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COLOMBIA CULTURAL FIELD GUIDE

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Foreword

The Colombia Cultural Field Guide is designed to provide deploying military personnel an overview of Colombia's cultural terrain. In this field guide, Colombia's cultural history has been synopsized to capture the more significant aspects of the Colombia cultural environment, with emphasis on factors having the greatest potential to impact operations.

The field guide presents background information to show the Colombia mind-set through its history, language, and religion. It also contains practical sections on lifestyle, customs and habits. For those seeking more extensive information, MCIA produces a series of cultural intelligence studies on Colombia that explore the dynamics of Colombia culture at a deeper level.

CONTENTS

Foreword	iii
Ethnicity	1
Ethnic Populations	2
White Elite	3
Mestizos	3
Afro-Colombians	5
Indigenous Peoples	6
Cultural History	7
Religion	10
Divisions	10
Role in Society	10
Role in Government and Politics	11
Language	11
<i>Holidays</i>	12
Customs	13
Greetings	13
Gestures	13
Visiting	14
Negotiations	15
Business Style	15
Sense of Time	15
Gifts	16
Etiquette	16
Lifestyle	17
Role of Family	17
Roles of Men and Women	18

Clothing	19
Diet	20
Dwellings	21
Societal Framework	23
Individualism	23
Socioeconomic Class	24
Centers of Authority	25
Roles of State and Group	25
Other Centers of Authority	25
Colombia Law	26
Attitudes toward Others	27
United States	27
Other Ethnic Groups	28
Neighboring States	30
Cultural Economy	31
Cultural Geography	32
Urban and Rural Populations	32
Culture of Major Urban Areas	33
Bogota	33
Medellín	36
Cali	37
Military Culture and Society	37
Cultural Style of Warfare	37
Offensive	37
Defensive	39
Conventional	42
Counterinsurgency	44
Internal Security	46
Foreign Cultural Influences	48
Attitudes Toward Foreign Military Assistance	51

Cultural Influences on The Military	53
Leadership	53
Strategy and Doctrine	56
Democratic Security Policy	58
Paramilitary	59
Operational Planning	60
Intelligence	61
Small Unit Skills	64
Logistics and Maintenance	65
Training	66
Unit Cohesion and Morale	68
Technology and Innovation	69
Culture and Rank	70
Officers	70
Enlisted Personnel and Non-Commissioned Officers ..	72
Identities within the Military	74
Regionalism	74
Ethnicity	76
Socioeconomic Class	76
Gender Issues	77
Organizations and Institutions	79
Service Branches	79
Traditional and Mobile Brigades	80
Army Reserves	80
National Police	81
Special Units	82
Civic Values and Military Culture	85
Authority and Loyalty	85
Nationalism, Patriotism, and Citizenship	86
Military Service and Social Status	86
Ethics and Discipline	87

Bravery, Courage, and Cowardice	88
Victory and Defeat	88
Military Role in State and Society	89
Military and Civilian Authority	89
Relationship to Civilians	91
Military and the Economy	93
Military and Politics	95
Military and Religious Institutions	95

ILLUSTRATIONS

Colombian Boy	2
Mestizo Girl	4
Afro-Colombians	5
Indigenous People	6
Hacienda	8
Las Lajas Cathedral	10
Carnival	12
Sisters	18
Mestizo Women	19
Man in Rural Community	20
Colombian Meal	21
Plantains	22
Middle-class Neighborhood	23
Afro-Colombians in a Shantytown	24
National Capitol Building in Bogota	26
National Flag	27
Poverty in a Rural Barrio	29
Colombia and Neighboring States	30
Coffee Plantation	32
Coca Plants	33
Population Density in Colombia	34

Bogota	35
City Street in Bogota	36
Colombian Soldier	38
Colombian Paratrooper	39
General Officer	43
19 th Century Caudillo	52
Simon Bolivar	53
Military Training	67
National Police	82
Special Units in the Colombian Military	83

COLOMBIA

CULTURAL FIELD GUIDE

ETHNICITY

Colombia's 44 million inhabitants comprise the following primary ethnic groups:

- Mestizos (peoples of mixed European and indigenous heritage) make up 58 percent of the population.
- Whites make up 20 percent of the population.
- Afro-Colombian-whites make up 14 percent.
- Afro-Colombians, mostly descendents from colonial Colombia's slave population, make up 4 percent.
- Afro-Colombian-indigenous make up 3 percent.
- Indigenous people, also known as Indians, make up the remaining percentage.

Colombia's whites and mestizos are concentrated in the provincial, departmental, and national capitals. Indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians typically populate rural areas, although displacement has forced many indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups into urban areas such as Bogotá and Medellín. Large populations of Afro-Colombians live in cities on the Atlantic Coast, in port towns along the Magdalena River, and in southern Colombian cities.

Approximately 80 percent of Colombians live in urban areas. Rural communities are typically disproportionately impoverished and have inadequate infrastructure. Rural communities with valuable



Colombian Boy

resources (natural resources or illicit crops) are often threatened by ongoing civil conflict and guerrilla warfare.

Colombia is a functioning democracy and has a long history of electoral politics. Two major parties – the Conservatives and the Liberals – have been significant factors in regional politics since the 1840s. The 1940s and 1950s political violence known as “*La Violencia*” began as partisan warfare, and the violence that Colombia is currently experiencing may be rooted in this former conflict.

Ethnic Populations

Modern Colombia retains race and class hierarchies that were originally established during the colonial period. Within these hierarchies, the white elite generally occupy the top of Colombian society, followed by the mestizos, and finally by Afro-Colombians and

indigenous peoples. Exceptions to this social structure do exist, but ethnicity-based social stratification is common in Colombia.

White Elite

Inheriting power from their colonial ancestors, the white elite has structured Colombian society to fit its needs, creating a society designed to reaffirm colonial structure and grant the elite sole access to political, social, and economic power. Colombia's white elite continues to view the indigenous and black populations, and to a lesser degree the nation's mestizo population, as inferior. Whites define themselves as civilized, cultured, urbane, and decent; they believe other ethnic groups lack these qualities.

White Colombians, in general, are physically similar to Anglo-North Americans or Europeans; however, they can also have a slightly darker skin tone than what one might consider Caucasian in the United States.

Mestizos

Mestizos, individuals of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent, began as the lower-class in colonial society but eventually grew into a large and dominant middle-class. Mestizos emerged as an ethnic group soon after the Spanish Conquest. The word *mestizo* (mixed race) was first used by the Spanish to describe a child of a Spanish father and an indigenous mother. The mestizo ethnic identity quickly acquired a cultural and ethnic dimension. After Colombia gained its independence, a state-sponsored process of *mestizaje* (blending cultures) attempted to promote a broader national mestizo identity.

The state de-emphasized racial differences in favor of encouraging its citizens to speak Spanish, practice the Roman Catholic re-



Mestizo Girl

ligion, and observe accepted Hispanic cultural practices. By performing these tasks, individuals could literally become mestizo. This process, called *mestizaje*, increased the mestizo population in Colombia by incorporating people from both the indigenous and white ethnic groups. The process of *mestizaje* also provided more opportunities for mobility among classes. A mestizo who is wealthy, has attended an elite educational establishment, and has internalized the mannerisms and customs of white society, is capable of achieving political power through elected office and is able to establish himself as a member of the political elite, a status typically reserved for Colombian whites.

Mestizos in Colombia have various physical characteristics due to Colombia's history of interracial mixing between indigenous and

white populations. Mestizo features can range from dark brown skin, high cheekbones, and slightly slanted eyes common among indigenous groups, to the light skin color and European features prominent in urban areas.

Afro-Colombians

Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples are typically at the bottom of Colombia's class structure, although some indigenous peoples, especially the political leaders, are doing relatively well economically. Most Afro-Colombians descend from colonial-era slaves. Most of these slaves were captured in the area between modern Guinea and Angola along the west coast of Africa. They were relegated to the bottom of Colombia's socioeconomic hierarchy as slaves during the colonial period. Colombia's rigid ties



Afro-Colombians

between race and class, however, continue to marginalize Afro-Colombians. Afro-Colombian culture is heavily influenced by West African culture and customs, as well as by Hispanic and indigenous practices.

Afro-Colombians have various physical characteristics due to Colombia's history of interracial mixing. Despite these variations, Afro-Colombians typically have West African traits of skin color and facial and body structure, including very dark skin, noses that are wide and flat across the bridge, minimal body hair, and thick, slightly woolly hair on their heads.

Indigenous Peoples

Colombia's indigenous peoples descend from tribal groups that lived in the region prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. Indigenous



Indigenous People

groups in the Amazon and in the rainforests of the Pacific have remained isolated, retaining their language and cultural identity, while others were influenced by other ethnic groups in Colombia. An indigenous activist movement emerged in the late 20th century that sought to revive indigenous language and culture.

Indigenous peoples are typically short and stocky; the average male is approximately five feet tall. Skin tones can range from light to dark tan. Most indigenous peoples have broad noses, wide nostrils, short torsos, and almond-shaped eyes. Indigenous peoples' feet are also typically broad and tough due to a lack of footwear.

Cultural History

When the Spanish arrived in Colombia in the 16th century, they began exploiting indigenous labor in the areas around present-day Bogotá and Pasto. In much of the rest of Colombia, however, there was almost no concentrated labor to exploit. The Spaniards instead began importing African slaves on a large scale. The Spanish established a caste system using blood purity regulations to create, maintain, and exploit indigenous labor and African slave labor to generate the most revenue possible for the colonial elite and the Spanish Crown.

In the mid-16th century, the Spanish began making permanent settlements in present-day Colombia. The Spanish introduced their culture and social system, largely displacing or destroying the ethnic and cultural identity of the indigenous population. In the eastern highlands of Colombia, several indigenous groups survived the initial Spanish Conquest in significant numbers. The Colombian mestizo class largely grew out of the intermixing of these indigenous groups with the Spanish.

To economically exploit the indigenous population and convert them to Christianity, the Spanish gradually forced indigenous peoples to migrate to larger towns. In addition, many indigenous peoples left their native communities to become wage workers in Spanish haciendas or in Spanish cities. Indigenous women served in Spanish households and had children with Spanish men. During this colonial period, most of Colombia's indigenous population either died out or assimilated into the mestizo population.

Mestizos originally formed a lower-class that blurred lines between Europeans and indigenous people in a way that threatened the white elite and their racially-based colonial economy. Gradually, however, mestizos moved away from their indigenous heritage and toward a more Hispanic identity. Toward the end of the 18th century, the Spanish loosened restrictions on class mobility throughout Latin America to create a free labor market.



Hacienda

Increased labor mobility and social freedoms encouraged further mixing between racial and socioeconomic groups, further broadening the mestizo identity. To rally the support of the majority mestizo population and to erase what they perceived to be dangerously fragmented racial identities of the indigenous groups, Colombians often promoted mestizo identity as a national, unifying symbol against the colonial government of Spain. After Colombia attained its independence, the redefined mestizo ethnic group became the foundation of the new Colombian republic.

African slaves labored as both personal servants and soldiers during the Spanish conquest. Most Afro-Colombians are the descendants of these slaves. Most of these slaves were captured in the area between modern Guinea and Angola along the west coast of Africa. Because they arrived in Colombia through the slave trade, Afro-Colombians were placed at the bottom of the social and racial hierarchy in Colombia. The slave trade unified the black community and stripped much of the slaves' existing ethnic identity, thus requiring that blacks reinvent their identities in the New World.

In the late 20th century, a new cultural pluralism emerged in Colombia that allowed indigenous and Afro-Colombian political movements to infiltrate mainstream Colombian society and cultural life. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian political movements began to claim that the *mestizaje* process had resulted in the subjugation of ethnic minorities and significant losses of ancestral territories. *Mestizaje* largely ignored Colombia's two other ethnic groups, Indians and Afro-Colombians. This cultural pluralism weakened mestizo dominance in Colombia. In July 1991, Colombia adopted a new constitution that formally recognized the cultural diversity of the country, ending the notion of a homogeneous mestizo identity.

RELIGION

Divisions

The Roman Catholic Church remains the most influential institution in Colombian society, although in recent estimates the number of Colombians professing Catholic faith has dropped to 82 percent. An estimated 5 million Colombians are Protestant, in which Evangelical Christian groups constitute the fastest growing group. Divisions in religious faith typically occur along racial and ethnic boundaries. Whites and mestizos are heavily influenced by traditional forms of Roman Catholicism, while indigenous Colombians and Afro-Colombians typically combine forms of spirit worship central to indigenous or African spiritualities with Roman Catholic practices. Protestant sects are strong and growing in Cali, some indigenous areas in the Cauca and Southern Colombia, in city slum areas, and on the Caribbean Coast.



Las Lajas Cathedral

Role in Society

Roman Catholicism, as the official state religion, has played a major role in Colombian culture and society since the Spanish Conquest; every village, town, and city has its official church or cathedral, patron saint, and special religious days, which are cel-

ibrated annually. The rites of birth, baptism, marriage, and death are all tied to religious rituals. The moral code of conduct in the country is based on Roman Catholic principles.

Blended practices combining Roman Catholicism with traditional African or indigenous beliefs also serve as the foundation for Colombia's modern festivals, including Carnival and the Festival of San Jose.

Role in Government and Politics

Roman Catholicism maintains a powerful influence over state affairs in modern Colombia. Political leaders often appeal to the notion of the sacred in public rhetoric. The Catholic Church's role in policy decisions was evident in the case of divorce, which was not legalized in Colombia until 1991, and is still debated as a violation of religious doctrine. Despite its political influence, the church was unsuccessful in opposing the implementation of family planning programs, AIDS awareness programs, and sex education curricular reforms.

LANGUAGE

Spanish is the official language in Colombia, and all professional interactions are conducted in Spanish. It is the primary language spoken among whites and mestizos, although some individuals are also proficient in English. Colonial efforts to teach Spanish to indigenous peoples and to Afro-Colombians made Spanish the primary language among minority communities, as well.

Despite the dominance of the Spanish language, some of the most isolated indigenous communities continue to use their own languages. Some indigenous peoples who previously relied upon Spanish have also reclaimed native languages since the emergence

of an indigenous activism movement. More than 60 indigenous languages are spoken in Colombia.

Holidays

Colombians follow a Catholic calendar, and religious holidays are marked with parades, dancing, and religious services. Christmas, Holy Week, and Easter are the most significant observances, but Colombians, like other Latin Americans, also celebrate days in honor of the Virgin Mary, as well as various other saints. Assumption, the Immaculate Conception, and dedicated days for Saints Peter and Paul are significant events on the Colombian calendar. These holidays are observed on Mondays to facilitate a long weekend for travel to hometowns or relatives' homes.



Carnival

CUSTOMS

Greetings

Greet a Colombian with a handshake on arrival and departure. Male acquaintances often embrace, and women kiss cheeks. Men sometimes kiss the cheek of a female friend. Use titles with surnames until asked to address a person differently; the most common titles are *señor* or *señora*. Upon entering a room, greet each person individually; upon leaving, say goodbye to each person individually.

Afro-Colombians are stereotypically thought of as being gregarious and loud in their interpersonal communications. Afro-Colombians from areas like the Chocó are likely to be suspicious of outsiders who they may associate with forcible displacement or violent extraction of locally produced resources. Class and kinship structures often dictate how Afro-Colombians greet one another and others. Afro-Colombians will often acknowledge those they consider superior to themselves with a tip of the hat or a smile, but they will direct their eyes to the ground when doing so. In contrast, Afro-Colombians greet each other more warmly, commonly referring to one another as *primo* (cousin).

Gestures

Generally, gestures and hand signs in Colombia mirror those in the United States. However, catcalls, whistling, and jeering by individuals or groups of men directed at women is common. While Colombian women accept this attention from Colombian men, they may not tolerate such actions from non-Colombian men.

Colombian men are often more aggressive toward foreign women. In Colombian culture, these advances are more common than they would be in North American society, and it is best to ignore them.

When signaling for people, do not use one finger pointed upward. It is more polite to use a sweeping motion with your hand. The American OK symbol (a circle with the thumb and forefinger) is considered vulgar and offensive. Spitting generally is not considered acceptable or polite among Colombians.

Visiting

Social gatherings among whites and mestizos generally provide a chance to get to know friends and family. Topics of business, politics, and religion should be avoided during social gatherings, unless someone else brings it up.

At indigenous social gatherings, drinking is very common and is expected of all those present. Age and gender are factored into the seating arrangement in an indigenous household. Men are given chairs. A male visitor deemed particularly important may also be seated in the center of the room while others stand. Women, even visitors, will be seated on the floor. Children normally are not allowed to be in the same room when visitors are present. Eat and drink everything that is offered to you when visiting a home or party. The food may be difficult to identify, but sharing food is a basic function of personal relationships, and refusing food or drink can offend indigenous peoples.

Hospitality is central to Afro-Colombian culture. By welcoming others into their homes and lives, Afro-Colombians demonstrate a mutual respect and solidarity with others. Guests should likewise pay respect to the host and his family with profuse thanks and appreciation. In addition to the Afro-Colombian culture, it is com-

mon to encounter hospitality in any poor household. An obligation to share what little one has is a widely-held value among poor, especially rural, Colombians.

Negotiations

Negotiations often take a great deal of time in Colombia. Colombians emphasize the long-term cultivation of business relationships. Expect to meet several times before an agreement is reached.

Business Style

Be punctual for business meetings, but be prepared for your contacts to arrive late and for meetings to be slow to start. A period of introductions and coffee before business is common. Urban business men and women dress professionally; a suit and business card is expected. Conducting business in English is common but should not be expected; it is polite to speak in Spanish or to have a translator present. Though not necessarily the case for executives in major urban areas, many Colombians take a 2-hour break in the middle of the day, and most businesses and government agencies do not operate during this period. It is generally considered inappropriate to discuss business in social situations, including a business lunch.

Sense of Time

In social situations, Colombians adhere to a different concept of punctuality than is common in the United States. Schedules operate as general guidelines rather than rigid structures. It is typical for Colombians to arrive half an hour late for most events, and it is polite to arrive at least half an hour late to a social gathering.

This approach to time is also occasionally present in business situations. In a business situation, however, it is important to arrive on time for scheduled appointments.

Gifts

Giving and receiving gifts is common in Colombia. With whites and mestizos, the situation dictates what type of gift should be given. The less formal the occasion, the more creativity can be used. Colombians enjoy good whiskey and fresh fruit, and it is appropriate to bring one of these as a gift to a dinner party. When attending a more formal event at the house of a wealthy and traditional family, a gift of flowers, chocolate, or fresh fruit should be sent beforehand or a similar gift with a thank you note sent afterwards.

Gifts are also highly appreciated in indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and are an effective means for establishing a relationship of mutual reciprocation. Due to the extreme poverty present in most indigenous and black communities, however, care should be taken not to give presents that are too expensive or that will upset inter-community balances.

Etiquette

- Do try to speak Spanish or an indigenous language. Colombians will appreciate the effort.
- Do eat all food offered. Failing to do so is disrespectful.
- Do be tactful when discussing local politics. Colombians can be easily offended if they believe that they are being criticized by someone from the United States.
- Do respect rank structure. Colombian officers adhere to rank and protocol more stringently than U.S. officers.
- Do use a strong tone of voice during instruction.

- Do expect strict rules and customs against fraternization to be followed.
- Do incorporate basic principles into training, such as weapons maintenance.
- Don't use slang terms to describe people of different races. While it is common among Colombians, it is not acceptable for foreigners.
- Don't be offended if foreign troops use slang terms like gringo (pejorative term for white person).
- Don't refer to the United States as America, as Latin American schools teach that the Americas are one rather than two continents. Colombians consider themselves American. Terms such as North America or the United States are more appropriate.
- Don't be insulted if trainees interrupt to ask questions or make comments, as this is common.
- Don't be surprised if trainees require more basic lessons and assistance than expected.
- Don't be blunt, as social and business relations are cushioned by a thick layer of civility.

LIFESTYLE

Role of Family

In Colombia, the traditional family is grounded in the union between a man and a woman married in the Roman Catholic Church. The father is the central authority figure and provides food and shelter for the family. The mother is the backbone of the family and is responsible for many domestic decisions. The first-born son is often pampered and may enjoy special privileges. These roles have changed to some degree with the increasing mobility and op-

portunity for women, but this traditional, idealized view remains common throughout the country. Upper-class families tend to adhere to this structure more than the lower-class.

Large extended families often live with each other. This extended family relationship forms a safety net during economic hardship for the lower classes and acts as an extended web of business and political contacts among the middle- and upper-classes.



Sisters

Roles of Men and Women

The role of men in Colombian society is similar across class lines. Men are responsible for discipline and for familial decision-making. There is also a high degree of machismo in Colombia, resulting in displays of masculine pride and male virility, especially among mestizo men.

The traditional role of women in Colombia is to bear and raise children, to run the household, and to defer to the wishes of her husband. In recent years, however, the role of women in Colombia has begun to evolve. Financial necessity has forced lower-class women to seek work outside the home. Upper-class urban women have also made advances in terms of education, political activity, and careers. Most upper-class Colombian women, however, continue to devote themselves to raising their children and running their homes.



Mestizo Women

CLOTHING

Among upper and upper-middle class whites and mestizos, clothing is similar in style and quality to fashions prevalent in the United States or Europe. Many women do not wear jewelry or carry valuables, however, because of the threat of violence or kidnapping.

Clothing worn by rural mestizos and indigenous peoples is occasionally homemade and, if so, will consist of loose fitting pants or skirts. Indigenous men and women in rural areas wear cloaks that vary according to region and temperature. A *ruana* (traditional cloak) is worn in colder areas. It is made of wool and worn over the shoulders. Increasingly, cheap sports clothes are replacing traditional attire.

Afro-Colombians usually wear clothing that accommodates the hot and humid climate of the coastal region. They commonly wear cotton T-shirts, skirts, and shorts. During religious and cultural ceremonies, however, female performers commonly wear traditional Afro-Colombian costumes. These costumes are influenced by West African culture and include head scarves; blouses with wide, ruffled collars; and brightly-colored, gathered, ankle-length skirts.



Man in Rural Community

DIET

Colombians eat a light breakfast, a heavy lunch (which is the main meal of the day), and a light dinner. A typical lunch or dinner of a middle or upper class family consists of fresh fruit followed by a homemade soup, a main dish with meat or fish accompanied by rice or potatoes, and a dessert of high sugar content.

Low-income families have similar eating habits but tend to substitute bread or another carbohydrate for the meat or fish. Colombians also tend to drink more coffee than milk.

Alcohol consumption in Colombia mirrors trends in the United States, although Colombians tend to drink more beer than wine. Along the Pacific and Caribbean Coasts, Afro-Colombians have adapted their diet to the local resources. In these communities, fish, seafood, and tropical agricultural products, including rice,



Colombian Meal

plantains, coconuts, and pineapples, are typically staple foods. These ingredients are commonly prepared as soups. They can also be dried, roasted or fried, and served with tropical fruits and fruit juices.

The indigenous Colombian's diet is rich in carbohydrates and is occasionally supplemented with meats. Staples include potatoes, other tubers, grains, broad beans, corn, and quinoa seeds.

DWELLINGS

In Colombia, the type of dwelling depends on the family's socioeconomic class, ethnic background, geographic location, and urban development.

Rural white elite and wealthier mestizos typically live in guarded, walled compounds called villas. The urban upper- and upper-mid-



Plantains

Upper-middle-class people live in high-rise apartment buildings and Parisian-style townhouses, usually with a doorman or on-site security.

Middle-class mestizos tend to live in apartments and small homes in and around major urban areas.

Rural Indians and Afro-Colombians, as well as lower-class mestizos, tend to live in single-roomed, thatch roofed huts built out of lightweight wood. A few of these huts are typically joined together to form walled compounds. Common elements used in the construction of these structures include palm fronds and bark, as well as cement and corrugated iron roofing. Due to urban migration, however, many lower-class mestizos and some Indians and Afro-Colombians have migrated to shantytowns surrounding Colombia's major cities.



Middle-class Neighborhood

SOCIETAL FRAMEWORK

Individualism

The ideal of individualism is prominent among both whites and mestizos in Colombian society. White and mestizo Colombians emphasize the concept of the worth of the individual and his or her role in the social structure. These values involve a strong sense of personal honor along with a sensitivity to praise, slight, and insult.

In contrast, both indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians tend to focus on the community rather than the individual. They see themselves as part of a group of people. They seek to defend their concepts of community against Western notions of individualism through self-isolation and ethnic rights movements.

Socioeconomic Class

Concentrated in the provincial, departmental, and national capitals, Colombia's white classes typically constitute the nation's elite. Estimates suggest that nearly 55 percent of Colombians live in poverty, a figure that includes almost the entire indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations. Most of Colombia's mestizo population lives between the extremes of the wealth and power represented by the white upper-class and the poverty represented by the indigenous population.

Despite the clear correlation between race and socioeconomic status, it is still possible in Colombian society to improve one's social class. The ethnic classifications that bound Colombians to certain classes during the colonial period are no longer as restrictive. For example, political clans consisting of non-white Colombians are capable of wielding significant domestic political power despite



Afro-Colombians in a Shantytown

historical inferiority within the class system. Family lineage also offers a primary method of social mobility for members of non-white ethnic groups. Marrying into a higher class allows individuals to elevate themselves to a new status within the hierarchy of Colombian society.

CENTERS OF AUTHORITY

Roles of State and Group

Among white and mestizo communities, an individual's relationship with the state depends upon his or her economic and social status. Typically only those who gain access to the ranks of the rich and powerful can interact directly with the highest levels of state power. This prevents access to the state for most of Colombia's population and makes state authority distant, foreign, and unpredictable.

Many mestizos, indigenous peoples, and Afro-Colombians feel ignored by the state and its institutions. In much of rural Colombia and in many poor urban neighborhoods, the state does not provide basic services such as health, education, housing, sanitation, and security. With legitimate political channels closed off, many Colombians have resorted to violence; guerrilla organizations operate as a major center of authority where the state is the weakest. Guerrillas provide public services for the residents of these areas, including health care and a judicial system. In these largely rural regions, guerrilla organizations have come to operate as the *de facto* state.

Other Centers of Authority

The weakness of Colombia's state prevents it from adequately confronting the challenges of insurgency, drug-related crime, and paramilitarism. This weakness has allowed leftist guerrilla groups and rightist illegal paramilitary organizations to create pseudo

state institutions in the regions that they operate. Institutions responsible for protecting citizens (i.e., the police and the judiciary) are unable to carry out their basic security functions. This situation has had a profound effect on the nation's population. Inhabitants of villages and towns find themselves continually trapped in the fighting and under siege by the armed groups.

COLOMBIA LAW

The rule of law is weak in Colombia. Most Colombians neither trust nor obey institutions that create or enforce the law. According to Colombia's legal tradition, laws are viewed as moral ideals not to be enforced if their enforcement is impractical or unjust. This tradition manifests itself in the large gap between the written law and its effective implementation. Because of this, Colombians tend to negotiate the law, and they are accustomed to resolve matters through private arrangements that favor well-connected individuals and organizations.

The rule of law is severely undermined because government institutions fail to mediate, adjudicate, or arbitrate the conflicts that



National Capitol Building in Bogota



National Flag

arise among socioeconomic and political groups. The Colombian state infrastructure (police, military, schools, and communication systems) is nearly absent in large parts of the country. In addition, Colombia's judicial system is weak and dysfunctional, and most crimes go unpunished.

ATTITUDES TOWARD OTHERS

United States

Colombians generally share a deep admiration for values or practices that they associate with U.S. society, such as democracy, economic opportunity, rule of law, social mobility, and greater personal security. However, Colombians often find fault with the way they perceive the United States to operate in Latin America. This negative perception is most evident in Colombia among the educated, middle class intellectuals, public university students, organized or politically active workers, and the urban poor.

Perceptions of U.S. intervention in the Colombian military have also influenced Colombian attitudes toward the United States.

Aside from excising the province of Panama from Colombia, U.S. intervention in the Colombian military falls into two periods: Cold War counter-insurgency training (1950s, 1960s, and 1970s) and U.S. training of the Colombian military as a result of Plan Colombia. Those who have been negatively affected by either of these events have developed resentment toward the United States. Indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians typically resent U.S. presence in Colombia primarily because of the effects of Plan Colombia on the environment. U.S.-backed aerial narco-eradication efforts spray herbicides on much of the vegetation in rural areas, which kills both coca plants and surrounding food crops. The spraying also pollutes the local water supply. Afro- and indigenous Colombians depend upon natural resources and basic agriculture to survive, and counter-narcotics operations have, therefore, severely affected these populations' perceptions of the United States.

Indigenous Colombians also worry that aerial narco-eradication efforts may cause birth defects or other medical problems. Tensions also exist because of the perceived role that U.S. military training and arms may play in the increased levels of violence that have arisen in these areas as armed groups of the right and the left battle for territorial primacy.

Other Ethnic Groups

Colombia maintains a rigid social structure, defined primarily by ethnic heritage and physical appearance. The white elite occupy the pinnacle of Colombian society, followed by mestizos, who make up the majority of the middle class. Finally, Afro-Colombians and indigenous Colombians occupy the lowest level of Colombia's social ladder. Whites and mestizos maintain a distant alliance, connected through a mestizo military elite heri-

tage, while both view Colombian Indians and Afro-Colombians with disdain.

Whites and mestizos tend to associate indigenous communities with a distant and primitive past and associate Afro-Colombians with raw, primitive sexuality. White elites have created and disseminated the notion that the indigenous and black populations represent Colombia's past, while the white mestizo communities hold the key to Colombia's future as a modern nation-state.

Indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians typically associate whites and mestizos with one another and view the two ethnic groups as rich, powerful, greedy, and cruel. Colombian Indians and Afro-Colombians also typically feel that whites and mestizos violate traditional group-oriented values such as hospitality, reciprocity, and mutual support.



Poverty in a Rural Barrio

Neighboring States

Significant tensions exist with Venezuela due to guerrilla activity within the shared border region. Many Colombians follow the



Colombia and Neighboring States

state perception that Venezuela has turned a blind eye to Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC) activity on Venezuelan territory, and Colombians are consequently suspicious of Venezuelans. Many Colombians also harbor suspicions that the Chavez administration in Venezuela may be engaged in actively aiding the FARC. Colombians typically view this perceived Venezuelan support as subversive of the Colombian state and associate Venezuelans with terrorism.

Due to a number of border disputes with Venezuela in the past 150 years, Colombians also view Venezuelans as imperialists attempting to expand into Colombian territory.

The isolated indigenous populations, however, have little attachment to the Colombian nation-state or its political boundaries with its neighbors. They show little regard for Colombia's regional politics.

CULTURAL ECONOMY

Colombia's cultural economy has traditionally been divided along the nation's rigid social and economic lines. Membership in the white elite is determined not only by racial and cultural purity, but also by two economic factors: wealth derived from property and an economy focused on intellectual pursuits. The elite have traditionally stressed colonial notions of the superiority of mental over manual labor. They encourage genteel activities derived from owning land or from a career in law, medicine, or architecture.

In contrast, much of the mestizo cultural economy centers on farming. Most non-urban mestizos are employed in coffee or banana production. For other mestizo peasants and small farmers, cultivating illegal drugs is the only available economic opportunity. Many mestizo peasants in rural areas subsist on the revenue



Coffee Plantation

of coca plantations. Other peasants cultivate coca (or poppies) to supplement their meager income or as a temporary measure to improve their standard of living.

Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples engage primarily in subsistence agricultural production and informal cash economy industries, such as timber and mining.

CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Urban and Rural Populations

Colombia's population has shifted gradually from rural to urban over the past 50 years. However, white and mestizo populations dominate in both sectors. The small percentage of Colombians whose urban roots are established believe themselves to be more



Coca Plants

sophisticated than recent urban arrivals. Many new city dwellers idealize the countryside, despite the fact that many of them were driven from it by violence and poverty.

Rural areas are disproportionately poor. They have also been profoundly affected by civil conflict. *La Violencia* (state of undeclared civil war) from 1948 to 1966 was centered in the countryside. Similarly, rural areas bear the brunt of modern Colombia's narco-trafficking and guerrilla-related violence.

Culture of Major Urban Areas

Bogota

Bogota, Colombia's capital and largest city, is composed of three major areas: downtown, the relatively wealthy northern suburbs,

and the poorer suburbs to the south. Bogota's population is almost 8 million and Colombians refer to it as the nation's cultural mixing



Population Density in Colombia

bowl. Founded by the Spanish in the 16th century, Bogota became the center of colonial authority in 1717; modern Bogota residents are particularly proud of this heritage. Bogota's residents claim that its standing as the seat of colonial power created a population that speaks the purest Spanish in Latin America. They continue to



Bogota



City Street in Bogota

pride themselves on their close attachment to Spain, and believe that this attachment makes Bogota residents superior to inhabitants of all other Latin American cities.

Medellín

Medellin, a manufacturing and industrial area, is Colombia's second largest city. It is the capital of the Antioquia department, which is an important center of entrepreneurial, industrial, gold, and coffee production. It is also the famed focal point of Colombia's various drug cartels. Medellín is influenced by imports from the United States, in large measure because of the rise of drug trafficking in the 1970s and 1980s, and back and forth population movement of local inhabitants to the United States. Located in the Aburra Valley, Medellin is known for its good weather; the city is called the City of Eternal Spring. In August, Medellin hosts a

large flower festival called *Desfile de los Silleteros* (The Carrier's Parade). During this festival, thousands of artisans use a variety of flowers to weave tapestries. The city is cosmopolitan, and its culture is heavily influenced by a variety of cultural imports coming from the Caribbean, Central America, and the United States.

Cali

Cali is the third largest city in Colombia. It is located in the western part of the country and is the capital of Valle del Cauca Department located on the Cali River. Cali is an industrial, commercial, and transportation center.

MILITARY CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Cultural Style of Warfare

Offensive

Culturally, Colombia has traditionally focused on defensive, rather than offensive operations. This reflects Colombia's preoccupation with maintaining internal public order. In the 20th century, Colombia engaged in sustained offensive operations only twice, during the 19th century war for independence and during the Korean War. In 1998, however, there was a substantive change in Colombian military doctrine from a defensive orientation to an offensive orientation, caused by a change in guerrilla strategy.

In the 1970s and 1980s, isolated small-scale guerrilla attacks were replaced by massive attacks on small towns and military bases. During that time, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) defeated the army on many occasions in a series of battalion-sized engagements. The military reforms in 1998 responded to widespread fear at all levels of Colombian society that the Colombian military would not be able to control the narco-insur-

gents. In the late 1990s, most Colombians believed that their country was under siege by illegal armed groups. Much of the population feared that the FARC was becoming too powerful and that violence was becoming too prevalent. This change in doctrine gave rise to new operational concepts that were proactive, offensive, and mobile. These operational concepts sought to enable the Colombian armed forces to respond to the new FARC strategy, as well as continue to address threats posed by drug trafficking and terrorism.

The United States encouraged

Colombia's new offensive orientation with respect to counter-narcotics operations. The U.S.-sponsored Plan Colombia trained and equipped each of the military services for offensive counter-narcotics operations. In the Colombian Army, the Division-sized Rapid Deployment Force (*Fuerza Desplegué Rápida (FUDRA)*) consists of three Mobile Brigades. It has been equipped for a variety of offensive land-based counter-narcotic operations and has been continuously deployed since 2001. The Navy's oceanic submarine fleet has transitioned from a defensive deployment along the edges of Colombia's territorial waters to offensive deployment in counter-narcotics surveillance and interdiction missions. The Air Force has expanded its mission to provide mobility and support to combat troops in offensive counter-narcotics operations.



Colombian Soldier

Defensive

Like other Latin American armed forces, Colombian military tradition calls for the defense of *La Patria* (nation or fatherland) against internal and external threats. This defensive orientation of the Colombian military is understood by Colombian society to include the defense of the country's sovereignty and political and economic infrastructure. This defensive orientation stems from the post-independence elite's attempts to use the military to protect their interests, from Colombia's difficulty in establishing its borders after gaining independence and from Colombia's internal instability within its borders. This defensive orientation was incorporated into the modern professional military. Members of the Colombian armed forces are taught that their role in protecting the country's sovereignty and its political, social, and economic institutions is a matter of honor and responsibility and a task worthy of self-sacrifice.



Colombian Paratrooper

The Colombian military originally had a defensive orientation that focused on internal security and public order. This was caused by the post-independence elite, who sought to use the military to consolidate their power and protect their economic and political interests. Therefore, the Colombian military was charged with protecting public infrastructure, roads, ports, water and power plants, and economic centers such as cities, oil reserves, and industrial sites. This internal defensive orientation continued throughout the 19th century and became even stronger with the internal instability of the 20th century.

Frequent border disputes throughout the 19th century contributed to the defensive orientation of Colombia's armed forces. When the Latin American nations achieved independence from Spain in the early 19th century, they established national boundaries along the lines of the administrative units the Spanish had created during the colonial period. The frontiers had not been precisely delineated, however, because all of the units (with the exception of Brazil) had been part of a single colony. As a result, the new nations waged a series of border disputes lasting more than 150 years. These conflicts coalesced to create an atmosphere of insecurity over each nation's territorial integrity, and a sense that the armed forces had to ward off any aggression from neighboring countries.

Many of these border disputes continue today. Colombia's border disputes include a disagreement that is being mediated in the International Court of Justice, in which Nicaragua is challenging Colombia's de facto occupation of San Andres and the Providencia Archipelago islands in the Caribbean. Colombia also has an ongoing dispute with Venezuela over maritime territories off the Guajira Peninsula in the Gulf of Venezuela, fueled by seabed oil deposits and mutual enmity between the two nations. Border dis-

putes with Brazil and Peru simmered until their respective settlements in 1928 and 1932.

In 1907, President Rafael Reyes established a modern professional military and gave it two main missions: defend against external threats and provide internal security. During this period, this defensive orientation was codified in strategy, doctrine, training, and organization.

Chronic internal instability and violence in the 20th century renewed the focus of the Colombian military on internal defense. During the first half of the 20th century, controlling political tensions and internal unrest became the armed forces' dominant concern. The armed forces understand this focus on internal security as a part of their defensive orientation. Instead of protecting the interests of the elite, during this period the Colombian military saw its role as defending democracy.

The Colombian military focused almost exclusively on internal defense during the 1930s and 1940s, when there were frequent outbreaks of worker or peasant violence in rural areas. This focus continued during the period of *La Violencia* (1948 to 1953). During *La Violencia*, the military defended the democratically-elected conservative government against the Liberal guerrillas occupying several rural areas. Although the military efforts were aimed at protecting the political and democratic institutions, the Army's dislike for political involvement prevailed, and their reluctance to be used as a means of repression forced them to oppose and eventually help overthrow President Laureano Gomez in 1953. In the years that followed, the Army returned to its internal security mission and engaged in a series of operations to purge the country of the banditry that remained after *La Violencia*. The purge was part

of a coordinated effort named Plan Lazo, and it was undertaken with U.S. government assistance.

The experiences of *La Violencia* and Plan Lazo elevated the military role in the government's efforts to control public order and violence. This role intensified further with the creation of the *Frete Nacional* (National Front), a 16-year power-sharing agreement between the Liberal and Conservative parties in 1958, and the emergence of the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN) in the 1960s. In response to these developments, the military assumed an important role in support of the new political alliance in power, and against the Cuban-inspired communist threat that the guerrilla groups posed.

Conventional

Despite a brief period of civil-war guerrilla tactics in the early 20th century, the Colombian armed forces relied solely on conventional tactics until the late 20th century, when guerrilla insurgencies pushed the military to expand into unconventional operations.

Throughout the 19th century, Colombian military leaders exclusively favored conventional warfare. They believed guerrilla warfare was an act of desperation that lacked respectability. Civil wars throughout Colombia's history have consisted of militias on both sides operating under conventional organization and under the leadership of members of the social and political elite. The War of the Thousand Days (1899 to 1902), however, created a brief disruption to this pattern. The civil war between liberals and conservatives brought with it a brief period of experimentation with guerrilla tactics. A lasting effect of this period of experimentation was the association of glory with ruthlessness, as much as with courage.

Once the civil war ended, the emphasis of military training and exercises returned to conventional warfare, although the cultural value of ruthlessness remained within the military mentality. The Colombian military conducted successful conventional operations against Peru over the Leticia occupation (1932 to 1934). These conventional operations enhanced the prestige of the Colombian military in Colombia and confirmed its conventional focus, which had become associated with a modern professional identity.



General Officer

The Colombian military fought in a battalion under a U.S. division in the Korean War, which strengthened Colombia's focus on conventional warfare. This battalion became a source of great pride for the Colombian military and was used as an elite force for operations within Colombia.

The focus on conventional warfare remained throughout most of the 20th century, despite the fact that the Colombian military was primarily occupied during this time with internal defense and low-intensity operations against various insurgency groups. In the late 20th century, the severity and protracted nature of the conflict with guerrillas caused the military to pursue unconventional tactics such as counter-narcotics, counter-kidnapping, and counterterrorism.

Counterinsurgency

The Colombian military has long had to deal with internal security challenges (*Orden Público*), but only gradually and grudgingly adopted counter-insurgency tactics in the second half of the 20th century at the urging of the United States, and in response to Communist-inspired guerrilla movements. The Colombians are still very reluctant to conduct platoon or squad operations. This is because Colombian General Officers realize that they cannot react quickly to reinforce units in combat, and therefore believe that any Colombian military unit engaged in combat must be able to survive without support for several hours.

After a successful campaign against banditry in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the army was deployed to fight emerging Marxist guerrilla groups. Experienced commissioned officers from the Korean War and noncommissioned officers, who had fought against liberal guerrillas during the period of *La Violencia*, were given the task of defending the country against the threat posed by Communist insurgent groups. The combination of these operational experiences facilitated exchanges in terms of counterinsurgency techniques between Colombia and the United States through the U.S. School of the Americas in Panama.

Guerrilla groups formed in Latin America at the height of the Cold War, just after the Cuban Missile Crisis. During this period, communism was perceived by Colombia as a threat to the democracy and sovereignty of all countries in Latin America. Many Latin American nations, including Colombia, signed the 1947 Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (also known as the Rio Treaty) for regional security. The treaty was intended to create a collective approach to the new regional security threats and was designed specifically to combat communism.

Under the Rio Treaty, the spread of Cuban Communist ideology in the region represented an imminent threat to the internal security of all Latin American nations. In response, most Latin American armed forces adopted a national security doctrine (NSD) in the 1960s to combat insurgency. These new NSDs were based on each country's experience with revolutions and insurgency, and they reflected the influence of U.S. military missions and training in the region. In Colombia, as in many neighboring nations, the armed forces and the NSD identified the nation's primary internal sources of unrest and insurgency as:

- Internal socioeconomic and political conditions that made members of the lower classes vulnerable to subversive proposals.
- The efforts of international communism to take advantage of these conditions to introduce Marxist, socialist, and revolutionary ideologies into the region.
- Domestic revolutionary and subversive groups.

Under the influence of NSD, the Colombian military continued to expand and professionalize. The 1968 National Security Law established the framework for military action in matters of public order and internal security. In the 1970s, the larger and more professional military effectively brought rural disorder under control by means of a U.S.-inspired counter-insurgency program. The anti-guerrilla strategy combined armed repression with extensive civic action projects, such as the construction of schools, clinics, and roads, that were designed to improve rural living conditions. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Army expanded its focus and also adopted a containment strategy based on keeping the guerrillas out of strategic economic areas and political centers.

Internal Security

The Colombian military's highest priority is to maintain public order and internal security. This mission includes preserving public safety and protecting strategic economic areas and political centers from internal subversion. This internal security mission is pursued by the Army, the National Police, and state-licensed private security companies. The Colombian military views this internal security mission as a subset of its traditional defensive orientation.

In 1924, a Swiss military training mission commissioned by the government of *Pedro Nel Ospina* began to develop constabulary capabilities within the Colombian military, enabling the military to quell internal unrest. During the first half of the 20th century, the military was occasionally employed to control outbreaks of worker and peasant violence such as the United Fruit Strike of 1928. In the second half of the 20th century, the military became extensively involved in civic action and counterinsurgency programs. During the early 1960s, when government concerns were directed at preventing the establishment of a Cuban-style revolution, the guerrillas remaining from the years of *La Violencia* were cast as subversives or bandits. Portraying the government's opponents as criminal elements helped legitimize the military's continuing role to maintain internal security. It also strengthened ties between the armed forces and the civilian population and, by extension, elevated the military's prestige.

By 1964, as much as 70 percent of the country's military personnel had been deployed in various missions related to internal security. The Lazo Plan, the military's first comprehensive counterinsurgency operation, successfully employed psychological operations in winning peasant support away from the insurgents. Army troops were also deployed throughout rural areas in an at-

tempt to eliminate small independent guerrilla-led republics that had been established during the years of *La Violencia*.

The National Police are charged with traditional police work in the large cities but also fulfill a military internal defense mission in rural areas of Colombia. Although they are separate from the Army, the Colombian National Police is as large as the Army, and also operates under the auspices of the Minister of Defense. National policemen assigned to rural areas are equipped and trained as rifle squads, platoons, and companies. Naturally there is some overlap in areas of operation between police detachments and military forces and that has served to exacerbate animosity between the two organizations.

All Colombian police forces were nationalized after *La Violencia* and moved from the control of the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Defense. These actions were taken because several local police forces had been recruited to the liberal side (which was primarily rurally-based) during the 5-year-long, bloody conflict. During *La Violencia*, the Colombian Army remained loyal to the Conservatives, who were controlling the government in Bogotá. Over the past decade, there have been several fire fights between Army and National Police units, caused either by mistaken identity or intentional assaults, varying with reporting slants.

During the 1990s, the Colombian National Police were very effective in lobbying the U.S. Congress for additional support, since they played a central role in the drug war and acted as counter balance to Colombian Army responsibility in counter-narcotics operations.

Despite U.S. support, as recently as 2002, close to one-fifth of the national municipalities had no national police presence, and therefore no government presence. However, by 2004, the administra-

tion of President Uribe had been able to reestablish at least some government control in each municipality.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, the lack of effective government control and deterioration of security throughout Colombia contributed to the further proliferation of illegal paramilitary groups and private security enterprises.

Approximately 300 security companies were founded in the 1990s, with 104 branches spread through the 36 departments. These companies were contracted to protect businesses, banks, and individuals in both urban and rural areas. Many of the managers, guards, and trainers are retired military officers. The Directorate of Security and Surveillance of the Ministry of Defense regulates these Colombian security companies and is responsible for issuing and controlling their business licenses. By 1997, the number of security company employees was more than 95,000.

Foreign Cultural Influences

Foreign cultural influences of Chilean, German, French, British, and U.S. military training missions have shaped the armed forces of Colombia, introducing a professional military identity early in Colombian history. The Colombian military values its identity as a professional institution, created in the image of Western militaries. The many different sources of foreign military assistance provided Colombia with diverse advice, doctrine, training, technology, and equipment. The Colombian military has had difficulty incorporating this assistance.

A 1907 reform under President Rafael Reyes established a modern professional military and introduced two main missions for the Colombian armed forces: defend against external threats and provide internal security. To facilitate the reforms, Reyes commissioned

the assistance of a number of foreign military missions and developed a curriculum for the new military academies. The curriculum emphasized the protection of the country's territorial integrity, the apolitical role of the armed forces, public safety, and, to a lesser extent, the promotion of economic development. Its primary goal was to form a professional military force that was subordinate to civil authorities following the Prussian military tradition.

Chile played a primary role in developing the Colombian armed forces. The first of three Chilean training missions arrived in Colombia in the early 1900s. The Prussian-trained Chilean military advisors were stationed in Colombia from 1907 to 1915. They helped develop the curricula for the new *Escuela Militar de Cadetes* (Military Cadet School) in Bogotá, and *Escuela Naval de Grumetes* (Naval Cadet School) in Cartagena, as well as the army and navy service academies. They introduced modern European concepts of military doctrine and technology. The Chilean mission also helped to found the armed forces staff school and the Superior War College, modeled after the Prussian *Kriegsakademie*, which offered advanced training for the officer corps and graduated its first class in 1910. With Chilean assistance, the Colombian government also opened the Noncommissioned Officers School in 1916.

The aim of the state-commissioned Chilean mission was to create an apolitical professional military force subordinated to the civil authorities following the Prussian military tradition. The Chilean curricula also emphasized two primary functions of the armed forces: national defense against foreign threats and maintaining internal order.

During the early 20th century, a series of European missions also contributed to the development of the Colombian armed forces. After the Military Aviation School was opened in 1919, a French

air mission (1921 to 1924) provided the technical training and advice that led to the creation of the Colombian Air Force. In 1924, a 9-year Swiss training mission followed, which developed constabulary capabilities within the military. From 1929 to 1934, German training missions assisted in the development of the Navy. In 1936, a 2-year British naval mission created a training program that further assisted in developing the Navy.

Following the departure of the British, the first United States Navy mission arrived in Colombia. The United States quickly established itself as the principal foreign influence on the Colombian armed forces. Thousands of Colombian soldiers received training at U.S. military schools. They participated in courses ranging from counterinsurgency tactics and resource management to international law and security issues. Throughout the 1980s, Colombia also participated in annual joint maneuvers with the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force in South America.

U.S. military doctrine and tactics have remained the dominant foreign influence on the Colombian military into the 21st century. However, the armed forces' early exposure to Prussian-style professionalism and the influence of other nations still has an impact on the Colombian military. By the late 1990s, the Colombian armed forces had a substantial amount of material in its equipment inventory from several countries, including Brazil, France, Germany, Israel, and Russia. The United States continued to supply the greatest amount of equipment to Colombia through Plan Colombia. Bilateral military relations also continued to improve in the late 1990s as new efforts began to expand the Colombian armed forces' capabilities in the area of narcotics control and interdiction, and most recently, in the efforts to control terrorist activity.

Throughout the 1990s, U.S. government policy supported the Colombians in counter-narcotics campaigns, but left all counter-insurgency operations as the responsibility of the Colombians. This policy distinction between counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency lead to certain administrative absurdities, such as determining how much of a soldier's equipment is dedicated to either counter-narcotics or counter-insurgency functions. In reality, the insurgents were heavily involved in narco-trafficking, first as "sub-contractors" for security and transportation and later by assuming a leading role in the illegal narcotic operations.

In the fall of 2003, along with other changes resulting from the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States, President George W. Bush formally changed U.S. policy to support the Colombian government against both narcotics-related and insurgency-related internal threats.

Attitudes Toward Foreign Military Assistance

Members of the Colombian armed forces are extremely proud and protective of their institution. They have traditionally shown some degree of resistance to change and arrogance in the face of foreigners attempting to implement change. Nevertheless, they usually welcome foreign assistance if they are part of the decision-making process.

On many occasions throughout the 20th century, Colombian military officers have complained that certain foreign missions were attempting to reorganize the Colombian military establishment without regard for the specific nature of Colombian problems. For instance, the U.S. approach to the Colombian Armed Forces in the 1990s caused some tension. The armed forces resented being forced to accept the creation of a counter-narcotics joint task force

that the Colombian high command could not employ. They resented that aviation resources were divided among five competing elements (Army, Navy, Air Force, National Police, and Joint Task Force South). They resented that intelligence-sharing was limited to narcotics trafficking. U.S. policy also exacerbated a split between civilian officials who were willing to work within U.S. conditions and military leaders who believed that their institution is being demeaned. Because of U.S. help in training and equipping counter-narcotics battalions, Colombians tend to view the counter-narcotics forces as the gringo army versus the real army of the Colombian armed forces.

Despite this view, Colombian officers usually welcome assistance that will better equip and train them to conduct their defense and security tasks. Colombian officers also typically respect U.S. officers and they are motivated and appreciative of training. They see foreign assistance as a way to overcome political and financial neglect. Technical assistance in the areas of intelligence, night combat operations, communications, and aerial and naval mobility has yielded sharp increases in the capabilities of the Colombian military.

In recent decades, Colombian officers have welcomed the significant military assistance packages that the United States has provided to the armed forces under Plan Colombia.



19th Century Caudillo

Contrary to the situation in other Latin American nations, U.S.-Colombia military-to-military relations have been fairly strong throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON THE MILITARY

Leadership

The Colombian armed forces have a long tradition of strong, personalist leadership in the armed forces, beginning with Simon Bolivar and Francisco de Paula Santander, commanders of the Liberation Army that defeated the Spaniards in 1819. Personalism is the vesting of authority and command with an individual, rather than with an institution. The Colombian military's leadership draws primarily from the caudillismo tradition of personalist, charismatic leaders. A caudillo was a regional military leader of the 19th and early 20th centuries who staged revolts and coups to take political power. Caudillos maintained a personal following independent of an institutional leadership role. Rather than attracting followers by proposing specific changes in government policy, caudillos tended to mobilize support through family and friends, through networks of patronage that linked them to subordinates in the social hierarchy, and through the use of



Simon Bolivar

violence. Caudillos are a potent symbol to Colombians of the adventurous, warrior spirit capable of dominating others in pursuit of personal wealth and power. Colombian society has been dominated by this practice of personalism throughout its history. Loyalty is given to a person, not an office, and that person exercises an extraordinary amount of power and influence.

Accordingly, leadership in the Colombian armed forces and in the Colombian state has been strong, patriarchal, and highly personalist. These types of charismatic leaders inspire intense devotion in Colombians. The most prominent example of this is Simon Bolivar, commander of the Revolutionary Army. Bolivar continues to be a symbol of bravery, command, and leadership within the modern armed forces. Most Colombian leaders identify themselves with Bolivar. Officers hold his love of the fatherland as an example for all soldiers to follow and often invoke the name of Bolivar in attempts to motivate their troops.

This emphasis on character and personality carries over into modern leadership trends. Colombian officer's command in a manner intended not to lead by example but to exercise control and domination. As a result, authority is heavily centralized in the Colombian military. Most decisions are referred to the General Command of the Armed Forces or to field commanders, effectively slowing the pace of military operations. The Colombian armed forces have often missed battlefield opportunities or failed to react expeditiously to guerrilla attacks because of the need for approval from the General Command or the civilian authorities before taking any action.

Over the past two decades, the Colombian non-commissioned officer (NCO) system has made great strides toward producing more

effective small unit leaders. These changes are most apparent in the elite combat units and in military intelligence organizations where both the junior officers and NCOs have had repeated training and exposure to U.S. organizational philosophy and military standard operating procedures.

Nonetheless, there is a tendency for Colombian officers to lead through control and domination that has generally created an extraordinarily weak NCO system. Officers refuse to grant much authority to NCOs, and instead prefer to maintain control over many of the functions typically performed by U.S. NCOs. This creates bottlenecks that constrain information flow and the decision-making process. This discourages initiative and innovation on the battlefield.

These leadership patterns also result in great sensitivity to insult or slight among leaders of the armed forces. Colombian officers maintain great pride in rank, experience, and longevity. If an officer of lower rank is promoted over another officer, tradition practically mandates the passed-over officer to retire. Colombian military leaders will not remain in the service if they believe they have been slighted. Because of this, experienced generals are often lost before the age of retirement. This represents a significant loss of training and expertise for the Colombian armed forces.

Despite their long-standing tradition of loyalty to civilian authorities, high-ranking military leaders are well-known for their confrontational way of dealing with civilian leaders. Colombian officers usually demand and expect the same respect from civilian leaders that they receive from the military. The Minister of Defense, a civilian only since 1991, is often viewed by Colombian military officers as intruding into military leadership, especially on operational and budgetary issues.

The Colombian military has been dedicated in recent years to serving the state and the elected leadership. However, Colombian military leaders generally see their duty more in terms of their love for country than in terms of fulfilling government policies. For them, governments are transitory in relation to the life of *La Patria* (motherland or nation).

Strategy and Doctrine

Until the development of a national security strategy in 1998, only very general notions about the defense of *La Patria* existed in Colombia. Among other factors, this was a result of romantic cultural views of the military as the protector of the nation, a political culture that did not value institutionalized strategy and doctrine, and social and political views that no large enemy threatened Colombia enough to warrant the development of rigorous strategy and doctrine. Since 1998, the armed forces have developed new strategy and doctrine, largely due to urging and assistance from the United States; this strategy and doctrine has focused on offensive counterinsurgency operations.

The Colombian military retains romantic cultural views of itself as the protector of *La Patria* (motherland or nation). These cultural views are shared by large parts of society and are related to a broader romanticism in Colombian culture about national identity. Colombians and the Colombian military have a mystical view of the nation, unlike many North Americans who think of the nation and national defense in rational or contractual terms. The Colombian military often conceives of its role as guardian of this nation.

Partly for this reason, the broader Colombian society and political culture undervalues the importance of strategy and doctrine. Al-

though many Colombian military leaders have long realized that this romantic view of the Colombian military's role has weakened the development of the military, they have had difficulty attracting and retaining the attention of civilian leaders. For over a century, Colombian officers have expressed their concern over the lack of a defining doctrine or strategy and a lack of consistent and sustainable defense policy. Officers also blame the lack of continuity in Colombian politics and political culture for this deficiency. Until November 2005, the Colombian constitution limited presidential terms to four years, and presidents were not allowed to run for re-election, making party differences highly significant in policy formulation and decision-making, and resulting in much inconsistency. A constitutional change now allows re-election for a further four years in an attempt to address this issue of political inconsistency.

The lack of strategy and doctrine in Colombia is related to the perception in Colombian political culture and society that Colombia has not been under significant threat. While Colombia does not have significant international threats, members of the Colombian armed forces believe that civilian authorities display a general lack of attention to internal security and the need for more rigorous doctrine on counterinsurgency. Over 70 percent of the country's population resides in urban centers; thus, urban areas represent a higher political priority than rural areas for elected officials. Most guerrilla activity, however, always has been localized in rural areas where the military has neither support from political elites nor the necessary resources for action. Until the creation of a new national security strategy in 1998, this lack of national-level political interest in rural areas created a vacuum of state authority outside the nation's urban centers. This allowed for the development of strong insurgent groups and prevented the military from combating them effectively.

In 1998, the civilian state created a cohesive national security strategy, and Colombian military doctrine changed from a defensive to an offensive approach of combat. This development came largely at the urging of the United States, but also was a product of a broader societal realization that guerrillas were posing a greater threat to the state and that previous attempts to combat them had been ineffective. The armed forces transitioned from the passive, defensive, and static attitude for which Colombian armed forces historically criticized civilian authorities, to a proactive, offensive, and mobile operational concept. At the same time, the civilian state and the armed forces made a significant effort to create a doctrine capable of addressing situations of internal armed conflict such as drug trafficking and terrorism.

Democratic Security Policy

President Alvaro Uribe Velez was elected to the presidency in 2002, having already served a few decades in Colombian local and national politics, including stints as the Mayor of Medellín and the Governor of the Antioquia Department. As governor, he demonstrated the ability to lower the level of violence in Antioquia, which was a key issue in his 2002 election to the Colombian presidency.

Upon his election, President Uribe implemented a “Democratic Security” policy in order to better integrate all elements of national power in the counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics campaigns and to regain the confidence and support of the Colombian people. Two years later, Uribe’s security policy had reduced homicides, kidnappings, and terrorist attacks by approximately 50 percent, the lowest level in almost 20 years. By April 2004, Colombia had also established a permanent police or military presence in every Colombian municipality for the first time in decades.

Paramilitary

Paramilitary groups sprang up in many parts of Colombia in the late 1960s as a defensive measure against Communist insurgent groups. The lack of effective government security forces outside of the major Colombian cities lead rich land owners to form their own local “self-defense” (*auto-defensa*) groups. Frequently the members of these groups consisted of military or police veterans and often acted as volunteer auxiliaries to the government security forces.

In addition to the emergence of local self-defense groups, narco-trafficker organized self-defense forces developed in the 1980s and 1990s as a way to defend against kidnappings and extortion by insurgent organizations.

By the mid-1990s, these widespread “self-defense” or paramilitary groups had grown and evolved into a potent force. Many had also branched out and established themselves in the lucrative narco-trafficking business and battled the FARC for control of the illicit drug trade. The paramilitary activities during this period were typically very brutal and involved some of the most horrific human rights abuses witnessed in Colombia.

By the turn of the century, the paramilitaries numbered more than 10,000 and were loosely represented by a single organization: the *Auto-defensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC). In response to the paramilitary threat, the Uribe government began to negotiate a demobilization of paramilitary forces in 2003. An agreement was reached that included reduced jail sentences for those not guilty of gross human rights violations.

This peace process successfully demobilized nearly 10,000 paramilitary personnel, but paramilitary activity remains a threat as demobilized fighters form new alliances and resort to the same

violence and illegal activity that the demobilization was intended to address. There have also been accusations made against high ranking Colombian officers alleging ties to paramilitary groups.

Operational Planning

The Colombian military operates through a rigid vertical system of authority. Because of this strict hierarchy, the responsibility for operational planning typically rests solely with the highest levels of leadership. In the rare instance that operations are planned at the division level, prior approval must be obtained from superiors before the operations are begun.

This derives in part from Colombian leadership patterns, which emphasize personalist, charismatic leaders who do not lead by example, but rather by exercising control and domination. It is also a result of the extreme import of social networking in Colombia. Colombians are well known for their use and understanding of *la palanca* (the inside track) afforded to someone because of a personal connection with another individual of power or influence. *Palancas* and other forms of social networking are consolidated through a system of informal decision-making groups called *rosca*s (a traditional Colombian twisted pastry). These informal groups exist at different levels, across different spheres, and are linked hierarchically by *palancas* and other personal relationships. Their composition varies according to level-municipal, departmental, or national, but each group typically includes at least one powerful person from every sphere. A *rosca* is a vitally important system in both the social and the political context because it is at this level of interaction that most political and military decisions are made and careers determined.

Even though there is a command structure that guides operational planning in the Colombian armed forces, *rosca*s maintain significant influence among officers when it comes to promotions, the protection of common interests, and strategies. As bargaining and trading favors among groups and members is common in these informal practices, the effectiveness of military operations can often be compromised. However, the *rosca* and *palanca* may lose influence if the general society becomes less traditional, or if military influence on society decreases.

The military's hierarchical approach to operational planning and decision-making carries over into inter-service communications. There is a limited history of joint operations, such as the use of a Joint Task Force to recover demilitarized zones in the aftermath of President Pastrana's failed peace initiative. However, traditional inter- and intra-service hierarchies and excessive rivalries have generally prevented the armed forces from conducting joint military operations. There is no institutional rhetoric with regard to joint operations as they are understood in the U.S. armed forces, and interactions are based primarily on *rosca*s. Because these networks are derived primarily from officers' military academy contacts, and because each branch maintains its own academy, there is little opportunity to network between branches. Joint missions are neither prized nor well-coordinated, and inter-service rivalries are common, particularly in regards to funding. This lack of an integrated approach to joint operational planning has, therefore, limited the effective coordination of service capabilities.

Intelligence

Intelligence gathering has historically been carried out through informal methods and in a highly personalized manner. Colombian cultural influences on intelligence gathering continue to cause in-

telligence officials to view knowledge as power to be used for the individual, rather than national, gain.

Until the 1990s, intelligence gathering operations did not exist in Colombia in the form in which they are understood in the United States. The Colombian military has traditionally used civic action projects and military presence in small towns and villages throughout the nation as an informal method of intelligence gathering.

This informal method of intelligence gathering focused on human intelligence, largely gained through interpersonal relationships between the military and civilian populations. Despite decades of internal instability and insurgency, the Colombian military does not have a long history of using trained informants and operatives to gather intelligence covertly. The Colombian military has traditionally not focused on penetrating paramilitary, insurgency, and criminal organizations. Some in the Colombian military believe that this inattention to rigorous intelligence gathering caused the Colombian military and the civilian government to underestimate the activities of guerrillas.

With the creation of a new, cohesive national security strategy in 1998, however, Colombia recognized its need for improved intelligence capabilities, and began to develop intelligence operations. Despite this recent development and other attempts at improvement, Colombian intelligence operations remain highly personalized and often used for political gain instead of for national or state objectives.

Intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination are jeopardized by a constant manipulation of information in Colombia. In some situations, military commanders use insufficient intelligence to fit their operational objectives. In others, intelligence officers may

purposely provide incomplete or inaccurate information as means of maintaining some degree of operational control. In addition, intelligence personnel may fail to report bad news or corruption to protect the interests of themselves and their colleagues. Failures in intelligence are accentuated by a high degree of corruption generated by drug money, a lack of secrecy, and a personalist culture that encourages the hoarding of knowledge. These failures often facilitate intelligence leaks.

Although there have been many pronouncements, new regulations, and information campaigns to warn Colombian service members of the severe consequences of selling information, few violators have been publicly identified and punished. One of the crippling results of this operational security problem is unwillingness on the part of Colombian senior officers to share sensitive information, thereby undermining the Colombian intelligence institutions' ability to disseminate operational intelligence.

Tactical intelligence gathering is inhibited by a lack of innovation in lower levels of military command. This is due largely to a military culture that centralizes authority and does not encourage innovation of any kind. In counterinsurgency operations, the Colombian military continues to rely upon small units of 15 to 18 men, known as Intelligence and Localizing Groups (GIL). These units have general patrol and reconnaissance missions. They have not proven effective against the guerrillas, especially as the guerrilla movements grow in size and sophistication.

The armed forces recognize these deficiencies. Over the past decade, the Colombian National Police and the Armed Forces have adopted severe measures to curtail corruption and informational leaks. With the allocation of more resources to intelligence efforts, the Colombian military has also significantly improved its techni-

cal intelligence capabilities, including its capacity to intercept signals, its communications capabilities, and its facility with aerial photography. Intelligence gathering efforts have also improved as units remain in the field for longer periods of time.

Small Unit Skills

The tendency of the Colombian armed forces toward officer centrism severely curtails small unit skills. This deficiency has led Colombian units to rely on what they consider their resourcefulness and creativity in the face of difficult circumstances.

Latin American militaries generally cultivate a highly rigid vertical system, in which the officer corps retains a great deal of strength, noncommissioned officers are extraordinarily weak, and enlisted personnel are nearly untrained. Because of this, most of the responsibility lies with the officers, as they often are the only fully trained members of the unit. Although the qualifications and quality of NCO's has increased in recent years, officers generally allocate only the most menial tasks to NCOs and enlisted personnel, and instead issuing orders only piecemeal. This results in much confusion within units, and severely curtails their effectiveness. If an officer becomes a casualty, the unit's command structure may disintegrate.

In response to this situation, Colombian soldiers take great pride in a characteristic they refer to as *malicia indigena* (indigenous malice). This phrase refers to the perceived ability of Colombians to adapt to difficult situations, and to be creative and resourceful. *Malicia indigena* refers specifically to the resourcefulness that arises from being continuously subjugated, either by the hierarchy or a lack of resources and opportunities. Small military units pride themselves on making good use of their *malicia indigena* given the difficult and unexpected conditions they often experience during combat.

Logistics and Maintenance

Geography and terrain combine with personalism and powerful social networking to impede the effectiveness of logistics management in the Colombian military. Generally, the relationship of logistics and maintenance to combat capability is undervalued. Logistics and maintenance are important in Colombia largely because of the procurement they involve. This procurement creates complicated networks between military cooperatives and enterprises and the armed forces, as well as opportunities for individual gain, either through the granting of favors or through corruption.

Logistics issues are extremely problematic in Colombia due to the country's topography and size. Problems with mobility and aerial support have been a major constraint. The lack of personnel allocation to logistics limits manpower capabilities for combat and patrolling operations.

The management of supplies is a complex affair given the long-standing military monopoly over production and the administration of contracts. Traditionally, military cooperatives and enterprises furnished the armed forces with supplies in exchange for money that was to fund, among other things, military retirement funds, social security services, and housing. This left little room for competition in the procurement of supplies. This relationship between the military cooperatives and the armed forces constrained the way the armed forces can procure supplies; procurement was driven by the needs of the overall system, rather than strictly operational military needs. In recent years, the process has become increasingly transparent and is now often based on cost-benefit analysis rather than non-competitive contracts.

There are also indications that logistics management can be used for personal gain in Colombia. A logistics officer controls a great

deal of resources, which he can then use to gain influence over military commanders. Logistics officers often disseminate resources in such a way as to buy a position in prominent *roscas* (social networks). This results in a disparity of resources between and among different units within the military and can reduce the effectiveness of neglected units.

In other instances, logistics officers will be more concerned about fulfilling the needs of the battalion commander, than the needs of the line company officers, who are his equal in rank and likely rivals for personal power. To compete with company commanders, the logistics officer may withhold support to that company. This forces the company commanders to enlist the support of the logistics officer and become a subordinate member of his social network. This behavior is common among logistics officers, enlisted soldiers, and civilians.

Logistics and maintenance present a variety of opportunities for individual and collective gain through corruption. The weakness of civilian oversight of the military and the inability of the military to manage its complex networks between military cooperatives and the armed forces have created an environment that fosters corruption. Mismanagement of supply contracts and their associated funds has diminished military effectiveness in recent years.

Training

Throughout the 20th century, the morale and readiness of the Colombian armed forces suffered from resource constraints, high operational tempo, and constant neglect from civilian authorities. Many members of the Colombian military believe that this neglect is purposeful, both because the Colombian civilian leadership fears a strong military and because Colombian society has not normally felt threatened enough to demand changes.



Military Training

Since the 1960s, members of the armed forces have expressed concerns about the state of training and readiness in their units, as well as their ability to succeed in unconventional warfare with armed guerrilla groups.

Before 1998, military training and education focused on conventional warfare and the fulfillment of requirements to ascend in rank. With the 1998 reforms, however, the number of hours allocated to the discussion and analysis of armed conflict, counterinsurgency, strategy, and operations increased dramatically. Until the reforms, instruction in Colombian military academies devoted 90 percent of class time to conventional mechanized operations and only 10 percent to counterinsurgency. Since 1998, these proportions have been inverted.

Unit Cohesion and Morale

Loyalties inside the military institution reflect Colombia's social structure. From the time they join the armed forces, servicemen begin to develop strong interpersonal ties and group identities according to rank, service conditions, and social background. This results in a highly stratified social structure, in which officers and enlisted personnel are separated by a wide chasm. The officer corps generally reflects the social status of the nation's white and mestizo elite. Conscripted soldiers in combat units are often poorly educated. A fundamental disconnect exists between officers and their soldiers. The Colombian officer's corps is a professional body with tremendous pride in professionalism. Many officers therefore view their conscript soldiers as useless, ignorant transients with few useful military skills. Young conscripted troops often view their officers as martinets, unconcerned with their well-being and in pursuit of professionalism that conscripts are incapable of achieving.

In response to this situation, the Army has taken several steps to improve the education and effectiveness of its enlisted soldiers. The Colombian military is still using conscript soldiers, but is steadily converting its primary combat units (counter-guerrilla battalions that comprise the mobile brigades) to professional soldiers.

Poor leadership and corruption has also affected unit cohesion in the Colombian armed forces. Financial advantages offered by drug traffickers, guerrilla groups, and organized crime syndicates can splinter loyalties within a unit and cause a great deal of discontent and suspicion. In certain circumstances, however, long periods of service together under the intense conditions of insurrectionary war create a situation in which unit cohesion is stronger in Colombia than in neighboring countries, despite being affected by similar social and economic structures.

Technology and Innovation

Technology and innovation in Colombia rely on a leader's will; if something is not the leader's idea or presented by a subordinate in a way that the leader can control, then it does not prosper. Technology introduced by rivals is often rejected or even subverted.

Technology and innovation have a greater chance of success in the Colombian military when introduced by outsiders such as the United States. This is because the United States is viewed as outside Colombian social networks, and hence, nonthreatening to the stability of these networks, and as fundamentally superior technologically to Colombia.

Technology introduced by the United States can, however, be appropriated by Colombian general officers and used for personal gain. Sometimes the United States unwittingly helps different factions increase their personal power or compete with one another. Sometimes there will be surprising resistance to a particular technology or innovation that would obviously improve efficiency. Often this resistance has little to do with the technology itself, but more to do with the local individual who is helping the United States introduce that technology in Colombia, and the shift in power that this technology will bring to this individual.

Members of the Colombian military recognize their inability to innovate technology with limited resources. While the armed forces do not typically create innovative technology on a large scale, they are, however, eager to adopt technology. The Colombian military, like the armed forces of many nations, regards technology as a method of power projection. The armed forces, therefore, have historically pushed for continually advancing technological prowess as a domestic and international marker of strength and modernity.

CULTURE AND RANK

Officers

Colombian officers typically come from a middle-class, mestizo background. Middle-class mestizos have traditionally viewed the military as an avenue for social advancement, given the extremely rigid social and racial hierarchy in Colombian society. The officer corps gives middle-class mestizos a way to gain more social and political power than they would otherwise have as civilians. Although this mobility does not generally allow mestizos to enter into the upper-classes of whites, it gives them much greater relative power compared to this elite group. This phenomenon also contributes to tensions in the military leadership's relationship to civilian authority. Military leaders are not simply resisting or challenging civilian authority; they are asserting themselves, given the power they have gained through their military careers, to an impenetrable elite class that is their social superiors.

The white, upper-class elite do not seek to place their children in the officer corps. There is an absence of a strong military tradition in Colombian society and a general mild disdain among the upper-class for the military. Young white upper-class Colombians are not eager to spend years in rigorous schools alongside their social inferiors and then climb slowly up a career ladder when they already have a variety of opportunities in government or business careers through their families' social networks.

This class identity of the Colombian officer corps is most applicable in the largest service, the Army, and less applicable in the smaller, technologically more superior Navy and Air Force.

The Colombian officer corps is extraordinarily tight-knit. With the exception of officers trained in medicine or law, all commissioned officers are required to graduate from one of the three service academies. There is no Officer Candidate School or Reserve Officer Training Corps in Colombia. The officer corps is therefore comprised of individuals who have known each other since childhood and who have studied, trained, and served together. Requirements for admission to the service academies include being a Colombian citizen by birth, of the male gender, age 18 to 24, unmarried, a high school diploma, and high scores on entry tests. There are a few women officers in the Colombian military but they typically only hold administrative positions.

Officer candidates are required to pay tuition to attend service academies. High school diplomas and tuition prevent most lower-class peoples from pursuing a professional military career. Lower-class families rarely can afford for their children to become non-wage earners during their early years in the military.

Most parents of officer candidates are merchants, white-collar workers, small farmers, and to a lesser extent military leaders. Traditionally, only a small fraction (5 to 7 percent) of officer candidates comes from military families. Officer candidates tend to come from families living in all parts of Colombia.

Mechanisms of military advancement in Colombia operate to the advantage of those with influence over powerful social networks or *roscas*.

The officer rank structure parallels that of the U.S. military with the exception that there are only three General Officer Ranks – Brigadier General, Major General, and General.

Enlisted Personnel and Non-Commissioned Officers

The enlisted ranks are filled almost exclusively by lower middle class Colombians with very limited formal education. The enlisted ranks are divided into conscripted troops, professional soldiers, and NCOs. The Colombian Army and Navy have eight enlisted grades, ranging from the equivalent of Basic Private to Command Sergeant Major and from Seaman Recruit to Fleet Force Master Chief Petty Officer. The Colombian Air Force has seven enlisted grades from Airman Basic to Chief Master Sergeant.

Most of the professional soldiers and NCOs first enter the Colombian military as conscripts. The period of conscripted service is 18 months for regular soldiers and 12 months for secondary school graduates. The armed forces drafts about 3,000 secondary school graduates each year who, according to Colombian law, are exempt from combat duty. High school graduates are assigned instead to the Presidential Guard, Military Police, recruiting offices, or other administrative duties. This results in a significant divide within the conscripted troops, so that the poorest, least educated conscripts typically bear the brunt of the military's most dangerous work. This law is being phased out, but the current system is likely to continue in practice due to the limited education and skill sets of lower middle class conscripts.

Basic training for Colombia's soldiers lasts for eight months and includes not only military skills but also basic language training for illiterates and elementary vocational training. Though the prestige of Colombian enlisted soldiers is typically low, lower-class Colombians often enlist to gain basic education and skills that may be difficult to gain otherwise, especially if the person comes from a rural peasant background.

Efforts have been made to offer additional opportunities to enlisted soldiers. Upon completion of required military service, conscript soldiers with good records and demonstrated potential may be given the opportunity to reenlist either for training as a professional soldier or as a NCO. Both of these career options require that the recruit have a higher level of education than the average conscript and significant additional military training.

In 1999, the Colombian military established a Professional Soldiers Academy, a demanding 6-month training program that transforms experienced conscript soldiers into profession counter-guerrilla soldiers. The Colombian Army Mobile Brigades consist of Counter-Guerrilla Battalions, that are staffed by these professional soldiers. The Colombian Marine Corps is also transitioning to professional Marines in their combat battalions. Professional soldiers and Marines are not expected to lead troops, so they are not trained in many fundamental military skills such as map reading or communication procedures. Colombian professional soldiers/Marines receive a number to wear on their uniforms that indicates the years of military service completed. Professional soldiers/Marines also receive a significantly higher salary than conscript soldiers, access to health care and pension plans.

Candidates for the NCO Academy are selected from conscript volunteers near the end of their service and also from the ranks of professional soldiers. The volunteers are required to have a high school diploma and are screened by a board of officers who focus on demonstrated military skills. The candidates selected for the program must then attend a demanding 18 month NCO academy before being promoted to the lowest NCO rank and reporting to their first units.

The Colombian military has been characterized by a very weak NCO Corps. Many regular officers view the NCOs with disdain and assign them menial tasks. As such, officers in the Colombian military perform many of the functions performed by NCOs in the U.S. military.

Starting in the 1990s, there has been a significant improvement in the training, status, and effectiveness of Colombian NCOs. Over the past decade, the Colombian military has established senior NCO ranks, including Command Sergeant Majors, and is slowly learning to more effectively use NCOs in military operations.

IDENTITIES WITHIN THE MILITARY

Regionalism

Regional identities play a primary role in interpersonal interactions among Colombian military personnel. Despite a strong sense of national identity among Colombians, cultural and political regionalism remains an enduring aspect of identity in Colombia. Colombia is broken up by three Andean mountain chains, rivers, swamps, jungles, and other natural barriers. For most of Colombia's history, its population has been relatively sparse and scattered in small, disconnected communities. Transportation and communication difficulties produced distinct regional economies and particularized cultures. *Cachacos* from the capital, *pastusos* from the rural farmlands bordering Ecuador, *paisas* from the coffee-growing Andes region, and *costeños* from the coasts have had few chances to become acquainted with one another, other than through stereotypes and regional caricatures.

The stereotypical *cachaco* (Bogota resident) is politically and socially conservative and observant of European traditions. The

stereotypical *cachaco* is also very formal in interpersonal interactions and is acutely aware of issues pertaining to social status.

The stereotype of a *paisa*, someone from the coffee-growing Andean region, is an individual who is shrewd, hardworking, entrepreneurial, and business-minded. The stereotypical *paisa* is also more cheerful than the *cachaco* and comparatively less concerned with social status. The *paisa* stereotype is based on racial biases dating back several centuries. *Paisas* are believed to be descendants of Jewish immigrant families and *converso* families, those who converted from Judaism to Christianity under the Inquisition. The perceived Jewish origins of *paisas* and stereotypes of Jews in general influence Colombians' characterization of *paisas*.

The stereotypical *costeño* (someone from the northern or Caribbean Coast) is fun-loving, lazy, and does not like to work. *Costeños* are described as cheerful, carefree individuals, who are significantly less formal than both *cachacos* and *paisas*. This stereotype is also based on traditional racial biases, and the image of a *costeño* is based upon stereotypes associated with the largely black coastal population.

The residents of the Pacific Coast are not normally referred to as *costeños*, and they do not share the relaxed Caribbean culture that characterizes the residents of the North Coast. The Pacific Coast is much less developed than the Caribbean Coast, which has several popular vacation resort areas near the cities of Cartagena and Santa Marta. About 15 percent of the Caribbean Coast residents are black and about 75 percent of the Pacific Coast residents are black. The Pacific Coast also has a large indigenous population.

Many Colombians perceive *pastusos*, from the Ecuadorian border lands, to be slow-paced, easily outwitted, and utterly unsophisti-

cated. This stereotype is also based on traditional racial biases, and the image of a *pastuso* is based on perceptions of indigenous peoples in Colombia. The area bordering Ecuador is largely populated by indigenous peoples.

These stereotypes are prominent within the Colombian military. The overwhelming presence of these regional caricatures has served to create psychological boundaries between people from different regions and has facilitated relations among personnel from the respective regions.

Ethnicity

Regional identity and social origins have more weight in Colombia's modern military culture than ethnic identity. In Colombia's social structure, white, black, and indigenous peoples form distinct categories, but most military personnel belong to the more amorphous mestizo (mixed race) group. Because the military is fairly ethnically homogenous, its class structure and its system of social status are based on a person's level of education, upbringing, family lineage, and degree of political or economic power. These are elements that can be attributed more to differences in regional development than to ethnic and racial distinctions.

Socioeconomic Class

Most in the Colombian military have lower- and lower-middle class backgrounds. Nearly all conscripts come from the lower classes and most are of peasant origin. Most officers come from the middle- and lower-middle classes, and a few come from the affluent segments of society and the poorer strata of society.

Servicemen from the poorer strata seldom have the opportunity to have a professional career in the military due to their lack of

education. Draftees who are high school graduates are assigned to non-combat and administrative posts, while draftees from lower-class sectors of society usually bear the brunt of the fighting, denoting an element of class privilege in the Colombian military.

Socioeconomic classes in Colombia can be distinguished by occupation, lifestyle, income, family background, education, and power. Within each class, there are many subtle gradations in status. Colombians tend to be extremely status-conscious. Class membership is an important aspect of social life since it regulates the interactions of groups and individuals. This situation is particularly important in civil-military relations where social differences between the two often play a role in the relationship dynamics.

Gender Issues

Few women serve in the Colombian armed forces. Women have only been admitted to the Colombian military since the late 1960s, when women gained more general access to professional opportunities in Colombian society. Traditionally, the Colombian military was even more closed to women than the rest of Colombian society, due to Colombian notions of honor and masculinity.

Women are exempt from the nation's service requirement. Those women who do join the armed forces typically have a higher level of education than the average serviceman. More women enter the navy and the air force than the army.

The billets open to women are primarily support positions, such as health, civil defense, police, transport, and refugee services. Women are excluded from combat positions. Opportunities have increased slightly in recent years, but a woman has never obtained a ranking or commanding post in the Colombian military. Colombia did, however, have a woman Minister of Defense, who while

controversial, played a part in the reform of the armed forces during the first Uribe administration.

Many males in the Colombian military subscribe to ideas about the connection between honor and masculinity that defines the Colombian military mentality. Influenced by their Spanish cultural heritage, Colombian officers perceive themselves as paragons of gentleness. This self-perception reinforces the ideal qualities of professionalism and honor that characterize ideas of Colombian manhood.

Professionalism and honor are highly valued traits that were written into the legal foundation of the new Colombia nation-state in the 19th century. These honor codes created a common vocabulary about honor, race, and gender in Colombian society. During this period, Colombia, like many other Latin American states, sought to normalize and legalize white male elite concepts of race and gender, especially in areas of health, education, employment, and charity-based social work. These honor or decency codes were flexible norms of conduct for daily life written into legal structures. Ideas about honor in Latin America have historically been defined by gender, with the honor code accompanied by the notion of an honor-shame complex. The honor-shame complex lists separately standards of appropriate male behavior and appropriate female behavior. In this context, honor and shame operate as a code granting men broad sexual license while requiring women's sexual chastity and submission to male authority. The honor/shame complex contributes to the prevalent notion that military honor is earned by fulfilling the male soldier's responsibility to protect the female patria. Thus, the military is linked not only with honor but also with masculinity.

ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

Service Branches

The Army is the dominant service branch, not only because it is the largest, but also because it controls many more resources and territory than either the Navy or Air Force. The Navy controls small sectors of the national territory along the coast lines and navigable rivers, and the Air Force has a technological advantage, but the Army has the lead counter-insurgency role and has a much stronger presence throughout the nation than the other service branches. The Army is also more working-class in nature than the Air Force and Navy, resulting in many inter-service rivalries.

Colombia is organized into military zones, nearly all of which are commanded by Army officers. Navy admirals command only two zones, the Caribbean coast and the department of the Amazonas in the South, and contribute to internal security efforts along jungle river systems. The Army directs all counterinsurgency efforts, with the Navy and Air Force subordinate to Army leadership.

Inter-service relations in Colombia are also influenced by the social and political make-up of each branch. The Army's greater political power occasionally creates resentment and hostility among the other branches. On the other hand, the Navy and the Air Force are inclined to be more elitist. They have more equipment per person, require higher technical standards, spend more time in training, and rarely use conscripts. The Air Force has the highest regard for technology. Naval and Air Force officers typically come from families with higher social status than Army officers. Because of this, there is more of an aristocratic tradition among naval and air force than army officers, with more social distance between officer and enlisted ranks. As a result of these differences, the Navy and

Air Force have developed distinctly conservative and anti-populist political identities. The Colombian Marine Corps also plays into these differences, as its personnel are highly trained in specialized skills such as jungle warfare and river tactics, both of which have emerged as an important part of the drug war.

These political divisions prevent the armed forces from acting as a corporate interest group. The Colombian military has, therefore, been less involved in domestic politics than many of its neighboring militaries.

Traditional and Mobile Brigades

The Colombian ground forces have stationed a traditional brigade in most of the 36 departments, with the brigade headquarters located in the capital city of the department. The traditional brigade has significant responsibilities for guarding military and civilian infrastructure in their area of responsibility, including electric power lines, highway bridges, and oil pipelines in their designated departments. About 70 percent of traditional brigade troops will be posted on guard within a department on a given day.

In the early 1990s, the Colombian Armed Forces Headquarters arranged to buy 10 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters, and organized a “Mobile Brigade” that could operate against insurgent base areas anywhere in Colombia. This Mobile Brigade was intended to focus on those guerrilla base areas located at high altitude, where the Colombian Huey helicopters cannot normally operate. As of 2007, the Colombian Army has 17 Mobile Brigades.

Army Reserves

Colombia is one of the few Latin American nations to maintain a system for Professional Reserve Officers. The Professional Re-

serve Officers are volunteer professionals (men and women) who have attended college and who have successfully completed the military education and training process set by the General Command of the Armed Forces. For professional members of the Colombian elite, becoming a Professional Reserve Officer earns prestige. Rarely, if ever called, professional reserve officers enroll in the system to demonstrate their patriotism without sacrificing a nonmilitary career or risking combat deployment. When called for service, the reservists are often used by local commanders to help in projects where their professional and personal contacts in the community would be beneficial.

Former conscripts often become Professional Reserve Officers. Upon completion of their 12- to 18-month period in active duty, conscripts pass to the reserve and can legally be called back to service until they turn 45 years of age.

National Police

Colombia's National Police is a paramilitary force and has been used throughout its history to maintain domestic stability. The National Police are responsible for providing law and order in the large cities and towns, but their control extends into smaller towns and even rural areas, which can create an overlap in mission with the Army.

Colombia's first national police force, consisting of an estimated 450 men, was organized in 1891 with the assistance of a French National Police commissioner. Over the next few decades, the National Police acted as a liberal counterbalance to the dominant conservative influence within the military. During the 1950s, the Colombian National Police (CNP) was moved from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of National Defense to eliminate



National Police

party alignments in the force and bring all the forces under stricter government supervision and coordination. During the 1960s, CNP members received military training in order to maintain order and defend their rural posts. Since the 1970s and 1980s, the CNP has been further militarized as a result of increased insurgent activity and the fight against drug cartels.

The General Directorate of the National Police now reports to the civilian Ministry of Defense. Under special circumstances it can come under the control of military command, but it is kept separate from the military.

Special Units

Special units represent the military elite and the national elite, and are typically controlled by the Army. Their soldiers have a high degree of education, come from fairly privileged backgrounds,

and typically maintain closer relationships with their superiors than do soldiers in non-elite units. Special-unit soldiers also take great pride in the specialized training they receive. This elite perspective resonates with the general population. Special units, particularly the Colombia Battalion in the Korean War, the Colombia Battalion in Suez, and the specialized counter-guerrilla battalions typically received the strongest national recognition.

After more than four decades of conformity with traditional counterinsurgency strategies, several specialized forces and elite units were introduced. This was done to increase mobility and military capabilities in an effort to better respond to new security challenges and with the government's realization of the growing strength and power of the illegal armed groups of the 1990s.



Special Units in the Colombian Military

During the 1990s, most U.S. funding for counter-narcotics operations was directed toward the National Police, but as the well armed and funded guerrilla groups grew in size and in involvement in the drug-trafficking business, the Army was also assigned a role in combating the narcotics problem. In 1999, the Special Counter-narcotics Brigade (BRACNA) was created to plan and execute offensive land and air-mobile operations in coordination with police forces or independently in the national territory to reduce drug-trafficking activity.

In December 1999, the Rapid Deployment Force (FUDRA) was created to plan and conduct counterinsurgency operations anywhere in the national territory rapidly and effectively, concentrating the efforts of each operation on surrounding and neutralizing the enemy. The FUDRA comprises three mobile brigades. The main objective for this group was to have a elite unit with the capabilities to conduct day and night air-supported attacks and to pursue terrorist groups following insurgency attacks on small towns or military bases, as commonly practiced by FARC between 1996 and 1998.

With the intensified terrorist activity in recent years, and particularly with increased presence of FARC terrorist cells in large urban centers, it became necessary to have trained personnel to neutralize and stop possible assaults, kidnappings, and attacks in order to safeguard the country's major cities. For this reason, the General Command of the Armed Forces created the Special Urban Forces to counter terrorist activities in these economic and politically important areas. It is a counterterrorist unit trained to successfully face crisis situations at the urban level. These measures have been in response to a general sense of urgency among Colombians who feared in the late 1990s that illegal armed groups were becoming too powerful, and violence was becoming too prevalent. This

situation represents a significant shift in the civilian perception of security threats, which before the late 20th century was minimal and limited to the countryside regions.

The Army introduced its helicopter brigade and several High Mountain Battalions in 2001 to increase state presence, the Army's mobility, and military capabilities in areas with tough environmental and geographical conditions. More recently, they re-designated several brigades in the southern regions to form Jungle Brigades.

CIVIC VALUES AND MILITARY CULTURE

Authority and Loyalty

Sense of authority is developed at an early age within the family through church activities, school, and communal relations. Civic values are usually passed from generation to generation according to regional traditions and intra-family relations and greatly depend on perceived centers of authority (i.e., elders, government, and police), social conditions, and access to formal schooling. Authority is usually earned by kinship, socioeconomic status, education, professionalism, and trust.

Historically, the centers of authority in Colombia have been the family, the state, the church, and the political and economic elite. Loyalty is earned through inter-personal relations, personal experience, and formal and informal systems of association.

Traditionally, loyalty toward the centers of authority has been the rule. Nevertheless, the high incidence of violence, lawlessness, and corruption in Colombia has undercut the perception of authority and influenced the development of individual loyalties.

Within the Colombian military institution, personnel are expected to express their loyalty to *La Patria*, the civilian population, the military institution, their superiors, and their colleagues. Unlike the armed forces in neighboring nations, members of the Colombian military also are taught to show loyalty to the president and civilian authorities.

Nationalism, Patriotism, and Citizenship

Colombian troops typically demonstrate a fervent devotion to the nation and exhibit strong traditions of nationalism and patriotism. Within the Colombian military institution, personnel are expected to express loyalty to *La Patria*, the civilian population, the military institution, their superiors, and their colleagues. The Colombian armed forces view themselves as bound to national history and tradition and as the only force capable of saving the nation of Colombia from revolutionary warfare. The military, therefore, employs the concept of nationalism to justify its frequent requests for additional funding and resources to be employed in counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics operations. Colombian military officers also maintain much pride in their institution and hold the sovereignty of their nation above all other values.

Military Service and Social Status

Military service has offered a primary avenue of social mobility in Colombia, particularly to mestizos. This rise of the *mestizo* in Colombia's military culture created a societal space for select mestizos alongside the nation's historically white elite. *Mestizo* advancement began when Bolivar appealed to non-whites to join the armed forces during Colombia's war for independence. They continued to gain power during the mid-20th century, helping the militarily-connected mestizo population develop into an influential

national sector. Playing an ever more important social role, *los militares* (the military ones) have emerged as a powerful sub-society, with special attributes and arrangements that set them apart from other social classes as a special-interest elite. The professionalization of the military, which involved a substantive reward system for professional career officers and noncommissioned personnel, supported the emergence of these powerful mestizo military elite.

Ethics and Discipline

The Colombian armed forces adhere to the same notions of ethics and discipline held by the nation's white elite. Influenced by Roman Catholicism and French and British norms of etiquette, military ethics emphasize formal interpersonal interactions and a strict system of protocol.

In addition to ethics, the Colombian armed forces also emphasize discipline. Discipline primarily means obedience to centralized authority. This is apparent in the strictly vertical command structure that prevents anyone but the ranking officer from making decisions.

Despite high standards of discipline and ethics during training, abuse of power, human rights violations, and corruption have frequently challenged the integrity of the Colombian armed forces. These incidents have been exacerbated by the characteristics of an irregular conflict, ties between military and paramilitary groups, a weak legal system, high levels of impunity, and a lack of resources available to the armed forces.

Since the late 1990s, military reforms have introduced new human rights training techniques, new patterns of leadership within a more professional force, and stronger civil-military relations in an effort to renew attention to the ethics of modern warfare. Re-

cent military reforms have focused on the Colombian educational system, renewed efforts to strengthen the legal system, the provision of sustained access to necessary resources, and the development of effective military training.

Bravery, Courage, and Cowardice

Bravery is highly lauded in the Colombian military. Members of the Colombian military traditionally associate courage with masculinity. The machismo mentality maintain that only women and homosexuals experience fear, and, therefore, requiring demonstrations of courage as proof of manhood and male virility. Bravery and courage are Colombian military and cultural values that are derived from the actions of the 19th century *caudillos*.

In the Colombian military, there is a tradition of war to the death against adversaries, even if it is not applied to the full extent of the word. Members of the Colombian armed forces usually fight until they have used the last round of ammunition, do everything they can to escape or evade the enemy to avoid capture once they are out of ammunition, and surrender to the enemy only when they do not have ammunition or troop reinforcements and are unable to escape. This was evident during the worst guerrilla attacks perpetrated between 1996 and 1998, mostly conducted by the FARC.

Victory and Defeat

Victory often creates a sense of overconfidence within the Colombian armed forces. This overconfidence then causes the military to underestimate current and future adversaries.

Colombia's first attempt to attain independence from Spain at the beginning of the 19th century failed despite the initial Creole victory over the royal troops. This was due to poor leadership, over-

confidence, and underestimating Spain's intentions to re-conquer its colonial lands. As a result, Spanish troops, headed by Pablo Murillo, regained control of the Andean territories less than two years after their initial liberation. It took the Creole leadership more than 10 years to mount an effective independence campaign that eventually achieved full independence from Spain in 1819. This has been a common pattern in Colombia's history. Defeat, on the other hand, effectively destroys military morale. The armed forces often respond to defeat by creating scapegoats to assume responsibility for specific failures. Colombian military personnel perceive victories as a collective effort but tend to blame individual leaders for defeat. In recent years, the armed forces initiated a large-scale campaign to re-establish popular support for the military and raise internal morale after a series of defeats suffered at the hands of the FARC in the 1990s.

MILITARY ROLE IN STATE AND SOCIETY

Military and Civilian Authority

Colombia's civilian and military cultures profess the importance of subordinating military power to civilian authority. Colombia historically has had a strong civilian political elite and a professionalized and de-politicized military. Because of this, military government has not been nearly as prominent in Colombia as it has elsewhere in Latin America. The Colombian military did, however, become an arm of conservative interests during the gruesome and very complicated period of *La Violencia*, a civil war that gradually merged the Colombian military and government. The Colombian military now believes that it has successfully withdrawn from partisan involvement and returned to its historic role as a subordinate organization of the civilian government. The

armed forces in Colombia assert pressure on civilian authorities but rarely aspire to control political office themselves. This trend began shortly after gaining independence, when the military had little prestige and even less power. Civilian authorities displayed no interest in the development of a stronger military and continuously tried to reduce the armed forces' size and influence.

The recurring, intense, and occasionally violent divide between liberals and conservatives in Colombia created the need for an institution to mediate between the two and control their violent flare-ups. Filling this role for over the century, the military evolved as a more neutral instrument than militaries in surrounding nations. The armed forces in Colombia operated as internal peacekeepers in the face of liberal-conservative civil disruptions.

During *La Violencia*, the Colombian military became a tool of the conservative party and partisan. During the 1940s, the period of peace and order that began in 1903 came to an end. A conservative, Mariano Ospina Perez, won the presidency in 1946 by a plurality because of the split of liberals into radical wings. Conservatives began bringing the military into play to keep order and reinforce their minority position. Officers were placed in charge of some municipalities. After the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan (1948), a popular Liberal leader, Colombia descended into the terrible period of *La Violencia* that took close to 300,000 lives. This was largely a civil war between liberals in the countryside and the conservative government. President Ospina used the Colombian military against the liberals. The Colombian military nearly merged with the government of a more radical conservative, Laureano Gomez, who became president in 1950. Gomez tried to bring the Colombian military into the direct service of his repressive dictatorship. Liberal officers left the military or were forced out. In 1953, with the support of conservative officers (mostly as-

sociated with the Ospina faction), the Commander of the Army, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, overthrew Gomez when the president tried to dismiss him. The coup was widely welcomed, and General Rojas was hailed as a savior and peacemaker. General Rojas promised to institute a nonpartisan government and tried to become a demagogic leader of the masses in Peronist style. The semi-military government rapidly decayed as it started to turn into a coercive dictatorship.

The prestige of the Colombian military was damaged by the corruption and arbitrary actions of the Rojas government. However, some of that prestige was restored when senior military officers formed a military junta with the purpose of restoring constitutional government. The junta encouraged the Colombian liberal and conservative political leaders to compromise and form a National Front Government, in which both political parties would partner in ruling the country for 16 years. In 1958, the military returned the presidency to civilian control.

The Colombian military now believes that it has successfully returned to political neutrality. Coming from a rising middle class, the officers prefer stability, although it may mean defending of an oligarchic system. The soldiers seem satisfied and have little or no inclination to govern the country. The civilians are not likely to do anything that could harm their good relations with the military. Military support is still considered crucial to the success of civilian governments in Colombia.

Relationship to Civilians

The Colombian armed forces maintain a complicated relationship with civilians. On the one hand, popular support for Colombian military civic action programs creates a fairly strong civil-military

bond. On the other hand, corruption and human rights abuses continually strain that relationship. The Colombian military has been trying to strengthen its relationship with the civilian population.

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century, the military has been engaged in civic action projects intended to develop the nation and strengthen civil-military relations. The Colombian armed forces have been active in building roads, bridges, and public housing, as well as creating education programs and health care systems. The military uses these projects to instill public confidence in the armed forces and break the hold established by guerrilla groups and drug traffickers in rural areas. Military assistance during natural disasters has also elevated civilian support and strengthened ties with local communities. The Army and its National Civilian Defense Force are typically first to arrive at natural disaster sites because of their mobility capabilities, pre-established plans, and existent local networks.

Despite the relationships fostered by civic action, civilians often accuse the Colombian military of excessive use of force and human rights violations. The Colombian Marine Corps has a particularly negative reputation for human rights abuses. These situations have been common during peasant and labor strikes, periods of concentrated political violence, and periods of intense fighting with guerrilla groups. Because of this situation, public perception of the Colombian armed forces varies according to region, depending on each area's exposure to violent conflict.

During the late 1990s, civilian and military leadership realized that it would be necessary to increase police and military capabilities in rural areas to regain territorial control over the areas occupied by guerrilla groups and drug traffickers. They determined that it would also be necessary to restore public support for the

military. Over the past decade, and as part of comprehensive military reforms, the Colombian armed forces have been engaged in a public relations campaign to improve their image, gain popular support, and expand their presence throughout the country. The campaign's two primary goals are the reduction of human rights violations and the reduction of armed forces corruption cases.

The core of President Uribe's Democratic Security strategy is an attempt to increase civilian participation in the country's security affairs. The current mind set emphasizes military-civilian cooperation as a central component of efforts to quell internal unrest.

Military and the Economy

Although the Colombian military historically has not intervened in economic policy formulation, one of its primary missions has been to protect the country's economic interests. In newly independent Colombia, the military was used to protect the economic interests of the elite. Since the early 1900s, the armed forces have been actively involved in the protection of public infrastructure, roads, ports, water, power plants, farmlands, oil reserves, refineries, industrial sites, and urban economic centers. The military has also engaged in civic action projects to build roads, bridges, hospitals, and water systems.

The military's role in internal security has been an important component of Colombia's economic development. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the Colombian economy was based on market agriculture, especially with the growth of coffee and banana exports. As Colombia joined the world market, coffee exports boomed. This provided capital to stimulate industrialization and urbanization. Military-protected coffee exports also became the basis for the development of transportation and communication systems.

As the economy improved, income inequalities and labor tensions increased. As strikes and labor disputes emerged, the government used the military to deal with this internal unrest. This linked the military with conservative, upper-class white interests in the eyes of some parts of Colombian society. The military believes that it was simply performing its mission to protect economic interests at the orders of the civilian government.

Since the 1930s, attacks on the economic infrastructure of the country have been a form of protest against existing inequalities and the oligarchic government system. Colombia remains one of the world's most economically imbalanced countries. About 3 percent of the population controls 70 percent of the land. State policies have largely failed to protect the peasant settlers on public lands from the incursion of big ranchers and large-scale agribusiness. The skewed distribution of land in Colombia has contributed to the expansion of the guerrilla movement among the peasant community, who operate at a subsistence level. Historically, the military has acted to protect the nation's economic infrastructure. Military commanders have refrained from voicing their opinions on social and income inequalities in the country, even though most servicemen come from the lower and middle classes.

Only during the early 1960s did General Alberto Ruiz Novoa, who served as an army commander and later as Minister of War in President Valencia's Cabinet (1962 to 1965), publicly criticized the civilian political elite for its inability to deal with the underlying problems of underdevelopment and social development, and linked this failure to the rise of guerrilla movements. Ruiz Novoa insisted that the military should have a much larger and more independent role in the nation's socioeconomic development. The political elite and other military leaders became worried about Ruiz's comments on socioeconomic problems, a subject outside

the military's traditional domain, and called for his dismissal in January 1965.

As the Colombian economy expanded beyond the agricultural frontier, so did the role of the armed forces in the protection of economic and financial interests. The growth of oil and other industries, as well as the growth of the urban banking and telecommunication industries, has changed the military's role in internal security. Today, the armed forces are actively involved in protecting oil pipelines and refineries, industrial sites, telecommunication infrastructure, roads, ports, and financial institutions.

Military and Politics

The Colombian military has a long tradition of abstaining from direct intervention in civilian policy and offices. Since the late 19th century, only three generals have served as the nation's president, and only one, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, came to power by coup. Despite a history of intense political violence in Colombia, the armed forces have retained a degree of neutrality in domestic politics unseen in most of Latin America.

The prestige of some military commanders in combat operations and dealings with the civilian authorities has served as a platform for a political career after retirement from the service. Currently there are a few retired officers serving as elected officials at the local and national levels.

Military and Religious Institutions

The Roman Catholic Church and the Colombian armed forces have occasionally clashed over issues such as internal security, labor unions, and insurgency groups. Despite this, the generally Roman Catholic background of the officer corps has resulted in

cordial relations between the church and the military in Colombia. It is not uncommon for troops to pray together before missions.

Most people with upper and upper-middle class backgrounds in Colombia maintain close personal relationships with members of the religious hierarchy. Because of the social make-up of the officer corps, these relationships are common among high level military officers. The church, therefore, is extremely influential in the armed forces' notions of ethics, and in the educational experiences of the officers. This religious influence over ranking members of the military has allowed the church to carry some weight in the military decision-making process.

Like the army, the Colombian Roman Catholic Church has a presence in almost every municipality, even where civil authorities are absent, making members of the clergy the only non-military authorities in many towns. It has been common practice for the church to intervene as mediator or facilitator between the government and insurgent groups in peace negotiations and kidnappings.

The biggest challenge to this relationship is the presence of insurgency movements in Colombia. On many occasions since the 1940s, military leaders accused church leaders of siding with insurgents. Military leaders particularly are suspicious of clergymen who ally themselves with Peruvian liberation theology. Several liberation theologians were instrumental in the development of both the FARC and the ELN, and this slightly strains military-church relations.

The first Colombian liberation theologian to support insurgency groups was Camilo Torres, an upper-class Colombian who left the priesthood to become a guerrilla member. Torres was killed in 1966 a few months after he joined the ELN and became the first

martyr of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. The activism of these religious leaders was in stark contrast to the church's traditional conservatism. In general, liberation theology did not affect the Colombian church with the same intensity as elsewhere in Latin America.

APPENDIX A: HOLIDAYS

National Holidays

1 January	New Year's Day
6 January or the following Monday	Feast of the Epiphany
19 March or the following Monday	Saint Joseph's Day
Date varies (March/April)	Holy Thursday
Date varies (March/April)	Good Friday
1 May	Labor Day
19 June, varies	Corpus Christi
30 June or following Monday	Saints Peter and Paul Day
20 July	Independence Day
7 August	Battle of Boyaca
15 August	Feast of the Assumption
12 October	Race Day
1 November	All Saints' Day
11 November	Independence of Cartagena
8 December	Feast of the Immaculate Conception
25 December	Christmas Day

