of the 2002 presidential elections. He launched an all-out war against FARC and ELN, and pledged to combat right-wing paramilitary groups.

Meanwhile, the legal and normative contexts with regard to human rights and drug trafficking, two central features of armed conflict in Colombia, had stiffened. In the 1990s, the judicial system was reformed and law-enforcement agencies strengthened. Specific state agencies with the mandate to promote and oversee human rights were created, such the Defensoría del Pueblo (Ombudsman) along with the figure of *personeros* in municipalities, the Human Rights Unit of the Fiscalía (Attorney General's Office),

the Ministry of Defense's Human Rights Office and the Human Rights Observatory at the Vicepresidency.⁸⁰ Moreover, international humanitarian law was formally integrated in 1994 when Colombia signed Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions and at the government's request, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights opened a field office in Bogotá in 1997. The further institutionalisation of the human-rights regime was stimulated by the 1991 Constitution; Colombia's own process of modernisation; heightened domestic and international attention to conflict dynamics, as reflected in the increased presence of international human-rights NGOs in Colombia, the proliferation of local NGOs and the work of UN agencies.⁸¹ Occasional pressure by the United States through new human-rights certification requirements attached to military aid and 'institution-building' assistance connected to the war against drugs also played a role in entrenching human rights norms and laws.⁸²

A similar development occurred with the drug-prohibition regime. In this case, narco-terrorism, the narco-corruption scandal of 1995 linking several politicians to drug cartels, the intertwining of conflict and drug trafficking and the United States' ever-larger anti-drug aid were key drivers. Colombia signed and updated anti-drug and judicial cooperation treaties with other countries; the Fiscalía created an Anti-narcotics Unit; law 190 of 1995, the so-called Anti-Corruption Statute, made money laundering a crime; and other laws passed in 1996–97 strengthened asset forfeiture and increased sentences for drug trafficking, money laundering and connected crimes. Aerial and manual eradication and alternative development became permanent features of Colombia's counter-drug policy, boosted later through Plan Colombia. Interdiction was expanded through maritime, riverine and land operations by the military and the police, and radar control systems were enhanced to detect smuggling aircraft. In addition, Colombia reintroduced the extradition of nationals in 1997, allowing the sentencing of Colombians in US courts for crimes (typically pertaining to drug trafficking) committed on US soil.⁸³

As the illegal drug industry and conflict became more connected, prohibition laws and counter-narcotic operations reached the illegal armed groups. Counter-narcotics army battalions and massive aerial coca-crop eradication began targeting guerrillas and paramilitaries and, for the first time, illegal combatants were extradited. From 1991 to April 2006, the US requested 109 combatants in extradition,⁸⁴ and the first to be condemned in US courts were three 'narco-terrorist' paramilitaries.⁸⁵

The lower tolerance for violence and crime and the moves to combat and prosecute illegal armed groups more forcefully were inevitably accompanied in public discourse

by the reconstruction of armed groups as criminals as opposed to 'political others'. Thus, although the paramilitary were eventually able to find a receptive government when it proposed demobilisation, the public was less sympathetic to the idea of political reintegration or of granting them a space as legitimate citizens. Neither was Colombia in the midst of deep national reform and so lacked the flexible political juncture that had helped M-19 and other groups reintegrate through the National Constituent Assembly in 1990.

All these factors shaped the Justice and Peace Law, which set higher standards with regard to human rights through the articles on the definitions of paramilitary victims; a victim's right to be protected; reparations, restitution and rehabilitation of victims; and the requirement to collaborate with judicial authorities to uncover the truth about their crimes. The law also reflected the new standards in combating illegal drugs by trying to differentiate between drug traffickers and paramilitary, on the assumption that drug traffickers did not deserve legal benefits.

International constraints

Another difference relates to the presence and pressures of foreign countries and international institutions. They effectively influenced the terms of the negotiations with paramilitaries, and through that their possibilities of political reintegration, for example in the 2006 presidential and congressional elections as well as in the 2007 local elections. Notwithstanding some differences among states, international organisations and NGOs, the general verdict of the international community was to veto the immediate transformation of paramilitaries into a political force, which they did by issuing public and private warnings, using assistance as leverage and, in the case of the US, threatening to execute extradition.

One key actor was the US. The US tendency to expand its missions, the bureaucratic dynamics of a bigger and better war against drugs and Colombia's cry for assistance in the face of conflict escalation did away with the old 'prudent distance' in US-Colombian relations. Therefore, in 1998 'Plan Colombia' was born, to assist the 'troubled democracy' against guerrilla-related drug cultivation and trafficking. Then, after the 9/11 attacks were articulated into the War on Terror and mainstreamed in foreign policy, the US turned to help Colombia combat 'terrorists', which was, according to the US State Department

listings as of 2001, the official label not only for guerrillas but for the AUC also. US military assistance, economic development, judicial strengthening and human-rights-related aid entered Colombia—approximately \$5.34 billion were disbursed from 2000 to 2006, more than the total aid given in the previous three decades—and along came US political intervention in Colombia's decisions on conflict management.⁸⁶ The US had turned into the main standard-setter of paramilitary demobilisation and reintegration. Such intervention did not come only from the state, in a 'billiard ball' fashion, but by the whole gamut of actors shaping policy-making in Washington.

The general effect of US policy was to echo and promote the hardening of domestic audiences towards all illegal armed groups, thereby raising the barriers to paramilitary transformation into a legitimate political entity in Colombia. 'I'm not sure the self-defense groups have a political goal or that they have a political agenda. They have only one program: narco-terrorism', said Ambassador William Wood in 2004 as the Justice and Peace Law was being debated.⁸⁷ Wood did at one point acknowledge the paramilitary's 'political dimension' but referred to it as 'vile, violent, brutal and anti-democratic'⁸⁸ and harshly condemned Mancuso's and Baez's appearance in the Colombian Congress, which friendly Congressmen had arranged for them so as to allow them to speak at an official hearing.⁸⁹ It must be noted, though, that the US did not impede talks with either FARC or with AUC, despite the hard rhetoric warning against negotiating with terrorists—but it made sure to express its preferences on the bargain and its outcome. In general, the US wanted the Colombian state to negotiate from a position of strength, the assured enforcement of drug prohibition and compliance with US laws. With regard to the paramilitary, this translated into the US pushing for stiffer terms in the Justice and Peace Law, which contained the agreement between the Uribe government and the AUC; requesting the extradition of paramilitary commanders as a stick; helping Colombia strengthen its capacity to punish paramilitaries who defected from the deal; supporting the OAS verification mission; helping Colombia provide employment opportunities to the rank-and-file; while keeping the paramilitary out of politics, concretely from the 2006 elections.⁹⁰ Moreover, Bush critics—Democrats and progressive think-tanks and NGOs like the Center for International Policy, the Washington Office on Latin America, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International—harshly condemned the US policy of lending support to the demobilisation despite its shortcomings, to Plan Colombia, to President Uribe, and to the idea of granting AUC any possibility to participate legally in politics.⁹¹ In 2007, the Democrats, after having won back the congressional majority in 2006, implicitly

conditioned their support to the Free Trade Agreement and Plan Colombia on the government's willingness to implement the Justice and Law strictly and punish public security forces, politicians and businesses with links to the paramilitary.⁹²

The US was not the only country looking at Colombia. Several European states and the EU also kept close watch and shaped the outcome of the process. Since the mid-1990s, Europe had become an important Colombian donor and it was thus engaged in projects, directly and through NGOs and the UN, focusing on economic development, human rights, democracy and the empowerment of local NGOs and civil society in Colombia. This meant that despite their lower position of influence over Colombia relative to the US (because of history, geography and amounts of aid), they still wielded influence over sectors of the Colombian population that were actively involved in the public debates related to the paramilitary demobilisation process. It was through this channel especially that they tried influencing the government.⁹³ Most condemned AUC and had deep concerns about the demobilisation, which was perceived to support the transition of war criminals and drug-traffickers into legality with impunity.⁹⁴ Sweden and the Netherlands, who decided to cooperate to increase their own influence, were the only European countries to provide financial support and political backing to the OAS during the very first stages of its verification mission, not without fears of criticism from domestic constituents and other European fellows.⁹⁵

The OAS verification mission, MAPP-OEA, created in 2004, also played a role.⁹⁶ Weaknesses apart, the mission's reports on paramilitary re-arming and the participation of demobilised combatants in criminal activities were important not only as a way to verify the implementation of the Justice and Peace Law but also in shaping the various debates about the paramilitary's 'true' identity: they highlighted mostly the criminal dimension. As for the UN and its panoply of agencies in Colombia, they were viscerally against the AUC, continuously voiced criticism of the Justice and Peace Law and demanded the 'effective dismantlement' of paramilitary structures. Michael Frühling, UN Human Rights Commissioner in Colombia explicitly faulted the law for not including temporary political inabilities for those implicated in human-rights violations and explicit provisions barring AUC reintegration into the armed forces.⁹⁷ The Inter American Human Rights Commission, which also pronounced itself on the paramilitary peace process, specifically on the Justice and Peace Law and related decrees, did not address the issue of the ex-combatant's political future either as a formal, legal political party or in the form of NGO activism or journalism, but indirectly contributed to the emphasis on punishment

rather than reintegration present in the public debate. The Commission's declarations after the enactment of the Justice and Peace Law in July 2005 and after the Constitutional Court's sentence C-370, for instance, insisted repeatedly on Colombia's 'international legal obligations' with regard to human rights. This translated into a duty to prevent and combat impunity, to ensure victims' and society's right to know the truth, to strictly apply all the established criteria by which former paramilitary would lose the legal benefits enumerated in the Justice and Peace Law and to consider criteria other than the 'original purpose' of the organisation when deciding whether a paramilitary or a block were effectively 'paramilitary' or drug traffickers in disguise.⁹⁸

In addition to the specific discontents of the US, Europe, the UN, and the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, recent international experiences with ending dictatorships and civil wars set new standards and expectations with regard to justice, which generally reduced the scope of indults and amnesties and reinforced the moral obstacles to paramilitary political reintegration.⁹⁹ For instance, a prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Luis Moreno, produced official statements on AUC demobilisation, which acted as a warning to Colombia if it failed to investigate paramilitary crimes and apply appropriate punishments.¹⁰⁰ The implication of any failings, it was implied, would be the intervention of the ICC, which was detrimental to Colombia's image as a democratic country. Meanwhile, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission supported the above mentioned statements citing among other sources, the UN's Basic principles and guidelines on the right to a remedy and reparation for victims of gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law, which were adopted by the General Assembly in 2006 after claims to take into account the victim's perspective became more vocal and visible with the end of the Cold War.¹⁰¹

Paramilitary identity, perceptions of Uribe and the terms of the agreement

While the Uribe government held talks with AUC and the Justice and Peace Law was being discussed, the debates focused on whether the law, which would determine the terms of the agreement, was going to be tough enough and whether it would disarticulate paramilitary structures: actual dismantlement of paramilitary power implied going

beyond disarmament and the withdrawal of paramilitary forces from armed conflict; it meant paramilitaries abstaining from influencing economic and political transactions in their local fiefdoms and removing their allies and protégées from public office. The focus was not on how to transform the paramilitary organisations into legitimate political entities as had been the case with the M-19 and the other guerrillas back then. In addition to the nature and conduct of paramilitary groups, the perceived lenient terms of the negotiations between the Uribe government and AUC, as embodied in the Justice and Peace Law, and the evidence of paramilitary cheating during the long, staggered demobilisation in 2003–06 served as reasons to ban paramilitary participation in the 2006 elections and to push for the social, economic and political containment of the AUC post-demobilisation.

Whether the final version of the Justice and Peace Law was lax or not is relative. For sure, the law was more strict than the requirements faced by M-19 and the other guerrilla groups when entering legality and becoming legitimate political actors: it introduced reparations for victims and a Reparations National Commission; it contained provisions to forfeit money and properties of AUC members (acknowledging the fact that paramilitaries had used war to make profit); it established that kidnapping was not a political crime and consequently could not be pardoned; and created a special unit in the Fiscalía to further investigate crimes.

Nevertheless, domestic and international audiences considered the law excessively lenient, given the nature and conduct of the paramilitary and the changed normative context. Critiques constantly hailed over the law as it was being discussed in Congress and even the final text, which was harder than the initial versions submitted by the Uribe government, was deemed unsatisfactory. The *New York Times* spoke of ‘Colombia’s Capitulation’ to crime,¹⁰² and the law was even rebutted by Uribe followers: Sen. Gina Parody, complained that the law was ‘sending Colombians the message that crime paid’, while Sen. Rafael Pardo opted out of the pro-Uribe alliance in Congress.¹⁰³ For many, the alternative sentence for those found guilty of crimes against humanity—up to eight years in a special prison plus four years of parole—was too low. Other points of contention regarded the lack of actual mechanisms to implement forfeiture, the absence of requirements regarding confessions, and the fact that reparations mechanisms had no teeth.

In part, perceptions on the law being weak stemmed from distrust of President Uribe and his will to prosecute paramilitary crimes. The President had a reputation of being sympathetic to the armed self-defence. Opponents and NGOs claimed that he had

personally benefited from paramilitary counterinsurgency in Antioquia and Cordoba, where he as well as paramilitary commanders owned land, and that Uribe's brother, Santiago, had participated in the Doce Apóstoles group, linked to the paramilitary.¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, the ongoing reports of links between state security forces and the paramilitary, the infiltration of paramilitary personnel in key agencies such as the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS)—the investigative and intelligence agency, the autocratic bent of the government's security policy and the right-wing tone of official discourse only lent credit to the suspicions.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the paramilitaries failed to prove that they were genuinely committed to peace and democracy and thus ready to become law-abiding citizens. While it is true that combat and mass killings nearly stopped following the demobilisation, the paramilitaries still exercised coerced influence in their old war zones, influenced politics in illegal ways, committed homicides, executed social cleansing, extorted local populations and kept links with drug-trafficking.¹⁰⁶

In the end, the 'peace' bargain with the paramilitary did not contain the same type of political issues that had featured in the M-19 peace agreement, such as the introduction of fundamental changes to democratise the political system, steps to transform the armed group into a political force and favourable conditions in electoral competition. Instead, the terms of the settlement resembled the type of plea bargain criminals would strike with law-enforcement agents to reduce their sentence in exchange for good behaviour or valuable information, except that it was written in a bill for Congressional approval and called a 'peace agreement'. This nature of the agreement was the result of, first, the paramilitary focus on having a settlement whose main point was not reintegration but the protection of combatants from extradition to the US and, second, society's understandings of the nature of paramilitary forces. Even if former combatants not guilty of war crimes could legally run for office and form their own movement or join other parties of their liking, the terms of the negotiation did not envisage transition instruments and paramilitaries were anyway morally banned from participating in politics in 2006.

Power and political participation: scenarios of paramilitary reintegration

In practice, paramilitaries still exert influence over politics, not always in entirely illegal ways, while some combatants have expressed their desire to become politicians following

mainstream rules. (Others may want to withdraw from the limelight and enjoy any remaining wealth and some, from the middle tiers and rank-and-file, have already drifted into crime rings and carried on with extortion and drug trafficking). The point is that several AUC members have local appeal in certain regions in Colombia and they are recognised as authority figures. Paramilitary forces may not be legitimate in the cultural mainstream, but they are in a local sub-culture, even if this legitimacy was first constructed using force and the leverage of their money. It is interesting to compare this situation with the case of the M-19 and other guerrillas. Whereas the M-19 enjoyed legitimacy in the eyes of Bogotá, enough to enter legality and electoral competition, it never exercised as much power in as many regions as the paramilitary did and presumably still do. In addition, ironically, crime and brutality notwithstanding, the paramilitary may be better equipped to survive in politics than the M-19 was when it demobilised back in the early 1990s. Unlike the guerrillas, the AUC leaders were all along connected to the cities and active in legal politics, even if through illegal means and were, therefore, familiar with the daily workings of political machineries: they understand pork-barrel politics, manage well the articulation between local and national politics and know how to mobilise constituents during elections. Above all, they have more access to funding through their legal businesses. In the long run, though, former paramilitary will have to adopt cultural mainstream rules as enshrined in accepted national laws and international standards if they want to sustain their participation in national public spheres as political actors. The political reintegration of the paramilitary might involve a process of selection and self-selection whereby the more criminal elements are weeded out and 'bad' paramilitaries are differentiated from 'good' ones.

Concluding remarks: the critical dimensions of political reintegration

Whenever a conflict ends, there is always the question of what to do with the rebel leaders and forces, or with the state and its security apparatus, depending on the ending of the conflict and the side vanquished. So far, attention has mainly focused on two themes: DDR and justice through tribunals. In the middle stands the issue of political reintegration. Such reintegration envisages letting the irregular armies share political power through electoral competition or transforming them into law-abiding citizens with social recognition and influence in public opinion and policy-making at the local or national levels. It is assumed,

of course, that the challenge stems from the fact that the group has legitimacy or power that cannot be ignored and the potential to spoil peace if marginalised. The 'way back in' to social and political spheres is about being accepted by the relevant audiences and having the capacity to perform as social and political interlocutors. This paper examined the cases of M-19 and AUC in Colombia and found the following dimensions of reintegration to be critical:

The international context

The political aspects of *big power games* and valid international normative frameworks sustained by the state system, international institutions and international society (*regimes*) serve as reference for political reintegration by setting the boundaries on what is and what is not permitted. Admittedly, there is a Western bias, at least for the analytical exercise in this paper: Colombia defines itself as Western and cares about what Western states and institutions do. In the case of M-19 and the other guerrillas that demobilised in the early 1990s, the international context allowed Marxist rebels to transform into legitimate social and political actors. Given the nature of the Cold War in many places of the Third World—a cover for right-wing extremists in the case of Latin America—Marxist guerrillas were seen as politically-driven, heroic, revolutionary victims, fighting to redress authoritarianism, the exclusion of the left and the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of traditional ruling elites. It was thus almost a moral imperative to reintegrate rebels even if they had previously resorted to illegal and violent acts.¹⁰⁷

More than a decade later, as the AUC demobilised, the international context looked somewhat different. The wounds of the Cold War were no longer as pronounced and rebel groups in general, from the left to the right, appeared less heroic as the academic and policy emphasis on the economics of war had uncovered its 'dirty' financial aspects and greed. Moreover, the Western human-rights regime, with all of its shortfalls, became more globalised and robust. This meant that violence was less tolerated and pardons and amnesties harder to concede. Then, for Colombia, because of its own history and cultural identity, the drug-prohibition regime also mattered and affected political reintegration by defining AUC members involved in drug trafficking as evil criminals that ought to be extradited to the US.

The impact of the international context may be assuaged by the distance of a given state or set of actors from key international players. In the case of Colombia, however, that distance shrunk in the early 2000s as the international community became more involved

in Colombian affairs. Eventually, the preferences of specific external players directly involved in the politics of conflict management in Colombia, such as the US, Europe and the UN, affected political reintegration by setting the standards for AUC's demobilisation and political reintegration. The outcome for the paramilitary was a veto on its transformation into a legitimate political entity, at least in the short run. Whether such an approach turns out to be effective or not in preventing paramilitary forces from rearming or fuelling violence in the future has yet to be seen. Snyder and Vinjamuri argue that sustainable peace may require more political expediency and less justice since it takes into account the actual power configuration among a given set of actors.¹⁰⁸ Barring the paramilitary from the political system may therefore have been the moral thing to do given their involvement in grave crimes, brutality and corruption, but it induces paramilitaries to carry on exercising influence over politics and legal economic transactions 'underneath the table' and can delay their absorption by the system and mainstream culture. It also places greater strains on the state, which must inevitably enforce the peace agreement by detecting and punishing paramilitary defection. The extent to which the state is capable (or willing) to enforce peace with AUC is unclear.

The *domestic political context* matters in similar ways, by defining what is and what is not legitimate. The M-19 was an accepted actor in Colombia; the paramilitary less so. The Colombian experience, specifically the case of the paramilitary, shows, however, that acceptance is a multifaceted category since there are relevant local audiences whose rules may differ from the national and international, or Western, mainstream.

Another dimension of the domestic political level is whether political reintegration takes place in the context of a broad national reconstruction process, for instance the ending of civil war where all groups are readjusting or redrawing fundamental power agreements while constructing new social contracts with civil society. The fluidity of the political and legal systems at the time of the reintegration of the M-19 and the other four guerrilla organisations helped their political reintegration in general and concrete ways: by lending a favourable climate to innovation and allowing quick legal and bureaucratic adjustments for the M-19's entrance in electoral competition. In contrast, the paramilitaries encountered a political system that underwent reform and progressively enhanced democratic rule of law. They found rigidity and the expectation that all of the adjustments required for political reintegration were to be made on their part, not on the side of the state or society.

The *terms of the peace negotiations* affect the legitimacy of an illegal armed group after demobilisation. If the negotiations appear to be fair to all parties and external observers,

former combatants will more easily be accepted into the political system. The reputation of the state and the government are however key variables in this equation. It was very clear how perceptions of Uribe's alleged bias toward the paramilitary and suspicions over how his re-election to the presidency would benefit from the demobilisation impacted negatively on the domestic and international reception of the Justice and Peace Law and, in turn, on the possibilities of former AUC combatants to partake in politics as accepted actors. In contrast, Barco and Gaviria's 'intentions' and 'motivations' in dealing with the M-19 were never questioned: they were seen as seeking the common good along the right democratic path.

The *identity and behaviour of illegal armed groups* matter in political reintegration, although the way they are perceived is culturally bound. In Colombia, the involvement of the paramilitary in systematic brutal killings, the use of war and crime for personal profit and their record of manipulation of local politics directly affected the terms of the peace negotiation and their path of reintegration: they were denied entry into mainstream political and social spheres. The M-19's more benign conduct helped them become legitimate political entities.¹⁰⁹

One key discussion here, however, is the issue of *political identity*: does the group have a political nature or is it in fact a greed-driven, criminal organisation and, if so, how is political reintegration possible? Can thugs be transformed into law-abiding citizens and eventually into responsible, legitimate political parties? Colombia has yet to find an answer to these questions based on what happens to the various strands of the paramilitary that loosely joined as AUC to negotiate collectively with the government and obtain favourable treatment in return for withdrawal from conflict. This seems to be more of a medium- to long-term process. Nevertheless, it seems clear that illegal armed groups with a defined national political agenda will have a greater interest in political participation after demobilisation. In contrast, a greed-based illegal armed group will be interested in reduced sentences and access to war spoils for personal use. Moreover, having a political discourse may not guarantee an illegal armed group's successful transformation into a legitimate entity; surely, many other variables count. However, to participate in politics as a party, a social movement or as an NGO in a democratic system, an armed group and its leadership must have, at least, political views on relevant issues for local communities or national policy-making. Moreover, in order to gain legitimacy and the adherence of an audience, such views must fit within the existing national political market place.

Alternatively, *power* appears to be an important element, apart from whether or not an illegal group has a clear and sophisticated political agenda in conventional ways.

The contrast between the M-19 and the paramilitary is clear on this point. The M-19 might have been more popular among Colombians, but the paramilitary had (and have) more power (economic and military capacity), which they translated into control over entire populations. This not only gave them enough status to obtain the government's attention when they expressed their willingness to demobilise; it also earned them a certain local acceptance. Of course, even local legitimacy and the capacity to exercise coercion can be eroded if the dominant groups continuously abuse their power.

Lastly, political reintegration has *critical practical dimensions*. The M-19 rise and decline as a political party showed that illegal armed groups that demobilise do not automatically turn into viable political parties with the capacity to act as politicians, local administrators or effective public servants. Very often, illegal armed groups have spent too much time 'in the bush' (like the 40-year-old FARC), suffer from high illiteracy or are simply not familiar with the practicalities of running a party or a NGO. DDR packages are frequently narrowly focused on disarmament, immediate humanitarian attention, psychological treatment, assuring the basic livelihoods of former combatants and training and education to help combatants find stable employment—measures seen as key deterrents to the resumption of violence given the assumption that combatants joined illegal armed groups due to deep socio-economic grievances and a lack of economic opportunities. However, as illustrated most forcefully with the case of the M-19, combatants also need guided preparation for political reintegration in the form of education for political practice.

Acknowledgements

A first version of this article was prepared for a research project at Kings College, London, funded by a grant from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This version was finalised in November 2006 and updated in June 2007. I am grateful to the workshop participants, Mats Berdal, David Ucko and the journal's anonymous reviewers for their comments.

Endnotes

1. Relevance stems from having 'either coalition or blackmail potential'. The term is Giovanni Sartori's and is used by Shugart to analyse guerrillas' incentives to demobilise *and* specifically participate in democratic elections. See Shugart, 'Guerrillas and Elections,' 121–152.
2. The CRS was the last to demobilise in 1994, by which time AD M-19 was already in decline, so they chose not to become politicians seeking the public vote but rather focus on the successful economic reintegration of their members and grass roots work. Conversation with León Valencia, May, 2006.

3. Valencia, 'En el pasado, la generosidad fue nuestra, en el futuro tendrá que ser del Estado', 16.
4. Demobilised guerrillas were involved in introducing human-rights safeguards in the 1991 Constitution. On other hand, the MAQL, the only ethnically based group, turned into the Sol y Tierra Foundation, which promotes the rights of indigenous minorities. The CRS, now Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris, is an influential think-tank working on conflict and peace issues and EPL members created the human-rights NGO, Fundación Cultura Democrática.
5. 'Informe Especial: Cómo va el proceso de reinserción tres años después?', *El Tiempo.com*, 20 September 2005; 'Las múltiples caras de la desmovilización', *Semana.com*, 13 March 2005; 'El drama de los reinsertados', *Cromos* (4546), 14 April 2005; 'Reinserción, un frente complicado para la paz', *El País* (Cali), 13 March 2005.
6. The way sectors from the left such as union leaders, NGOs and left-wing politicians like the Mayor of Bogotá, Lucho Garzón, one of the leading figures of Polo Democrático, harshly condemned FARC's bomb attack against El Nogal Club in February 2003 and the donations to FARC by the Danish NGO Rebellion in 2004 are cases in point. 'La CUT condena acto terrorista', www.cut.org.co; 'Uno no puede escoger entre terroristas buenos y malos, afirma Luis Eduardo Garzón', *El Tiempo*, 17 February 2003; 'La alianza de 125 organizaciones sociales y afines por una cooperación internacional para la paz rechaza la donación de 8.500 dólares a las FARC', *El Tiempo*, 5 November 2004. Due to FARC's increasing involvement in drug trafficking and crimes against humanity, many in Colombia and abroad have questioned its 'true' motivations and see it as a criminalised insurgency. Perceptions on ELN are more benign because of its reduced contact to drug trafficking, its less militaristic structure, its emphasis on social and political work and the use of a public discourse in favour of civil society and wealth redistribution. The ELN has also been less frequently involved in terrorist attacks against civilians as compared to FARC, although kidnapping has been high.
7. See Collier and Hoeffler, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil Wars', and Kaldor, *New and Old War* as well as the subsequent debates in Berdal and Malone, *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, Ballentine and Sherman, *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance* and Berdal, 'Beyond Greed and Grievance—and not too soon . . . '.
8. 'Quién cree en la Constituyente?', *Análisis Político* 10 (May–August 1990); Hernández, *Una agenda con futuro. Testimonios del cuatrenio Gaviria*.
9. For an interesting and reliable description of the period, see Pardo, *De primera mano*. See also the journalistic work Duzán, *Crónicas que matan*.
10. On guerrilla expansion, see Echandía, *El conflicto armado y las manifestaciones de violencia en las regiones de Colombia*.
11. US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Legal Affairs, *International Narcotic Control Strategy Report 1985*, 62.
12. Romero, *Paramilitares y autodefensas, 1982–2003*.
13. Bejarano, 'La política de paz durante la administración Barco', 97. Bejarano was one of President Barco's peace negotiators.
14. Aguirre, Muggah, Restrepo and Spagat, 'Colombia's Hydra: The many faces of gun violence.'
15. Estimates of the size of the illegal drug industry vary. Two key sources on cultivation and eradication in Colombia are the yearly US International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, which uses figures from the Central Intelligence Agency, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.
16. Bejarano, 'La política de paz durante la administración Barco', 90–91.
17. 'Pleno respaldo de los gremios económicos al proceso de paz del Gobierno', *El Espectador*, 24 February 1989; 'Hay que salvar a Colombia de la guerra civil', *El Tiempo*, 7 March 1989; 'Conservatismo apoya proceso de paz con el M-19', *El Espectador*, 26 October 1989.
18. Bejarano, 'La política de paz durante la administración Barco', 83; Bejarano, Ana Maria, 'Discusiones sobre la reforma del Estado en Colombia', 65, ss.
19. Bejarano, Ana Maria, 'Discusiones sobre la reforma', 78.
20. Patiño, 'Armas versus política,' 66–70. The point is interesting if one examines the case of individually demobilised combatants. From 2002–06, more than 9,000 in Colombia deserted illegal armed groups on their own and joined the Ministry of Interior's DDR programme. By 2006, some had formed organisations to advocate better reintegration projects, but most were otherwise politically invisible: they did not constitute a political entity as such. For instance, one middle-rank former FARC attributed the lack of bargaining leverage vis-à-vis the government and the lack of opportunity to exercise politics to the fact that he had demobilised on his own. Several conversations with former FARC combatant in 2005.
21. 'El diálogo: un paso a la convivencia, dice Barco', *El Tiempo*, 13 January 1989; 'Hay voluntad nacional para buscar la paz' *El Heraldo*, 18 April 1989; 'Antes de elecciones todo debe haber concluido', *El Tiempo*, 18 March 1989.

22. This had been M-19's calculation, since key demands regarding open political participation had already been addressed by previous reforms and they perceived that the public's sympathy for revolutionary causes had been decreasing due the excesses by rebels. Interview with former M-19, Vera Grabe, Bogotá, October 2005 and April 2006.
23. Villarraga Sarmiento, *Los derechos humanos y el derecho internacional humanitario en los procesos de paz 1990–2000*, 57. Interestingly, Villarraga says that 10% of the CRS went to prison. The difference is most likely related to the legal changes on kidnapping. Laws were stiffened in 1993 before the CRS demobilisation as a response to increases in kidnapping connected to narco-terrorism and guerrilla activity.
24. The point on the investigative capacities by the police and judiciary was brought to my attention by Carlos Eduardo Jaramillo, peace adviser during the Gaviria administration (1990–94). He also mentioned that after the 1990s peace agreements, one lesson learned by the military, traditionally opposed to the left-wing guerrillas, was to open formal criminal investigations against rebels to guarantee their imprisonment. The simultaneous strengthening of the rule of law and the escalation of armed conflict meant that war would also be fought in court, not just through weapons.
25. López de la Roche, *Izquierda y cultura política: ¿oposición alternativa?*
26. *Ibid.*, 278.
27. Bejarano, 'La política de paz durante la administración Barco', 82.
28. Lara, *Siembra vientos y recogeras tempestades: la historia del M-19, sus protagonistas y sus destinos*, 305–324.
29. Rubio, 'M-19, secuestro y narcotráfico.'
30. Corporación Observatorio para la Paz, *Las verdaderas intenciones de los paramilitares*, which also narrates M-19's contacts with Escobar and drugs.
31. Navarro Wolf, 'La desmovilización del M-19 diez años después', 66–74; interview with Vera Grabe.
32. Corporación Observatorio para la Paz, *Las verdaderas intenciones de los paramilitares*, 28.
33. In his analysis of FARC, Gutiérrez argues that the larger an organisation, the more its involvement in criminal behaviour: greed (or at least criminal fundraising) can be a function of scale, Gutiérrez, 'Criminal Rebels? A discussion of war and the criminality from the Colombian Experience.'
34. Crocker, Hampson and Aall, *Turbulent Peace, The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*.
35. Guáqueta, 'Change and Continuity in US-Colombian Relations and the War Against Drugs.'
36. Fundación Ideas para la Paz files.
37. The term was shortened due to the installation of the National Constituent Assembly and its reforms. After 1994, the political calendar resumed regularity.
38. Interview with Carlos Eduardo Jaramillo, Bogotá, September 2005.
39. Interview with Vera Grabe.
40. La Huerta, Pinto and Vergara, 'Diagnóstico del programa de reinserción en Colombia,' 1, 15–19. Exchange rate used: 2000 pesos = 1 US dollar.
41. Ministerio del Interior, Dirección General para la Reinserción, *Huellas de Paz*, 141.
42. Interview with Vera Grabe.
43. De la Roche, *Izquierda y cultura política*.
44. Zuluaga, 'De guerrillas a movimientos políticos,' 61.
45. Patiño, 'Armas versus política.'
46. Interviews with Carlos Eduardo Jaramillo and Alvaro Villarraga, September 2005.
47. Interview with Vera Grabe, 10 August 2005, Bogotá.
48. Patiño, 'Armas versus política,' 62.
49. Due to its decline at the ballots, the AD M-19 experience is often portrayed as a failed case of political reintegration, see Bejarano and Reales, 'Políticas después de la Guerra,' 101; Zuluaga, 'De guerrillas a movimientos políticos,' 55.
50. www.polodemocratico.net
51. Unlike the M-19, who as a group absolutely decided to withdraw from the conflict, the consensus within AUC among the different blocks was brittle.
52. Decrees 3043 of September 2006 and 395 of February 2007.
53. Congressmen Dieb Maloof, Luis Eduardo Vives y Habib Merheg were forced to leave Partido de la U and Jorge Luis Caballero and Jorge Castro left *Cambio Radical*. Claudia López, 'Los héroes que no se han reinsertado', *Semana*, (1202), 29 November 2005; Juan Manuel Santos, radio interview in 'La W', 5 October 2005; Casa de Nariño, Secretaría de Prensa, *Palabras del Presidente Uribe en los 114 Años de la Policía Nación*, Bogotá, 3 November 2005.
54. Valencia, 'Exicraso', *Arcanos* 8(11).
55. Forum 'Paramilitares, desmovilización y política.'
56. Cinep, *Paramilitarismo de Estado en Colombia: 1988–2003*. It is worth mentioning that FARC has been involved in violent crimes including indiscriminate bomb attacks and thousands of kidnappings, which makes their situation different from the M-19 and other guerrillas. So far, however, FARC is either less concerned with its reputation or unwilling to understand the normative changes Colombia has undergone in the last two decades.
57. 'Colombia busca 10.000 muertos' *El Tiempo*, 24 April 2007.

58. Carlos Castaño, AUC leader, was among those that hunted Medellín kingpin Pablo Escobar down in 1992–93.
59. 'El hombre de la Sierra', *El Tiempo*, 25 October 2001.
60. 'Habla Vicente Castaño', *Semana*, (1205), 5 June 2005.
61. 'Bloque Cacique Nutibara: la red', *Arcanos*, 8(11), December 2005; 'Los archivos de Don Berna', *Cambio*, (663), 15 August 2005.
62. Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris, 'Los grupos paramilitares en las regiones.'
63. 'Este es el portafolio paramilitar', *El Tiempo*, 11 February 2007.
64. *Ibid.*
65. Valencia, L. 2005. 'Exicraso', *Arcanos* 8(11).
66. Colombia's case for instance was a chapter in Huggins, *Vigilantism and the State in Modern Latin America*.
67. Romero argues that political and academic emphasis on the economic dimensions of war has downplayed the 'political' dimensions of the emergence of the paramilitary, specifically Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá (ACCU). The political dimensions he refers to are the desires of regional elites, which eventually became paramilitaries, to maintain their influence over local politics amidst the threat of a possible demobilisation of left-wing guerrillas resulting from peace processes, which would have entailed the sharing of local power. This localised 'political' dynamic is different from the guerrilla's political identity as a national Marxist movement seeking deep overarching reforms. Romero, *Paramilitares y auto-defensas*, especially the 'Introduction'. See also discussions in Barón and Gutiérrez, 'Re-stating the State: Paramilitary Territorial Control and Political Order in Colombia (1978–2004).'
68. 'En amplio pronunciamiento: Autodefensas reivindican su carácter político', *El Colombiano*, 3 July 1997; see also the document by AUC and Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá, *Estatuto de Constitución y Régimen Disciplinario* written around 1996–97.
69. 'Paras dicen que deben recibir estatus político', *La Patria.com*, 11 September 2006.
70. 'Paramilitarismo, desmovilización y política.' forum hosted by Caracol Radio, *El Tiempo*, Fescol, *Revista Semana* and UNDP, Bogotá (21 September 2005)
71. 'Hoy conocimos a "Macaco"', *Semana.com*, 12 June 2007.
72. Restrepo, Spagat and Vargas, 'The Dynamics of the Colombian Civil Conflict: A New Dataset,' 396–429; Guáqueta, 'The Colombian Conflict: Political and Economic Dimensions.'
73. Information provided by Dirección de Inteligencia, Ejército Nacional de Colombia. See also Rangel, *Colombia: guerra en el fin de siglo*, 12.
74. Displacement statistics vary according source. See 'Las víctimas: una guerra injusta.' In UN Development Program, *El Conflicto: callejón con salida. Índice Nacional de Desarrollo Humano, 2003*. Bogotá: UNDP, 2004; and documents of the Observatorio del Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario, Vicepresidencia de la República. Typically, the Colombian NGO Codhes claims that official figures are too low; their estimates of annual internally displaced persons were already more than 100,000 since 1991, www.codhes.org.
75. 'Evolución histórica de los secuestros en Colombia', statistics compiled by the Departamento Nacional de Planeación using figures from the National Police and the NGO País Libre, www.dnp.gov.
76. Dirección de Justicia y Seguridad, Departamento Nacional de Planeación, *Cifras de violencia 1996–2002*, 0(1), 2002, www.dnp.gov.
77. Figures are from the US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2001*, Washington DC, www.state.gov.
78. www.colnodo.apc.org
79. In part, this can also be attributed to US demands. As mentioned below, with Plan Colombia US conditionality increased.
80. www.derechoshumanos.gov.co
81. The Confederación Colombiana de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales, created in 1989 under UN auspices, alone gathers 1,000 local NGOs, www.ccong.org.co.
82. Human rights reporting by Colombia to the US was first introduced by the 1996 Leahy Amendment. Later (along with increased Plan Colombia military assistance, approved in 2000) came stricter compliance requirements. See US Public Law 106-246. Organisations such as the Washington Office on Latin America, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, however, argue that the US should be stricter with Colombia.
83. US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Control Strategy Report*, from 1992 to 2000.
84. Ninety from FARC and 19 from AUC. Information provided by the US Embassy in Bogotá.
85. Acusación de Estados Unidos a los paramilitares colombianos, Departamento de Estado de EE.UU., Richard Boucher, portavoz, Bogotá, 24 September 2002, bogota.usembassy.gov/wwws0069.shtml.

86. For US aid figures, see Serafino, Congressional Research Service, *Conditions and US Policy Options*.
87. 'La agenda de la AUC es el narcoterrorismo', *Cambio*, June 2004.
88. See speech at the Woodrow Wilson Center, 14 June 2005, available at www.wilsoncenter.org/events/docs/-Wood_Transcript_WWC_6-14-05.doc.
89. 'Embajador de Estados Unidos califica de 'escandalo' discurso de jefes paramilitares en el Congreso', *El Tiempo*, 29 July 2004.
90. 'Congreso de E.U. condiciona apoyo económico para respaldar proceso con los paramilitares', *El Tiempo*, 6 July 2005; 'Y el gringo ah?', *Semana.com*, (1240), 5 February 2006.
91. See, for example, Isacson, 'Peace—or 'Paramilitarization' and 'New Law in Colombia inadequate to prevent future violence, drug trafficking; US should not provide political or financial support', Washington Office on Latin America, 24 June 2005; Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Watch, Colombia: Letter to US Ambassador William Wood on Demobilization Process, Washington, DC, 24 January 2005; Demobilization Scheme Ensures Injustice. International Donors Should Not Fund Sham Paramilitary Demobilizations, Washington DC, 18 January 2005.
92. 'Más requisitos de ayuda de E.U. en el 2008', *El Tiempo*, 20 June 2007;
93. Guáqueta, 'Colombia: seguridad y política exterior.'
94. Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of the formal start of the talks between the Government of Colombia and the AUC paramilitary groups, Brussels, 30 June 2004; Delegación de la Comisión Europea para Colombia, Declaración del Consejo de Ministros de la Unión Europea sobre Colombia, Luxemburg, 3 October 2005.
95. Sweden took the lead only after intense debates in the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sweden had been a key supporter of the 1999–2002 FARC peace talks and incurred political costs due to its alleged bias in favour of FARC and the failure of the talks. It seems this was at least one factor that weighed in its decision to accompany the paramilitary demobilisation process through the OAS.
96. MAPP-OEA, the OAS verification mission, has been funded by the US, Netherlands, Sweden and Bahamas.
97. Oficina en Colombia del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos, 'Consideraciones sobre la Ley de 'Justicia y Paz', Bogotá, 27 June 2005, www.hchr.org.co.
98. Interamerican Human Rights Commission. IACHR Issues Statement Regarding the Adoption of The 'Law of Justice and Peace' in Colombia. Washington. Press Release, No. 26, 2005 and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Statement on Constitutional Court's Decision Regarding Application of Law of Justice and Peace in the Republic Of Colombia. Washington. Press Release No. 28, 2006.
99. Snyder and Vinjamuri, 'Trials and Errors, Principle and Pragmatism in Strategies of International Justice,' 5–44.
100. 'Corte Internacional pide cuentas al país', *El Tiempo*, 31 March 2005; 'La CPI tiene grabaciones de altercado entre Comisionado de Paz y 'paras' en Santa Fe de Ralito', *El Tiempo*, 2 April 2005.
101. A/RES/60/147 of 21 March 2006; Theo van Boven, Draft Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation, presented at the Workshop on International Human Rights Standards-Setting Process, Geneva, 13–14 February, 2005.
102. 'Colombia's Capitulation', *The New York Times*, 4 July 2005.
103. 'La nueva ley de Colombia otorga concesiones a Paramilitares', *The New York Times*, 29 June 2005, www.ginaparody.com; Rafael Pardo in *El Tiempo*, 10 April 2005.
104. 'Petro acusa a hermano de Uribe de tener vínculos con paramilitares', *RCN Radio*, downloaded on 8 May 2006 from www.rcn.com.co/noticia.php3?nt=9616; Joseph Contreras, 'A Harsh Light On Associate 82. A declassified Pentagon report claims Uribe once worked for Pablo Escobar', *Newsweek International Edition*, downloaded on 8 May 2006. www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5570107/site/newsweek/.
105. 'El DAS y los paras', *Semana*, (1226) 31 October–7 November 2005.
106. See OAS, Sexto Informe Trimestral del Secretario General al Consejo Permanente sobre la Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz en Colombia—MAPP/OEA, 1 March 2006; 'Los archivos de Don Berna', *Cambio* 633, 15–22 August 2005.
107. In El Salvador and Guatemala, the FMLN and the UNRG were the 'benign' forces that triggered desirable democratic reforms. Western international donors, even the United States after having supported cruel dictatorships, did not refrain from assisting the Central American peace processes and in particular the former guerrillas. It is interesting to note that in contrast, the US-funded, Nicaraguan right wing Contras (counter-revolutionary) never enjoyed such appeal and support.
108. Snyder and Vinjamuri, 'Trials and Errors'
109. The experience of Sendero Luminoso in Peru is an example of how extreme human-rights violations may undermine the popularity of an insurgency despite the validity of their political and social claims. Sendero

encountered strong rejection among peasants who eventually supported strong counterinsurgency policies.

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