

DEFENCE DIPLOMACY & NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

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Colombia – Not So Unusual After All

A case study on the transnational making of the boundary between ‘defence’ and ‘public security’

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Abstract

Colombia is often mentioned as an anomaly within the expected framing of defence and public security, an anomaly that arises from a faulty division of labour between the police and the military. In this chapter, I offer a different interpretation: I use Colombia as an entry point to analyse the processes through which the boundary distinguishing ‘defence’ and ‘public security’ has historically been built. The argument unfolds in two parts. Firstly, I analyse how counterinsurgency was raised to a privileged position in the Colombian military doctrine in the second half of the 20th century. The second analytical move looks at the dynamic between the United States and Colombia in the making of a counterinsurgency *a la colombiana* and inscribes this dynamic in the hemispheric circulation of military *savoirs*. By dissecting the main direction of transmission in this circuit, I show how defining Colombia as a ‘malfunction’ in the division of labour between police and military is misleading, as it does not account for the transnational impact on what has come to constitute ‘defence’ in Colombia. Moreover, the framing of Colombia as an anomaly avoids questioning the assumptions upon which disputes of anomaly/normality rest. I argue that, by focusing on the circulation of military *savoirs*, it becomes apparent that the domains of public security and defence are not only constitutively merged, but also transnationally so. This claim is important, given that the boundary separating these domains came to characterise a central part of our institutional imaginaries of democracy since the 20th century, and perhaps more strongly since the late 1980s in Latin America.

Introduction

In March 2015, in an interview¹ I conducted in the Colombian Superior War College (ESDEGUE, in Spanish), I was told that Colombian defence and public security came to be organised as inextricably associated spheres due to the armed conflict: ‘Without basic internal security conditions, it is not possible to turn our attention to traditional defence issues, for the integrity of the Colombian territory has been under threat for decades’. The connection made here between defence and public security points to the latter as a condition of the former: the violence of the armed conflict prevents the Colombian military forces from performing their ‘traditional’ defence role. It also suggests that the

military would only be able to perform their traditional role in a post-conflict scenario, when threats to the Colombian territory and population cease to exist, as there would be no longer be a need for the military to engage in public security. This could be seen as an attempt to justify an anomaly within the expected framing of defence and public security, one arising from a faulty division of labour between the police and the military in Colombia.

However, I offer a different interpretation. Instead of viewing the boundary between defence and public security in Colombia as flawed, I use it to problematise the recurrent framing of this country as an anomaly in terms of the division of labour between the police and the military (as in Rouquié, 1984; Pizarro, 1987a, 1987b; Atehortúa & Vélez, 1994; Vargas, 2003; Ciro & Correa, 2014; Velásquez, 2015). Importantly, my objective here is not to justify and defend the involvement of the military in Colombian public security matters. Rather, my point is that the framing of the problem as such misses the fundamental question regarding the assumptions upon which disputes about Colombia's status as an anomaly rest.

The objective of this chapter is to use Colombia as an entry point to analyse how the boundary between defence and public security has historically been built. I argue that by focusing on the military *savoirs* – technical knowledge whose authority derives from the experience in a specific professional domain – it becomes apparent that public security and defence are not only constitutively merged, but also transnationally so. In other words, public security and defence are intertwined, not as a Colombian idiosyncrasy, but globally through the circulation of military expertise, or military *savoir*. This claim is of fundamental importance, given that the boundary separating those domains came to characterise a central part of our institutional understanding of democracy since the 20th century – perhaps more strongly since the late 1980s in Latin America, when the region was going through a so-called “re-democratisation” processes.

One might say that using Colombia as a case study to argue that the boundary between the terms is blurred is an easy task, for nothing else can be expected from a country where the Military Forces have for decades been engaged in public order affairs. However, my point is precisely that we cannot understand how the spatial and functional limits of defence have been historically constituted without looking at Colombia in the broader context of military *savoirs* in the hemisphere – what I call a ‘circuit of military *savoirs*’ (Viana, 2017). In the next pages, I show that it is key for us to grasp how the role of Colombian military professionals in public security as defence has been defined.

The argument unfolds in two parts. First, I analyse how counterinsurgency attained a privileged position in Colombian military doctrine in the second half of the 20th century. I focus on the Colombian Army² as the branch of the military forces which, throughout

the second half of the 20th century, has more systematically been the focus of the military *savoirs* here analysed. In this process, it becomes clear that we need to bring the United States (US) to the fore if we want to identify how the national security doctrine took shape in the making of defence policy in Colombia, and thus also of public security. The emergence of counterinsurgency as a privileged military *savoir* helps to understand the systematic entanglement of the Colombian military with public security affairs.

The second aspect of the analysis looks at the broader context of military *savoirs* in the hemisphere. Through this, I show how defining the division of labour between the police and military in Colombia as malfunctioning is misleading, as it does not account for the transnational influences on what constitutes defence in Colombia. The section also looks at Colombia's recent re-positioning in the hemispheric circuit of military *savoirs*. If Colombia has been seen as an anomaly when it comes to distinguishing defence from public security, what is its status in relation to other countries?

Colombia and the US in the making of a counterinsurgency *a la colombiana*

The literature on the professionalisation of the military in Colombia associates the prominent role of the army in public security with the close relationship between Colombian and US military officers in the second half of the 20th century (Rouquié, 1984; Pizarro, 1987b; Atehortúa & Vélez, 1994; Leal, 2002; Rodríguez, 2006; Vargas, 2014). What are the main features allowing for such a claim, and why is the US used as a reference in the Colombian military's engagement with public security?

In order to address these questions, we need to turn our attention to the 1950s, as it was in this period that interaction with the US army started to crystallise into assistance programmes, instruction materials, and training programmes. A starting point for our discussion is the Korean War (1950-1953), presented by military officers in Colombia such as General Álvaro Valencia Tovar, as 'a source of extraordinary experiences [...] which divides the modern history [of the army] in two eras: before Korea and after this experience, when the army was modernized and learned how to fight accordingly to modern concepts' (Pizarro, 1987b). Although the Korean War was the Colombian Army's first experience in battle with the US military forces, the way it is portrayed in Colombian military historiography does not match the occasional character of interactions with the US military prior to the war, or the improvised character of recruitment.³ Nevertheless, this experience was used by military officers as an opportunity for the intensification of the professionalisation of the army along 'US lines' (Atehortúa, 2008:67-70). More specifically, high-ranking military officers who returned from the Korean War translated their experience into 'technical' improvements in the Army (Pizarro, 1987b:32; Leal, 2002:20; Rodríguez, 2006).

For example, General Alberto Ruiz Novoa, who commanded the Colombia Battalion No. 1 from July 1952 to June 1953, registered what he considered the main contributions from this experience in three different books (1956a, 1956b, 1965). At the tactical level, the aspects he highlighted derive from guerrilla warfare, shown in the importance he attributes to the role of infantry, small-units patrol, and training infantry soldiers not only for body-combat, but also for long-distance marching, rather than counting on motor vehicles for that purpose (Rodríguez, 2006:64). He also pointed to the need to replace heavier and costlier non-portable artillery used in conventional warfare, like cannons, howitzers, and war tanks (Rodríguez, 2006:65). According to the general, one of the main benefits Colombia could gain from closer interaction with the US army was specifically related to psychological operations. He argued that the use of propaganda, rumours and information campaigns could be useful in demoralising communist guerrillas (Rodríguez, 2006:65-66). It is thus noteworthy that he offered a justification of the position of the US army as a reference point for professionalisation that was more attuned to the 'problem of communism' facing Colombia.

Furthermore, General Ruiz Novoa is known for having conceived the main aspects that came to constitute 'Plan Lazo', a set of military operations launched in 1962, when Novoa was Minister of War. Aiming at 'pacifying' Colombia, the rationale of the Plan was that violence had social and economic root-causes (Leal, 2002:43). Specifically, 'the philosophy of the Plan was "to remove the water from the fish", that is, to remove the peasant's support to the guerrilla' (Ruiz, 1992, in Leal, 2002:44) through a set of social and economic policies that were added to the military intervention. This tactical component was referred to as 'civil-military action' (*acción cívico-militar*) by Novoa, in a speech published in 1964 (Ruiz, 1964:247). In practice, civil-military action in Plan Lazo often involved the distribution of pamphlets with information on the mission of the Colombian army, in addition to very occasional services offered by the military in small villages, such as shoe repair and tooth extraction. Importantly, the provision of those services always coexisted with armed confrontations and psychological techniques, such as infiltration and torture, aimed at gathering information on the insurgents.

The forces participating in Plan Lazo had been trained in irregular warfare in the Lancers' School (Escuela de Lanceros), established in 1955 as a specialised unit of the infantry. Months before the foundation of the school, a commission of five Colombian high-ranking military officers visited Fort Benning in Georgia, US, in order to attend the 'Ranger Course' (Leal, 2002:44; Rodríguez, 2006:77). Formalised in 1951 as a specific department within the US Army Infantry School, the rangers are agile and flexible small-unit soldiers engaged in irregular warfare, whose training constituted short-term courses based on counter-guerrilla warfare for jungle and urban terrains, instruction on how to perform ambush and infiltration, and a set of exercises focused on physical preparation

and resilience (Rodríguez, 2006:77). With the assistance of the US army's Captain Ralph Puckett, the Escuela de Lanceros was built as a mirror of the Rangers School in terms of training and military procedures.

In an article published in 1959 in the official review of the US Army Infantry School (*Infantry Review*) and then in the Colombian *Revista Militar*, it was claimed that the Colombian Army's interest in the Ranger Course derived from the massive presence of guerrillas and *bandoleros* in specific regions (Puckett & Galván, 1959:94, in Rodríguez, 2006:78):

These irregular groups have been, for a long time, a continuous threat to the peace and security of the Colombian people; being experts on the mountains and jungle paths, they are very difficult to find and defeat, and the Army has not been successful in dominating them. To overcome this difficulty, it was necessary to put forth a specific training program for a special kind of operation; since small units have been used to combat the anti-socials, the solution became evident: selected officers and non-commissioned officers had to be trained in order to fight the enemy in its own terrain and with its own methods. This was the mission of the Lancers' School, and it excelled at it.

As the excerpt above shows, the creation of the Escuela de Lanceros was considered a concrete response to a security necessity, given the 'continuous threat to the peace and security of the Colombian people'. This version of the national security doctrine became the main axis around which defence practices were developed in Colombia. In this context, the Escuela de Lanceros excelled in fighting 'the enemy in its own terrain and with its own methods', not only through the mobility that such irregular warfare required, but also a specialised *savoir* in the terrains that guerrillas and *bandoleros* were experts on: the mountain and the forest. According to a campaign manual dated 1944, translated and adapted by the US military mission to the Colombian Military Forces, 'In the war in the jungle, the soldier fights two different enemies: man and nature. Between them, nature is often the most impressive one' (Estado Mayor General de las Fuerzas Militares. República de Colombia, 1944:5).

Such a statement has two main implications. Firstly, it highlights the reliance on the 'native population'. In order to make the soldiers more familiar with the hostile conditions of the jungle, the manual instructs troops to count on 'carefully selected local guides, whose loyalty and integrity are undisputable' (Estado Mayor General de las Fuerzas Militares. República de Colombia, 1944:50). However, while necessary for the military to feel safer in a terrain they are not familiar with, the 'native population' constitutes a potential danger, for there may be enemy infiltration, a risk which a careful selection process aims to minimise. Furthermore, according to the manual, 'The use of organized native troops ... will not only help dissipate any opposition to the presence of our troops, it will also bolster solidarity against a common enemy' (Estado Mayor General de las

Fuerzas Militares. República de Colombia, 1944:51). The population is thus portrayed as either an enemy to be defeated or an asset to be explored so that the operation succeeds, constituting a source of knowledge on the terrain, as well as a source of intelligence and legitimacy.

The second implication of fighting where and how the ‘anti-socials’ fight is the format of the training programme. With the assistance of the US military, the Escuela de Lanceros dedicated a significant part of its training programme to familiarising soldiers with the hostile environmental conditions of the jungle.⁴ The first groups who graduated from the Escuela de Lanceros were attached to brigades operating in regions considered to be ‘infested with guerrillas’ (Vásquez & Negret, 1960:60, in Rodríguez, 2006:81). The 1960 memoirs of the Minister of War, Rafael Hernández Pardo (1959-1960), celebrated the efficiency of the *lanceros* in controlling “subversion” foci in those regions. Within a few years, this infantry specialisation constituted the backbone of Plan Lazo.

The features of Plan Lazo correspond to the main pillars characterising what we have come to know as counterinsurgency (Porch, 2013): (i) an emphasis on tactics, mobility, and the small units deriving from it; (ii) a population-centric approach and a ‘winning hearts and minds’ motto, due to the idea that the population acts as both the key to the success of the operations and the risk of infiltration of the enemy; and (iii) an emphasis on intelligence, given the difficulty of discerning an enemy from an ally in a given population. These features remained the main axes guiding military operations in Colombia throughout the following decades.

The analysis so far has shown how Plan Lazo was central to the elevation of counterinsurgency to a privileged position in Colombian military doctrine, as well as to a more systematic interaction with the US in terms of the professionalisation programme of the Colombian Army in the second half of the 20th century. I now turn my attention to another fundamental piece in our puzzle: Plan Colombia. On the one hand, the analyses about Plan Colombia often underestimate the importance of the war in Korea and Plan Lazo to the consolidation of the features mentioned above. However, if understood as an important point within a broader trajectory, Plan Colombia is an unavoidable subject if we want to discuss the implications of the so-called “post-conflict” context in Colombia for defence doctrine in this country. This is because Plan Colombia takes the features mentioned above to another level, in terms of: (i) the intensity of the relations with the US; (ii) the resources mobilised in the Plan; (iii) the areas covered by the specialisation of the military in Colombia; and (iv) the scale of the professionalisation of the Colombian Army.

The first two aspects are intrinsically linked. Between 2000 and 2006, US foreign assistance to Colombia amounted to US\$ 4.7 billion, 80% of which was concentrated in military and police training, equipment, weapons, and vehicles (Isacson, 2006), making Colombia

the main recipient of military aid from the US in Latin America, and the third in the world, after Israel and Egypt. Amongst the many ways one can interpret the scale of Plan Colombia, one is that the regime of justification mobilised by the Colombian Army evoked a “military crisis” in a context marked by an intensification of violence in the country. Ongoing military defeats to the FARC in fronts considered as strategic by the Armed Forces resulted in the claim that military reform was both necessary and urgent (*El País*, 1998; Rangel, 1998; *Revista Semana*, 1998; Villamizar, 2003). Based on this, the Minister of Defence, Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo (1998-1999), created the Commission for the Restructuration and Modernization of the Armed Forces in 1998, with the objective of developing a comprehensive reform plan.

One of the main components of Plan Colombia was the procurement of aeroplanes and helicopters aimed at strengthening the air power of the Colombian Army, and based on this, 74 helicopters were supplied by the US, and additional ones were procured by the Colombian government (Vargas, 2014:140). Four years after Plan Colombia had been implemented, Colombia had the third largest fleet of helicopters in the Americas, after the US and Brazil (Villamizar, 2003:50). As of 2003, the police and military forces in Colombia had 230 helicopters, of which 30 are of the assault kind, mostly produced in the US (Black Hawk, Bell, Huey, and Hughes) (Villamizar, 2003:51).

If Plan Lazo was characterised by the specialisation of the combat forces within the Colombian Army, this specialisation was further deepened with Plan Colombia, and organised according to different criteria: (i) the geographical characteristics of the Colombian territory, as in the case of the four Mountain Battalions (*Batallón de Alta Montaña*); (ii) specific skills mobilised by military operations, as in the four Mobile Brigades and the Rapid Deployment Force (*Fuerza de Despliegue Rápido* – FUDRA, in Spanish); and (iii) the category of threat, as in the case of the Counternarcotic Brigades (*Brigadas Contra el Narcotráfico* – BACN, in Spanish).⁵

Amongst those specialised forces, the BACN is emblematic of how the US engaged with training in the context of Plan Colombia. Created in 1999, the Counternarcotic Battalions were trained by the 7th Group of US Special Forces in Fuerte Tolemaida.⁶ The training programme combined a focus on physical preparation with the familiarisation of the soldiers with terrains such as the jungle and mountain, highlighting the persistent relevance of the rangers in the irregular form of warfare characteristic in Colombia.⁷ What is important in Plan Colombia in this regard is the explicit incorporation of counternarcotic policies into military expertise – a domain which until then had been part of the scope of the Colombian National Police (Vargas, 2012).

Finally, an additional key feature of Plan Colombia was how quickly it expanded the manpower of the Colombian Army, predominantly through “professional soldiers”

(*soldado profesional*), those who, after having concluded the mandatory military service (18-24 months), decided to remain in the Military Forces, receiving specific training and a salary for their work (Villamizar, 2003:61). In 1998, there were 22,000 professional soldiers in Colombia, while by 2002 there were 55,000 (Vargas, 2014:141). The increase stemmed from the so-called *Plan 10,000*, issued in 1999 with the objective of substituting 10,000 “regular soldiers”⁸ for the same number of “professional soldiers” each year until 2001 (Villamizar, 2003:61).⁹ The short-term process in the conversion of a regular soldier into a professional soldier allowed for the rapid increase of combat soldiers in Colombia: most professional soldiers were incorporated into the Counter-guerrilla Battalions (BCG, in Spanish) and Mobile Brigades (BRIM, in Spanish) (Villamizar, 2003:61-62) after a 14-week training programme.¹⁰

Preparing thousands of soldiers for combat required dedicated infrastructure, and the School of Professional Soldiers (ESPRO, in Spanish)¹¹ was created in December 1999, based in Nilo (Cundinamarca), offering training facilities and short-term courses focusing on the physical preparation of soldiers. Interestingly, the polishing of those who were to become instructors in the ESPRO was undertaken in Fuerte Tolemaida,¹² which was founded in the department of Cundinamarca in the 1950s, during general Gustavo Rojas Pinilla’s administration (1953-1957). Under Plan Colombia, Fuerte Tolemaida received massive investments aiming at developing its infrastructure and transforming it into a centre of excellence in military training.¹³

This analysis of Plan Colombia highlights the re-definition of counterinsurgency in Colombia so as to encompass counterterrorism and counternarcotic tactics in a more systematic way. More recently, as Colombia claims to have overcome the violence of the late 1990s, these domains correspond to the military *savoirs* the Colombian Army has been increasingly taken as a reference for to its counterparts in Latin America. In the next section, we describe the transnational influences leading to defence being viewed as public security in Colombia and discuss how the country has come to enjoy a privileged position in more recent years.

The circulation of military *savoirs* in the Americas and the recent re-positioning of Colombia

In mapping the main defence practices of the Colombian Army in the second half of the 20th century, the previous section revealed a fundamental aspect: the role of the US Army as an example for the Colombian Army in the structure, organisation, and execution of their professionalisation programmes. In this section, I argue that this is a specific example of a broader circulation of military *savoirs* in Latin America,¹⁴ which also characterises the US as a diffusion hub, and counterinsurgency as the most valorised concept. For us to

grasp the texture of this circuit, we need to identify the main mechanisms through which these military *savoirs* circulate: the military schools operating as diffusion sites; courses taught and manuals used in those schools; military missions travelling from one country to the other in the hemisphere; and specific military doctrines.

The hemispheric circulation of military *savoirs* started to gain shape in the 1940s, in the context of the Cold War, and contributed to synergies between military forces across the Americas. For example, the organisation of regular meetings and competitions and the creation of permanent commissions on specific topics allowed for the exchange of doctrine and instruction materials, along with the comparison of forces (such as equipment and personnel), the design of cooperation mechanisms, the articulation of a “common” agenda, and networking. These practices are shared, compared, and discussed in inter-American institutions: the Inter-American Defense Board, the Organization of the American States (OAS), and the School of the Americas (SOA). Such an institutional system – and the interactions it allowed for – has two main effects. Firstly, it contributed to the harmonisation of military *savoirs* throughout Latin America during the second half of the 20th century. Secondly, its weight created a reluctance to change the direction of this harmonisation.

A closer look at the SOA will illustrate this point. Colombia only figured prominently in the student population of the SOA from the 1970s onwards (Gill, 2004:74).¹⁵ Between 1970 and 1979, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Panama, and Peru sent between 1,100 and 1,800 students each, accounting for 63% of total enrolment in the School (Gill, 2004:78). Returning from those courses in the SOA, Latin American military officers often had the content of the material translated into Spanish/Portuguese, so that it could be used as reference for the courses taught in their home countries (Gill, 2004:99). This form of knowledge sharing has continued: in the second half of the 20th century, training manuals on counterinsurgency were created in Fort Leavenworth, and then translated to Spanish at the SOA (Gill, 2004:54).

As the definition of what constitutes a threat was developed through the decades, the configuration of the SOA changed, both in terms of the courses offered and in student demographics. For example, while the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the US Army Special Warfare School sent their civil and military professionals to the SOA to teach Latin American students, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the Federal Bureau Agency (FBI) undertook similar practices as drug trafficking increasingly became seen as the main threat facing the Americas by the 1980s. In terms of the student population, Mexico, El Salvador and Colombia accounted for 9,000 students in the 1980s – 72% of the total student population (Gill, 2004:83). However, it was only in the 1990s that the Colombian Armed Forces – both police and military personnel – attended specific courses

on drugs at the SOA. The SOA Watch database¹⁶ illustrates the changing curriculum offered by the SOA, as well as revealing For instance, the “Patrol Operations” course, attended by 129 low-rank military officers¹⁷ and non-commissioned officers (*suboficiales*) from Colombia during the 1980s, disappeared as such in the following years.¹⁸ Only 30 high-ranked Colombian officers¹⁹ attended courses at the School from 1960 to 1989. Similarly, some of the courses were “tailor-made” for a specific state or group of states – as in the case of “Jungle Courses”.

On one hand, the best-attended courses in a given historical context might suggest a transformation of military *savoirs* throughout the second half of the 20th century. On the other hand, the changes mentioned above are all organised under a broader category of military *savoir*: counterinsurgency. The transformations identified must thus be read as a re-articulation within a specific military *savoir* or, more specifically, as refinements in counterinsurgency tactics based on contextual interpretations of what “insurgency” is being combatted, and information on how this “enemy” operates. In other words, the changing curriculum during the second half of the 20th century is not a transformation of military *savoirs* in the same way as the displacement of conventional warfare by counterinsurgency in mid-20th century Latin America.

There is another fundamental aspect related to the courses offered in military schools such as the SOA since the second half of the 20th century. As shown above, while the US enjoys a position of authority in the diffusion of counterinsurgency to other countries in the hemisphere, the tactical refinements and adjustments point to the agency of Latin American military professionals in this process. Since the mid-20th century, the US Army has indeed been the reference point for others in the region when building their professionalisation programmes. However, this does not imply a unidirectional flow. As mentioned above, there is a demand-driven component to courses taught in these institutions, an institutional response to what was considered a priority by key military partners in the region. Indeed, the circulation of Latin American military officers amongst these schools allowed for a solid hemispheric network of military professionals, as well as the legitimisation of the discourse on the “threats” facing societies in the hemisphere, contributing to the fabric of military institutions in those countries.

Enabling this circulation of Latin American military professionals was one of the remarkable features of the history of this institutional fabric. For instance, the economic constraints facing many Latin American states since the end of the 1970s led to a significant decrease in the number of students at the SOA. As an effort to facilitate the flow of students by that time, in 1976 the Gerald Ford administration initiated the International Military Education and Training (IMET) programme, funding the training of foreign troops (Gill, 2004:78). By the 1980s, when many Latin American states were immersed in economic crises, these

resources funded Mobile Training Teams (MTTs), small teams formed by US military officers who trained troops *in situ* (Gill, 2004:75, 85). With time, this came to constitute the main platform through which military training was provided in Latin America.

As shown in the previous section, military missions were also important channels through which military expertise on intelligence and irregular combat (the *lanceros*, for instance) were transmitted. The format of such missions varied in duration (the 1962 intelligence mission to Fort Holabird lasted for 8 months, for instance) and scope (to attend a course, to instruct troops, to create a military school and build its curriculum, etc.). As in the case of the *Escuela de Lanceros*, the purpose of the US military mission to Colombia was not only to crystallise a *savoir* on irregular warfare in the form of a specialised school, but also to create the conditions for the transmission of that *savoir*. It was for this reason that a group of high-ranking military officers visited the facilities at Fort Benning to attend the “Ranger Course”, making sure that they were in a position to teach others when they returned. Importantly, the SOA was only one of the destinations for Colombian military personnel to familiarise themselves with a specific technique, domain or doctrine.

This circuit of military *savoirs* seems to have changed in recent years, with Colombia coming to operate as a hub for the diffusion of military knowledge in the region. In Fuerte Tolemaida from 2009 to 2013, the Colombian Army and Colombian National Police trained 10,310 professionals from Mexico; 3,026 from Panama; 2,609 from Honduras; 1,732 from Guatemala; 1,132 from Ecuador; 510 from Peru; 465 from El Salvador; and 377 from Costa Rica (Tickner, 2014:3). In April 2013, the *Escuela de Lanceros*, one of the nine training schools in Fuerte Tolemaida, concluded its 367th course, resulting in the training not only of Colombian military professionals, but also of 582 international students from 19 different countries (including Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Peru and the United States) (CENAE, 2013). These numbers reveal that other countries in the world, and particularly in Latin America, have come to take Colombia as a reference in the training of their military and police units in counterinsurgency. Colombia’s position in the circuit of military *savoirs* is predominantly based around Fuerte Tolemaida, a facility whose modernisation and transformation into a centre of excellence in military training relied on significant shares of the resources from Plan Colombia.

However, the re-positioning of Colombia in the Latin American circuit speaks not only to the range of courses that came to attract attention from other armies in the region, but also to a specific category of military professional. For example, ESPRO, the school specialising in preparing *soldados profesionales* through short-term courses focused on irregular warfare, appears as a key destination for military personnel in the region. The most-attended courses on ‘tactical military operations against illegal organisations’ include elite units; mobile units; explosive units; demolitions; and demining (ESPRO, n.d.).

In this sense, ESPRO trains soldiers in both the highly-ramified specialisation that came to characterise the Colombian Army, and a form of “professionalisation” in other armies in Latin America. Being the only school of its kind in South America, ESPRO has received students from Brazil, Chile, China, Israel, Paraguay, Peru, the United Kingdom (UK) and the US (ESPRO, n.d.)

The training of Latin American military professionals in Colombia in recent years is a result of the country overcoming the problem of insurgency in its territory, and now being in the position to teach others based on its expertise. In the words of the Minister of Defence (2011-2015) at the time in Colombia, Juan Carlos Pinzón (2015:8):

Because of the sustained progress since the turn of the century, and their exceptional expertise and experience, the Colombian Armed Forces are well positioned to evolve into a regional leader in training, education, and actively participate in international peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief missions around the globe. Colombia’s experience successfully combating insurgent groups, illicit facilitators, transnational criminal organizations, and drug trafficking organizations, makes it uniquely capable and qualified to assist other nations that today, or one day, may face similar threats.

Of course, it is important to explore how this re-positioning of Colombia affects the privileged position that the US has enjoyed in the hemisphere for so many decades. Although this is outside the scope of this chapter, it is noteworthy that this recent dynamic is more like a trilateral organisation – preserving the US as a key piece in this arrangement – than a full displacement of the US as the main authority on counterinsurgency. Two elements arising from my fieldwork in Colombia²⁰ account for this hypothesis. Firstly, the Colombian Ministry of Defence reserves a whole section of its main building in Bogotá for military staff from the US. Second is the significant numbers of military instructors and high-ranked military officers from the US going to Fuerte Tolemaida and the Superior War College (ESDEGUE, in Spanish) respectively.

For the purposes of this chapter, however, the main argument emphasises another aspect in this dynamic, which is the boundary allegedly differentiating defence from public security. In the introduction to this chapter, I highlighted that Colombia is repeatedly framed as an anomaly for the practices undertaken by its Military Forces which are not considered part of a traditional defence agenda. According to this understanding, the historical and systematic engagement of the Colombian Army with public security constitutes a problem in terms of the principles underlying the differentiation of defence and public security.

Within these terms, Colombia’s position as an authority in the region in recent years leads to a puzzle, as even countries whose military forces are not seen as anomalies, such

as Chile, France, and the UK, have been learning from Colombia's experience in public security matters. In post-conflict Colombia, the debate on the role the Military Forces can perform in peacetime reinforces the need for the Colombian National Police to take the lead in internal affairs. Along with this, the Colombian Army should emphasise civil-military action which, as we have seen, is not that different from counterinsurgency, and export its expertise to 'nations that today, or one day, may face similar threats' (Pinzón, 2015:8). Thus, if Colombia is considered to be a post-conflict context, but the "disturbing" participation of the military in public security continues, the position of the country as a provider of solutions to counterinsurgency operations must be taken as an analytical puzzle. As the analysis here shows, Colombia's position in a broader circuit of military *savoirs* suggests that the term "anomaly" should apply to the whole hemispheric circuit, not just to Colombia. However, this is tantamount to saying that we should question the standard of normality against which this so-called anomaly is assessed.

This chapter has problematised the supposed boundary between defence and public security. By offering an account of how military *savoirs* circulate in the hemisphere, it highlighted that defence and public security are transnational social constructs. Accordingly, the labelling of Colombia as an anomaly when it comes to traditional defence practices is challenged, because it makes it difficult for us to identify the historical processes that resulted in a specific contextual understanding of defence. It is not a matter of shifting the responsibility for "problematic" institutional design from Colombia to the US, for we must also recognise the agency of Colombian military professionals in the history of military *savoirs*. Similarly, we cannot limit our understanding of public security to a given space or function, precisely because it requires broader definitions of internal and external.

Final remarks

What are the assumptions behind the boundary we draw between defence and public security? This chapter has taken up this question through a focus on Colombia as an analytical point of entry. What makes Colombia relevant as a case study is the recurrent framing of the country as an anomaly in light of persistent and pervasive engagement of the Military Forces with public security. This chapter has a twofold argument.

First, I explored how it is necessary to account for the active role of the US Army in the emergence of counterinsurgency as the main military *savoir* guiding the engagement of the Colombian Army with public security. I argued that it is impossible to understand the Colombian Army's notion of defence without including the US Army in the analysis. My second move involved looking at this interaction within a hemispheric circuit of military *savoirs*. The influence of the transnational idea of defence as public security on Colombia points to the limits of confining the anomaly to a specific territorial context. After all,

the blurred boundary between those two domains stems from the relation between US and Colombian military professionals, a dynamic which itself is inscribed in a circuit of military *savoirs*.

Furthermore, exploring the circulation of military *savoirs* in Latin America in the second half of the 20th century allows us to more closely examine the common valorisation of counterinsurgency as more relevant to the “threats” that the military in the hemisphere were believed to be facing. Importantly, however, the re-positioning of Colombia in the circuit of military *savoirs* does not refer exclusively to the military. In the post-conflict context, both police and military professionals from other countries have sought Colombian expertise to solve the problems they claimed to be facing.

In this sense, the chapter displaces the spatial (from Colombia to the circuit) and temporal (from internal war to post-conflict) lenses through which we frame “problems” in the supposed boundary between defence and public security. This transnational perspective of how the military came to perform public security functions in Colombia is thus of fundamental importance if we are to question the notion of the two as distinctive spheres of policy, involving contrasting tasks and different professionals of the public force. Considering the position of authority that such a boundary enjoys in our beliefs about democracy, the discussion here acquires particular significance, and particularly in Latin America, where militarisation has increasingly been debated.

One might say that a key aspect is the transformation of warfare. Indeed, the multiple forms that counterinsurgency has taken all share at least one constitutive element: the population-centric approach. This is an essential component, for it is this element that leads to an inherent confusion between police and military functions. If we accept counterinsurgency as a central tenet of defence on the one hand, and public security on the other, then we must also be prepared to accept the modalities of war that constitute social ordering practices in our daily lives.

Notes

- 1 The interview took place in ESDEGUE on 9 March 2015. Personal information about the interviewee are not public, under the request of the interviewee. For more details on the content of the interview, however, please contact the author: m.trindadeviana@gmail.com
- 2 The Colombian Armed Forces are constituted by the Military Forces (Army, Air Force, and Navy) and the National Police.
- 3 Indeed, at least 15 volunteers joined the Battalion right before it departed to Korea: although they were formally enlisted, many of them did not have any previous military instruction (Atehortúa Cruz, A.L., 2008:66).
- 4 Its main course comprised a twelve-week instruction, structured into four phases. The first one was a six-week course focused on the physical preparation of the soldier through military gymnastics, fencing with bayonet, personal defence, swimming, and survival. During this period, the soldier was also taught on intelligence and tactics, as well as on how to read aerial-photographic maps, to work with explosives, and to lead. The second phase (two weeks and a half) corresponded to patrolling in a flat, jungle terrain, where the soldiers were given eight different counter-guerrilla missions. In the two weeks constituting the third phase, the soldiers patrolled in mountainous terrains and participated in technical and tactical exercises on how to prepare and protect from an ambush. Moreover, in this part of the course, the soldiers engaged in combat simulations, with a mission, a target, and a weapon, and were trained on how to jump on the river with their equipment and uniform. In the final week of the Lancers' Course, the soldier went through several tests on command, patrol and physical resistance (Rodríguez, H., 2006:80).
- 5 It is important to mention that this process had been accelerated since the 1980s, in the context of the intensification of the "war on drugs". Indeed, in 1985, the Colombian Army created the Urban Anti-terrorism Special Forces Group (*Agrupación de Fuerzas Especiales Antiterroristas Urbanas* – AFEUR, in Spanish), with the objective of countering and neutralising terrorist actions in the main urban areas of Colombia. In 1996, the Army created the Unified Action Groups for the Personal Liberty (*Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal* – GAULA, in Spanish), exclusively dedicated to avoiding and finding solutions to practices of kidnapping and extortion. Currently, the FUDRA, the AFEUR, the GAULA, and the BACN are 4 of the 6 Special Forces of the Colombian Army. For more information, see <https://bit.ly/3aPpysq> [Accessed 7 September 2018].
- 6 Currently, the Brigade is constituted by three maneuver units (BACN No. 1, 2 and 3), and one support unit – the Counternarcotic Services and Support Battalion (*Batallón de Apoyo y Servicios Contra el Narcotráfico* – BASCN, in Spanish), responsible for the provision of materials, budget and logistics to the maneuver units (Ejército Nacional de Colombia, 2017).
- 7 The training programme is constituted by four pillars. The first one involves a technical preparation in which the soldier learns how to master weapons and equipment such as compass, GPS and night vision devices, as well as techniques such as how to build an improvised vessel. In this phase, soldiers are also trained on "ranger operations". The second pillar corresponds to training on physical tactics, including physical resistance exercises such as marching, trotting and training in specific formations (polygonal) and self-defence, in addition to the emphasis on swimming for river crossing and rescue. The third component of the training programme is focused on the psychological preparation of the soldiers, mainly through simulations on how to deal with situations under pressure. Finally, the programme aims at familiarising the soldiers with the legal frameworks on human rights and humanitarian law. In this last phase, the courses instruct soldiers on how to deal with local authorities, and how to proceed with invasion, capture and confiscation.
- 8 The category "regular soldier" refers to a military professional whose career is prepared from the basis in the Escuela de Cadetes (School of Cadets). In the latter, the military students remain for 4 to 5 years, as the starting point of the military career programme for the low-ranked military in Colombia.

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- 10 See <https://bit.ly/2w6kYr5> [Accessed 15 September 2018].
- 11 See <https://bit.ly/3aSMFIW> [Accessed 15 September 2018].
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 In this context the fortress had its name changed to National Training Center (CENAE, in Spanish). Currently, Fuerte Tolemaida has nine schools specialized in lancers (ESLAN), military parachuting (ESPAM), army tactics (ESERT), support and services for training (BASEN), special forces (ESFER), professional soldiers (ESPRO), shooting (ESTIR), high mountains (ESAMO) and jungle (ESSEL). For more information, see <http://www.cenae.mil.co/> [Accessed 15 September 2018].
- 14 Actually, we could also picture it as a global phenomenon. Porch (2013), for instance, shows how military professionals from France and the United Kingdom travelled to the United States in the 1960s so as to engage in conversations on how their experience could be mobilized in counterinsurgency tactics that were being advanced by the United States in Southeast Asia. In a book edited by Arielli and Collins (2012), a compilation of chapters reminds us how the circulation of military professionals is not a phenomenon confined in a specific geography, nor in a specific time frame.
- 15 According to Gill (2004:74), after the Cuban Revolution, the SOA had a 42% increase in the number of students in comparison to the 1950s. During the 1960s, when the SOA was transferred from Fort Benning (United States) to Fort Gulick (Panama), 13,500 students attended courses at the School. Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Panama, and Peru represented the greatest shares: from 1960 to 1969, between 1,000 and 2,000 trainees were sent by each of these states.
- 16 <https://bit.ly/2WeJG36> [Accessed 17 February 2017].
- 17 From Second Lieutenant (*Subteniente*) to Major (*Mayor*).
- 18 From 1978 to 1988, the course was attended by 823 Latin American students.
- 19 From Lieutenant Colonel (*Teniente Coronel*) to General (*General*). However, only Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels attended courses at the SOA in the period mentioned above.
- 20 My fieldwork involved interviewing military professionals from diverse ranks in the Ministry of Defense and military schools in Colombia. Focused on the training and schooling of military personnel, I also had access to specific manuals which were used in those schools. The work comprised four 15-day visits to Bogotá from 2014 to 2016.

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