Waging War, Preparing for Peace:
Military Change in the Colombian Army, 2010-2018

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Abstract

The present study describes and explains the Colombian army's most recent reform, which unfolded during the Santos administration (2010-18). While the government categorically excluded any changes to the security forces during the peace talks with the guerrilla (2012-16), as a final ceasefire accord became plausible, the land force issued a structural, doctrine and education reform. The army command designed these changes parallel to the ongoing confrontation and outside of the peace negotiations.

To understand how and why the ground force designed and implemented these changes, the case study conducts a theory-guided process tracing to analyse multiple intervening factors in three analytical dimensions: the security and political environment, the interplay between civilian and military agents, and the organisational networks, pressures and expectations shaping the outcome of the reforms. Evidence confirms the hypothesis leading this empirical study in showing that an increasingly uncertain institutional and operational context prompted the land force's leaders to advance changes that mitigated or prevented adverse, external reforms. On this backdrop, the civil-military interplay aimed to favour the army's interests. Ultimately, the EJC responded to rising pressures and expectations by emulating organisations that confer material and ideational resources.

The case shows a combination of elements that belong to military adaptation, given the land force's intention to counter threats development at an operational-tactical level, with a series of decisions that resulted in far-reaching reforms during a transitioning institutional context. Indeed, the changes had already begun to unfold before the peace process with the FARC. However, shifts in the security and political environment during the Santos presidency accelerated and prompted broader reforms.

The high sensitivities raised by the peace talks concerning the military status quo and the interplay with political leaders led to a high politicization of the reforms and excluding a broad discussion on equally relevant issues such as the army's size, financial sustainability, and the necessary resources to bolster capabilities, amongst others. This, in turn, deviated the attention from a much profound level of institutional change, namely, civil-military relations in Colombia.

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Studie beschreibt und analysiert die jüngste Reform der kolumbianischen Armee, die während der Regierung Santos (2010-18) stattfand. Veränderungen innerhalb der Sicherheitskräfte wurden während der Friedensgespräche mit der FARC (2012-16) ausgeschlossen. Als jedoch die Wahrscheinlichkeit eines endgültigen Waffenstillstandsabkommens wuchs, gab die Armee eine Struktur-, Doktrin- und Ausbildungsreform heraus. Diese Anpassungen wurden parallel zum Kampf gegen die FARC und außerhalb der Friedensverhandlungen konzipiert.

Um zu verstehen, wie und warum das kolumbianische Heer diese Reformen entworfen und umgesetzt hat, wird in der Fallstudie eine theoriegeleitete Prozessverfolgung durchgeführt. Dabei werden mehrere intervenierende Faktoren in drei analytischen Dimensionen analysiert: das sicherheitspolitische Umfeld, das Zusammenspiel zwischen zivilen und militärischen Akteuren und die organisatorischen Netzwerke, die das Ergebnis der Reformen prägten. Die dieser empirischen Studie zugrunde liegende Hypothese wird in ihren drei Teilen bestätigt. Erstens, dass ein zunehmend unsicherer institutioneller und operativer Kontext die Armee dazu veranlasste, Anpassungen voranzutreiben, die nachteilige Reformen abschwächten oder verhinderten. Zweitens zielte das zivil-militärische Zusammenspiel darauf ab, die Interessen der Armee zu begünstigen. Und schlussendlich reagierte das Heer auf die steigenden Erwartungen im In- und Ausland, indem es sich an Streitkräfte anpasste, die materiellen und ideellen Ressourcen zur Verfügung stellen.

Einerseits handelt es sich um einen Prozess der militärischen Anpassung, bei dem die Armee der Entwicklung der Bedrohungen auf operativ-taktischer Ebene begegnen will. Andererseits werden weitreichende Reformen in einem sich wandelnden institutionellen Kontext dargestellt. Tatsächlich hatte der Wandel schon vor dem Friedensprozess mit der FARC begonnen, allerdings beschleunigten Entwicklungen im sicherheitspolitischen Umfeld während der Präsidentschaft von Santos umfassendere Reformen.

Schließlich zeigt die Studie, dass die hohe Sensibilität der Friedensgespräche in Bezug auf den militärischen *status quo* und das Zusammenspiel mit der politischen Elite zu einer hohen Politisierung der Reformen führte und eine breite Diskussion über ebenso relevante Themen wie die Größe der Armee, die finanzielle Nachhaltigkeit und die notwendigen Ressourcen zur Stärkung der militärischen Fähigkeiten ausschloss. Dies wiederum lenkte die Aufmerksamkeit von einer viel tiefgreifenderen Ebene des institutionellen Wandels ab, nämlich dem zivil-militärischen Beziehungen in Kolumbien.

Acknowledgements

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List of Acronyms, Abbreviations and Initialisms

Acore	Asociación Colombiana de Oficiales Retirados de las Fuerzas Militares ("Colombian Association of Retired Officers of the Military Forces")
AFEUR	Agrupación de Fuerzas Especiales Antiterroristas Urbanas ("Urban Counter-Terrorism Special Forces Group")
ARC	Armada Nacional de Colombia ("Colombian Navy").
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia ("United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia")
BG	Brigadier General
CAAID	Comando de Acción Integral y Desarrollo ("Comprehensive Action and Development Command")
CAEM	Curso de Altos Estudios Militares ("high-level military studies course")
Capt.	Captain
CCOET	Comando Conjunto Estratégico de Transacción ("Joint Strategic Command for the Transition").
CEDEF	Comité Estratégico Diseño del Ejército del Futuro ("Design Committee of the Army of the Future")
CEDOC	Comando de Educación y Doctrina ("Education and Doctrine Command")
CEDOE	Centro de Doctrina del Ejército ("Army Doctrine Centre")
CEM	Curso de Estado Mayor ("General Staff Course")
CEMAI	Centro de Misiones Internacionales y Acción Integral ("Centre for International Missions and Comprehensive Action")
CENAE	Centro Nacional de Entrenamiento ("National Training Centre")
CEPAL	Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean)
CETI	Comité Estratégico de Transformación e Innovación ("Strategic Committee for Transformation and Innovation").
CGFM	Comando General de las Fuerzas Militares ("General Command Military Forces")
CIAC	Corporación de la Industria Aeronáutica Colombiana ("Corporation of the Colombian Aeronautical Industry")
CIDENAL	Curso Integral de Defensa Nacional ("Comprehensive National Defence Course")
CIDES	Centro International de Desminado del Ejército ("Army International Demining Centre")
CNMH	Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica ("National Centre of Historical Memory")
Codaltec	Corporación de alta tecnología para la defensa ("High-Tech Defence Corporation")
COET	Comando Estratégico de Transición ("Strategic Transition Command")
COING	Comando de Ingenieros ("Engineers Command")

Col.	Colonel
Cotecmar	Corporación de Ciencia y Tecnología para el Desarrollo de la Industria Naval Marítima y Fluvial ("Science and Technology Corporation for Naval, Maritime and Riverine Industry Development")
COTEF	Comando de Transformación Ejército del Futuro ("Army Transformation, Futures Command")
CRE-i	Comité de Revisión Estratégica e Innovación ("Strategic Review and Innovation Committee")
DICOE	Dirección de Comunicaciones Estratégicas ("Directorate for Strategic Communication")
DILEA	Dirección de Lecciones Aprendidas del Ejército Nacional de Colombia
DIRIE	Dirección de Relaciones Internacionales del Ejército ("Army Directorate for International Relations")
DNP	Departamento Nacional de Planeación ("National Planning Department")
DOD	US Department of Defense
DOS	US Department of State
EJC	Ejército Nacional de Colombia ("Colombian National Army")
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional ("National Liberation Army")
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación ("Popular Liberation Army")
ESDEGUE	Escuela Superior de Guerra ("War College")
ESMAI	Escuela de Misiones Internacionales y Acción Integral ("School of International Missions and Comprehensive Action")
ESMIC	Escuela Militar de Cadetes ("Military School of Cadets")
EU	European Union
FAC	Fuerza Aérea Colombiana ("Colombian Airforce")
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia ("Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia")
FUDRA	Fuerza de Despliegue Rápido ("Rapid Deployment Force")
FUTAM	Fuerza de Tarea de Armas Combinadas Mediana ("Medium Combined Arms Task Force")
GAULA	Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal ("Unified Action Groups for Personal Freedom")
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Gen.	General
GREAT	Grupo Estratégico Asesor para la Transformación ("Strategic Advisory Group for Transformation")
Indumil	Industria Militar Colombiana ("Colombian Military Industry")

JEMGF	Jefatura de Estado Mayor Generador de Fuerza ("Chief-of-Staff for Army Force Generation")
JEMOP	Jefatura de Estado Mayor de Operaciones ("Chief-of-Staff for Operations")
JEMPP	Jefatura de Estado Mayor de Planeación y Políticas ("Chief-of-Staff for Planning and Policies")
JEP	Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz ("Special Jurisdiction for Peace")
JTF	Joint Task Force
Lt.	Lieutenant
MDN	Ministerio de Defensa Nacional ("National Ministry of Defence")
MFE	Manuales Fundamentales del Ejército ("Army Fundamental Manuals")
MFRE	Manuales Fundamentales de Referencia del Ejército ("Army Fundamental Reference Manual")
MG	Major General
MHCP	Ministerio de Hacienda y Crédito Público ("Ministry of Finance and Public Credit")
MTE	Manuales de Técnicas del Ejército ("Manuals of Army Techniques")
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCOs	Non-commissioned officers
OACP	Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz ("Office of the High Commissioner for Peace")
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PETEF	Plan de Transformación Ejército del Futuro ("Transformation Plan Army of the Future")
PTEC	NATO Partnership Training and Education Centres
RMA	Revolutions in Military Affairs
SAMS	US Army School of Advanced Military Studies
SOUTHCOM	United States Southern Command
ULO	Unified Land Operations
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon
US	United States
USAWC	United States Army War College

1. Introduction

The negotiations between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) that officially began in 2012 and ended with a final bilateral ceasefire in 2016 raised the question of whether a military reform should be part of the peace agenda. Indeed, more than five decades of counterinsurgent warfare have profoundly influenced the country's armed forces and, in particular, its land branch. Throughout the years of domestic confrontation, the Colombian army's size, resources, structure, strategy and doctrine adapted to confront the oldest and largest guerrilla group in the hemisphere and other irregular threats (Borrero, 2006; Ortega, 2011; Vargas, 2010a).

Consequently, as the plausibility of the main threat demobilising increased, attention was drawn to possible changes in the country's most important military branch. Moreover, given the international experience in post-conflict transitions and the evolution of the diverse illegal actors operating in the country, scholars have identified the need to undertake a security and defence sector reform (Schultze-Kraft, 2012; García, 2014; Álvarez et al., 2015; Grasa, 2016). Indeed, a series of transitional measures in the early twenty-first century have coexisted with the ongoing internal turmoil and its multiple intervening actors. In this sense, Colombia features a continuity of the armed confrontation with policy decisions and steps towards an eventual post-conflict, including questions about the role of the armed forces in it[1]. Overall, the prospect of a potentially drastic change in the army's operational and institutional context prompted a contentious, albeit not a broad enough, discussion on military adjustments in this Andean nation.

In response to the rising debate, from the outset of the dialogues, the executive in Bogota categorically denied that subjects related to the security forces or the defence sector would be part of the negotiations or the policy agenda parallel to the peace talks (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz [OACP], 2018a, p. 146; 2018b, p. 79). Not infrequently, the insurgent group leaders negotiating in Cuba demanded a reduction and reform of their hitherto adversaries' doctrine, structure, and roles (NTN24, 2012; El Espectador, 2015a, 2015b).

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[1] This research agrees with scholars who have denominated this continuum as an armed post-conflict, in which transitional and peacebuilding efforts –such as the demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants, reconciliation, special justice and reparation to victims– coexist with ongoing and changing dynamics of armed violence (see, for instance, Rettberg, 2012, p. 33; Vargas, 2015, p. 2). For the purposes of the analysis, given that decision-makers referred to it as such, the study refers to an eventual or potential post-conflict, as the future scenario to which the army projects the reform. This, too, encompasses steps towards overcoming the armed conflict and the evolution of illegal actors.

Despite the guerrilla delegation's insistence on this point, the government delegates vetoed this issue from the Havana agenda. Accordingly, none of the 255 dispositions of the comprehensive peace agreement refers to changes within the military. President Juan Manuel Santos (2010 – 18) also insisted that no military reform would occur.

Nevertheless, in September 2015, the army commander announced an allegedly unprecedented reform to prepare the institution for new domestic and international roles (El Tiempo, 2015b). Months later, the land force issued its restructuring plan, including a novel distribution of force generation and command tasks, alongside new operational and tactic elements (Ejército Nacional de Colombia [EJC], 2016a). According to official documents, this process began to unfold before the peace talks in Cuba, was forged as an initiative of high-ranking military officers since the beginning of the Santos administration, and entailed changes of doctrine, training, and structure (Dirección de Comunicaciones Estratégicas [DICOE], 2016). In sum, between 2016 and 2018, the EJC command issued a transformation plan for the future and new doctrine reference documents formulated during the last decade.

The institutional changes adopted aim at transforming the Colombian land force into a multi-mission force. It encompasses war and peace-related domestic roles and getting ready to participate in inter-state conventional conflict as well as international operations, for instance, in peacekeeping and stabilisation missions in partnership with multilateral organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) (CEDOE, 2016, p. 8; Rojas, 2017a; Ministerio de Defensa Nacional [MDN], 2018a, pp. 76-7, 161-7). This new emphasis on international roles and missions coexists with remaining and rising domestic irregular threats, which the military have traditionally fought and continue to confront in Colombia. Moreover, although the government expressed the disposition to deploy soldiers in international missions, this seems unlikely in the short term, given the necessary capabilities, time and resources to materialise this commitment.

Although some scholarly contributions have initially addressed this development in the Colombian ground force, most of them surmise that a change has occurred without critically assessing it. Descriptive and normative accounts have been the rule, whilst analytical, theory-founded explanations have been sparse. Moreover, those who have outlined drivers of change point out to the impact of the peace process and international cooperation. However, these neglect the decision-making behind the modifications and alternate intervening variables.

This research aims at bridging this gap by addressing a twofold puzzle. On the one hand, if this change was primarily an initiative of the military, took place outside the peace talks with the FARC, and began before the negotiations started– then why did this change take place? What factors caused it? On the other hand, if the specific form this military change has taken towards new international missions does not necessarily correspond to the country's strategic needs and security threats, what influenced this military change? How was it shaped?

Accordingly, the general question guiding the present study is: *Why did a military change occur in the Colombian army between 2010 and 2018?* Furthermore, three specific research questions guide the hypothesis formulation and subsequent analysis. First, the work will reveal what changes occurred in the EJC during the studied period. Secondly, the analysis will reveal which developments caused this process of change. Finally, the factors that explain the particular form and content of the adopted reforms will be examined.

This introductory chapter overviews how previous research has addressed military change. In doing so, it seeks to frame the research question and the contribution of this dissertation within the academic tradition of political science and strategic studies, pointing out how previous work has addressed the issue of military reforms in other countries and the specific case of Colombia. The chapter then presents the research method, sources and limitations of this work. The final section offers a summary of the succeeding chapters.

1.1. Literature Review

There are two broad standpoints from which scholars have addressed the issue of military change. The first one concerns innovations in fighting organisations that emerge either parallel to the conduction of warfare or during peacetime, as part of an adaptation to present or future conflict. Although not exclusively, research that adopts this perspective emerges from strategic studies, drawing on the broader fields of international relations, history and political science. The second stance inquires about the reforms on a state's armed forces or the whole security sector within a changing context such as democratisation or war-to-peace transitions. The study of democratic transitions has mostly been related to civil-military relations[2],

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[2] The term differs from civic-military action and civil-military cooperation. The latter are used to categorise specific types of actions in which civilians and military members engage either as part of warfare strategy or as a comprehensive approach to complex contexts.

borrowing conceptual tenets from institutionalism in political science. In contrast, and although the scholarship on post-conflict military change has also drawn on the analysis of civilian control of the armed forces, it has more often used a security sector reform approach.

Between these two positions, the Colombian army reform that is the object of this study offers an interesting case. It comprises elements that aim to adapt to shifting circumstances on the battlefield and unfolded on the backdrop of a peace process with a potential impact on its institutional framework given the transitional infrastructure that it entailed. In this sense, the phenomenon that this research seeks to explain stands in the interface of military adaptation and reforms on the backdrop of a transitioning society.

The following literature review frames the research problem in the fields of political science and strategic studies to which this work belongs. In this way, the brief outline of previous studies that have addressed military transformation shows what answers other scholars have given to this question and why this study chooses the categories of analysis and approach that underpin it. For this reason, and before examining how scholars have addressed the EJC's change process, the section begins with a general overview of academic contributions to the study of innovations and reforms in fighting organisations. It then reviews the main strands of military reform scholarship in transition contexts. The final subsection assesses the principal exponents that have researched the matter of this work and the gap in the literature to which it aims to contribute.

Sources of Military Innovation and Adaptation

When examining academic references of contemporary military change, consensus points to explanations from the theoretical tenets of international relations. Specifically, the neorealist perspective offers a compelling account of why states implement changes in their armed forces. According to this view, competition for power and the emulation of the most successful states' capabilities are the main drivers of change (Waltz, 1971, p. 127).

The most prominent work in this strand is Posen's study of British, French, and German military change in the interwar period and the early World War II (1984). According to this author, upon rising threats, civilian leaders intervene to change military doctrine. Although Posen also resorts to organisational theory to explore domestic constraints on political actors, he concludes that the balance-of-power theory is most convincing to explain

the cases he examined (1984, p. 239). Resende-Santos (2007) asserts that the external security environment, not cultural factors, caused Argentina, Brasil and Chile to emulate Prussian military practices at the turn of the twentieth century.

Neoclassical realism authors have drawn upon Posen's work to provide supplementary and alternative explanations. For instance, Deborah Avant analysed how hegemonic states that engage in peripheral wars introduce changes in their security forces (1993). In her view, it is necessary to delve into the civil-military configuration of a political system to understand how domestic and international variables influence military doctrine (p. 427). Likewise, Taliaferro (2006) inquires into state power and how it mobilises resources as necessary causes to shape the adopted strategies. From this stance, the international system does shape military change, but only in that it interacts with the domestic institutions and ideas (Taliaferro, 2006). Finally, Horowitz (2010) posits that the domestic financial and organisational challenges of adopting new warfighting models influence the decision to innovate or emulate and, in turn, the balance of power at a systemic level.

Another strand in the literature explaining military change resorts to individual and organisational variables. In this line, Rosen (1991) examines how intra-service competition and institutional arrangements shaped military adaptation in both US and British armed forces during peace and wartime during the twentieth century. Other authors have provided historical accounts that underscore the importance of alternative factors in shaping military innovations such as bureaucratic acceptance of novel elements, leadership and officer careers, and the development of visions of future conflict coherent with operational realities (see, for instance, Murray & Millet, 1996; Mets & Winton, 2000; Murray, 2011).

Scholars in the field have also studied how military alliances adapt to shifting environments, assessing the relative weight of drivers of change. For instance, Terriff (2002) examined the adoption of US ideas in NATO's approach to change after the Cold War, underscoring the role of norms in shaping change. From a contending stance, when analysing the case of the Alliance's response to developments in the Mediterranean region, Masala (2003) demonstrates how shared threats' perception and interests by NATO member states are the decisive factors that influence the Alliance's adaptation processes and, in turn, its ability to respond to a changing security and political environment.

With the advent of information and communication technology and its effect in warfighting, the scholarship dealing with post-Cold War change drew attention to technology as a driver of military innovation. Particularly central to this approach is the widespread debate on revolutions in military affairs (RMA) emerging since the early nineties after the US used high-tech precision weapons in the Gulf War. While some affirmed that lack of consensus in what the RMA entailed and civil-military strains hindered change in this direction (Owens, 2002), a significant part of the debate centred in defining the phenomenon (Bland, 2001; Knox & Murray, 2001) and in the question of whether it was an evolution or a revolution (Benbow, 2004; Halpin et al., 2006). In this respect, Cohen (2004) criticised the excessive emphasis on technology and top-down decisions to explain change, to the detriment of organisational factors. Moreover, the discussion mostly focused on US developments, overlooking other military organisations worldwide (Sloan, 2002; Futter & Collins, 2015).

In reaction to the relatively marked focus on technology as the driver of military innovation, some researchers turned towards other causes stemming from culture and norms (Kier, 1997; Goldman, 2002; Terriff, 2006). For instance, Vennesson (1995) draws upon an institutionalist framework to explain France's air force decisions to adopt new capabilities. Trubowitz, Goldman and Rhodes (1998) ascribed the development of the US Navy to the interest of political leaders in stimulating industrialisation, the role of progressive thinkers and the need to build a national identity at the turn of the twentieth century. More recently, Katarzyna Zysk (2015) showed the decisive role of military thinking in Russian top political leadership in shaping the adoption of novel concepts, technologies and organisational forms.

Others have addressed the impact of diffusion and emulation in the spread of the RMA and replicating the idea of military transformation (Pretorius, 2008; Demchak, 2002; Goldman & Mahnken, 2004; Adamsky, 2020). Among these studies, the US's predominant role in leading transformation trends in other Western countries, particularly within the transatlantic Alliance has received attention (Farrell et al., 2010; Farrell et al., 2013). Finally, from a historical perspective, D. E. Rojas (2017) explained the diffusion of counterinsurgency approaches through military networks in the wake of the Cold War.

Precisely, new operational contexts led to analysing how fighting organisations adapt to counterinsurgent and stabilisation missions. The US and other military powers' incursion in irregular warfare during the past decades has inspired much research in this body of literature (Lock-Pullan, 2005; Ucko, 2009; Davis, 2010; Serena, 2011; Hochuli, 2016). For instance,

Farrell (2010) studied how British brigades in Afghanistan integrated a population-centric approach to operations in the Helmand Province between 2006 and 2009. Likewise, Borchert (2010) reviewed the Bundeswehr transformation process integrating network-centric and effects-based approaches to operations.

Among these contributions that deal with contemporary challenges in military innovation, some authors have drawn on conceptual tenets that include the influence that the interplay between civilians and the military have on conduction of irregular warfare. For instance, Egnell (2007) analysed the US and British deployment in Iraq, concluding that the civil-military integration at the interagency and ministerial levels is crucial to effectiveness. Moreover, delving into domestic and international variables, Groitl (2015) provided a systematic examination of how strategic change in the US post-Cold War interventions triggered civil-military conflicts. Finally, Jordán (2017) proposed an integrative theoretical approach, encompassing the role of civilian and military leadership, as well as organisational variables, to study how US special operations forces innovated after the 9/11 attacks.

In sum, the literature on military change as adaptation during war or peacetime has examined variables from the domestic and international realm, as well as civil-military aspects and organisational dynamics. Additionally, authors have explored the role of technology, ideas and politics in the development of new approaches to warfare. Besides this approach, scholars have also addressed security forces' reforms implemented in transitioning contexts, such as regimes emerging after periods of authoritarian rule and societies developing towards post-conflict. The next subsection overviews this research area.

Reforming Security Forces in Transitioning Contexts

The study of military reforms deals ultimately with how a state organises the use of violence and, indirectly, with relations between governors and the armed corps. Who and how decides over the structure, roles, missions, doctrine and education of the armed forces, among other issues, fall into this category. Modifications in these areas do not always affect the relations between politicians and the military, but they may potentially raise tensions and resistance, especially in transitional contexts.

Precisely for being considered necessary to consolidate democracy, measures to achieve civilian control over the armed forces are central to the civil-military relations discussion. One of the most influential scholars of this area of studies has been Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* (1957). Synthetically, this seminal work posited that professionalisation and the diffusion of democratic ideals among service members ensure civilian control. Contesting this assumption, Janowitz (1960) suggested that professionalism can otherwise lead to the military's excessive political influence.

Several case studies addressing reforms to curb military power and dismantle authoritarian regimes have been salient in the field (see Bruneau, 2013a and Kuehn et al., 2016). Indeed, the rise of military governments in the second half of the twentieth century and the third wave of democratisation since the late 1970s fostered a vast majority of the literature dealing with how civilian governors restrain military power. In this respect, the Latin American region offered a fertile field both for single case studies (for instance, Stepan, 1978; Agüero, 1989; Hunter, 1997) and comparative research on the particular configurations to control and manage the armed forces (Lowenthal & Fitch, 1986; Stepan, 1988; Varas, 1989; Pion-Berlin, 1992).

Just as the Latin American strand, academics dealing with military reforms in European transitioning states have highlighted the importance of democratic civilian control (Cottey et al., 2005; Croissant et al., 2011). For example, scholars in this field have researched the reduction and structural reforms of post-Cold War security forces (Heinemann-Grüder, 2002; Cottey et al., 2002; Edmunds, 2005; Cottey, 2007). Additionally, the volume by Born, Caparini and Kuhlmann (2006) addressed the issue of democratic control and tensions between civilian and military actors, not only on transitioning and consolidating states but also in established democracies.

Within this body of literature, three ideal types of explanatory frameworks can be identified. First, some studies highlight the role of civilian and military actors in the process of change and thus rely on agent-centred explanations such as strategic choice and bargaining theory. Examples of this thread are Hunter's (2001) study of actors' strategies in Brazil and Fitch's (2001) analysis of officers' attitudes towards democracy, national security and military doctrine in Latin America. Moreover, when analysing civilian control in post-authoritarian Indonesia, Mietzner (2011) concluded that agency-related factors played a more significant role

against path-dependent, structural variables. Similarly, Kuehn (2013) applied a game theory approach to strategic interactions between civilians and the military in democratic transitions in South Korea and Taiwan, concluding these had a preponderant weight against alternative explanations of change.

A second strand sees contextual variables as the most relevant causes to explain the development of civil-military relations and reforms to security forces in transitioning states. Some authors have emphasised the impact of war and turmoil in increasing military autonomy, with security forces attempting to or taking power in the name of national interest (Finer, 1962; Moskos, 1977). On a similar drift, Feaver (1998) and Desch (1999) suggested that rising internal or external threats and the high levels of polarisation of a society in crisis tend to favour military insubordination and coups. Finally, researchers have also drawn attention to how the preexisting institutional arrangement in a political system influences civil-military issues during transitions (Pion-Berlin, 1997; Pion-Berlin & Arceneaux, 1998).

The third group of explanations advocate for integrative approaches. For instance, researchers have merged analytical elements from historical institutionalism and strategic action to understand what shaped civilian control efforts in post-authoritarian South American and South European regimes (for instance, Trinkunas, 2001; Agüero, 2001). In his edited volume on the military's changing political role in Asia, Alagappa (2001) formulated explanatory propositions of how socio-economic and political factors interact with agents' beliefs and interests. Advancing the importance of integrative analytical approaches, Croissant et al. (2011) offered a causal chain in which structural factors influence agent behaviour, specifically, the type of civilian strategies selected to control the military. Finally, Chambers (2011) drew upon the latter to study how institutional, ideational and macro-structural variables in Thailand have conditioned civilian actors' choices and strategies to manage the military sector.

Beyond democratisation, and given that the vast majority of peace accords to end intrastate armed conflicts refer to security sector reforms (Joshi et al., 2015)[3], war-to-peace transitions have also gained the interest of military change researchers. In this body of literature, the Central American region has offered relevant cases for empirical studies. For example, Williams and Walter (1997) examined how the increased level of prerogatives that the

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[3] According to the database available on the Kroc Institute Peace Accords Matrix referred to in Joshi et al. (2015), 26 out of the 34 comprehensive agreements between 1992 and 2012 provide dispositions to transform the armed forces.

Salvadorean armed forces enjoyed throughout military rule and civil war hindered the peace accord's demilitarisation efforts. Furthermore, Schultze-Kraft (2005) analysed the particular features of civil-military relations in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua during the nineties and how they impacted the possibility of military reform and democratisation. More recently, Pérez (2016) conducted a thorough study of the institutional arrangement between governors and armed forces, their new missions, roles and beliefs in four post-conflict Central American countries.

A significant contribution to this area of studies is that of Barany (2012), who delivered a comparative volume of how democratic armies are built after interstate conflict, civil war, regime change and state transformation. Among the generalisations based on the empirical evidence of 27 cases, his work concluded that peace accords that leave issues related to armed forces unsettled are likely to be contested (p. 343). Moreover, coinciding with the contributions of Brzoska and Heinemann-Grüder (2004) and Law (2006), Barany stresses the crucial role of foreign actors in post-war activities that aim to build armed forces (2012, p. 343). From a different perspective, Schroeder et al. (2014) used sociology of organisations' concepts to go beyond state-centric variables when addressing the interaction of domestic factors with external security governance standards.

Finally, authors in this strand of scholarship have identified the challenges of structuring a post-conflict army, often because of the long-term process of building trust between former adversaries. Contesting the idea that a multiethnic army can lead to military flaws, Florence Gaub's (2011) study of Nigeria, Lebanon and Bosnia-Herzegovina showed that these efforts potentially serve peace and reconciliation. Moreover, Barany's (2012) chapter on the latter two countries compares this experience with incorporating the FMLN guerrilla into El Salvador's armed forces (pp. 78-110), while Anne Marie Balouny (2013) focuses on the shortcomings and challenges of the Lebanese case. Finally, Licklider (2014) offered a volume with eleven contributions that assess why some cases result in successful post-war integration of former rivals, while others lead to continuing or deepening confrontation.

Overall, academic contributions on military reform in transitioning contexts have examined intervening variables ranging from actors' beliefs, interests, and strategic interaction through the domestic and international factors shaping change development. Besides structural

and agent-based explanations, organisational variables have also been integrated into analytical and empirical work. However, unlike research on democratisation and civil-military relations, the literature on military reform in post-war transitions has yet to profit more from the theoretical basis of institutional change applied by the former body of scholarship. This gap is a potential area of research in which the present study aims to shed light, drawing on empirical evidence from Colombia, a case that stands in the interface of military adaptation and reforms on the backdrop of a transitioning society.

Consequently, the following subsection concludes this literature review, presenting the main strands of the academic work that has dealt with military change in Colombia, especially regarding contemporary adaptation and the latest reform process.

The Study of Military Change in Colombia

Being a region that saw more than 130 coups during the twentieth century (Radseck, 2019, p. 301), research on military issues in Latin America has mostly stemmed from the study of democratic transitions. In this scenario, Colombia rarely appears in international compilations or regional comparative volumes on the matter and, when it does, it is peripherally mentioned or addressed as a deviant case (see Fitch, 1998; Schultze-Kraft, 2005; Born & Schnabel, 2009; Grabendorff, 2009; Pion-Berlin, 2016). Indeed, as Deas (2003) and Nasi (2007) recall, while military dictatorships plagued the region, the country remained in democratic rule[4]. Moreover, the persistence of a more than five-decade internal armed confrontation on the background of a relatively stable, continuous democracy further underscores its exceptionalism (Porch, 2008; Leal, 2018). Notwithstanding, the study of the military and the broader security field in Colombia has been overlooked, with relatively low interest from civilians on the matter (Borrero, 2006, p. 140; Schultze-Kraft, 2012, p. 406; Skaar & Malca, 2014, p. 3).

Indeed, a first look into the scholarly work in the field reveals that some of the most frequent references stem from former officers engaged in intellectual endeavours to describe the evolution of the military in Colombia. Two salient authors are late Generals Valencia Tovar (1993) and Ruíz Novoa (1956), who delivered historical accounts and lessons learned from the

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[4] With the sole exception of the military government of Rojas Pinilla (1953-57) installed and ousted by the political elite

battlefield, including the incursion of the EJC in the Korean War (Valencia Tovar & Sandoval, 2001). Former Gen. Ospina has also been prolific in depicting the strategic adjustment during the government of former president Álvaro Uribe (2002-10), emphasising a new concept of military victory and how a civil-military partnership gained the upper hand over the insurgents in the 2000s (2014; 2017; Ospina & Marks, 2014). Regarding doctrinal change, retired Gen. Cabrera (2017) elaborated a thorough study of the army's operational principles and frameworks throughout its history. Additionally, former navy Capt. Rivera-Páez conducted a research on military identity in Colombia, with preliminary insights on potential cultural transformation in the corps and peacebuilding (2017; 2019a).

Civilian viewpoints on reforms and innovation in the Colombian armed forces have also drawn attention to how the participation in the Korean War (Atehortúa, 2008; Delgado, 2015a; Dufort, 2017) and foreign military missions fostered new models of warfare, force structure and organisation (Atehortúa, 2009; Esquivel, 2013). These studies usually draw on history and strategic studies to unveil the drivers of change. Similarly, Vargas (2008) elaborated a comprehensive account of the Colombian army's transition towards a modern, professional corps throughout the twentieth century, including the emergence of counterinsurgency.

Indeed, the armed forces' participation in the domestic armed conflict is part of the most researched topics for those studying their change over the past decades (see, for instance, Vargas, 2010a). The end of the nineties and the beginning of the twenty-first century saw significant interest in studying military innovations in Colombia. A systematic analysis by Borrero (2006) stands out in this body of scholarship, addressing new forms of force organisation, deployment, recruitment, education and intelligence that came with effectiveness shortcomings and command and control challenges. Other academics have also assessed the changes that took place during the Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) and Uribe administrations, which were substantially, although not exclusively, enabled by Plan Colombia's domestic and foreign aid resources (Escobar et al., 2006; Vargas, 2010b; Castrillón & Guerra; 2017).

From a broader stance, Leal's (1994; 2006) work has emphasised the shortcomings of strategies and security policies designed in Bogota, which usually have privileged exclusively military responses to the rise of illegal armed groups. Moreover, he studied this recent phase of innovation, focusing on how the army has dealt with national security, the civilian role in this definition, and the still ongoing modernisation process (Leal, 2017).

The specific development of counterinsurgency in this Andean country's armed forces has also raised the attention of strategic studies' researchers. For instance, Ortega (2011) analyses how the FARC adapted to the military's operational changes and, in turn, how the latter responded to this ability, further adjusting the fight against irregular groups. Among these adaptations, the inclusion of jointness at the doctrinal, force structure and operational dimension has been analysed as a determinant factor for success (Flórez Henao, 2012).

However, Borrero (2007) stressed the challenges of implementing jointness in the country, particularly concerning the army's preponderant role and the military organisation structure in Colombia, adverse to horizontal, collective decision-making. In a more recent assessment, Palma (2020) analysed the state forces' response to insurgency during the Uribe administration and the first two years of the Santos government, shedding light on progress, limitations of the consolidation strategy and the issue of extrajudicial killings.

From a different perspective, other authors have also delved into the role of ideas and beliefs in military changes that have taken place in the country, and how the armed forces conceive the armed conflict. Specifically, scholars have assessed how conservative or progressive doctrinal strands have influenced operations and interaction with the executive (Torres del Río, 2000; Nieto, 2014). In this drift, Delgado (2016) analysed counterinsurgency development alongside military thinking evolution in the 1950s and 1960s. Similarly, Dufort (2017) identified how certain factions of army officers that ascended to the top brass at a given time throughout the twentieth century sought to position one or another approach to warfare, sometimes in tension and others in coalescence with the civilian leadership. Finally, Ugarriza and Pabón (2017) reviewed military archives to explain how the organisation conceived the initial insurrectionary movements, the later rise of the guerrilla and the latest peace process.

Upon changing dynamics in the battlefield and a possible armistice with the FARC, academics and practitioners in Colombia began to discuss the possibility of a new transformation in the armed forces. Borrero (2009) called attention to the fact that the military would require modernisation reforms and respond to changing and new rising threats in the light of appeasement and conflict reduction. Certainly, a part of the literature dealing with the most recent developments offers a normative and prospective analysis of how the sector should change in an eventual post-conflict phase.

For instance, Schultze-Kraft (2012) highlighted the need for structural changes in the armed forces, considering the exponential growth in troop size and budget during the long-lasting conflict, and advocated for reforms on the broader security sector. Furthermore, Martínez (2014) proposed a shift in roles towards peacebuilding and development-oriented military tasks in a future post-conflict scenario. Additionally, Grasa (2016) formulated recommendations on a reform of the security sector stressing particular issues related to disarmament, demobilisation, and former combatants' reintegration.

On a different drift, Borda (2013) and Borrero (2017) argued that it would be undesirable to decrease military capabilities in the post-agreement phase given the rising threats this entails. Similarly, retired Col. Velásquez (2015) emphasised the importance of strengthening the armed forces' presence in zones that have previously been controlled by the rebel group and were significantly affected by the armed confrontation. Whereas they favour a general security and defence sector reform, Álvarez et al. (2015) suggest that the military be strengthened during a transitional phase. More recently, the works of Pastrana and Vera (2018) and Benzig (2019) underscored the importance of preserving traditional roles while also justifying the scope towards international missions, which is at the core of the new military doctrine.

A substantial part of the academic work on this matter has focused on describing the main security challenges in the light of the peace process. Some authors generally ponder the public force's priorities in an eventual post-conflict scenario in Colombia (Muñoz & Sánchez, 2015). Others instead focus on specific issues such as risk management and human security (García et al., 2016), historical memory and the truth commission (Ramírez et al., 2016), and the rising difficulties of the implementation of the peace accords (Leal, 2018b). The interest in addressing military reforms parallel to the Havana dialogues also led to reflections on the Colombian case based on lessons learned from other countries, especially in Central America (García, 2014; Ramírez et al., 2016; Donadio, 2017).

Once the national army announced the doctrine and structure change, the debate focused on describing and assessing the reforms. For instance, Ciro and Correa (2014) elaborated a detailed article unfolding the army's restructuring process and planning for future

scenarios. Castillo and Niño (2016) overviewed the new emphasis on military roles and missions beyond combat, such as development, reconstruction of infrastructure and monitoring the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process of former guerrilla combatants. Other authors portrayed the main elements of this change and pointed out the pertinence of new operational concepts in the light of traditional and possible new roles (Díaz & Amador, 2017). Finally, the work of Pastrana and Vera (2019) described the shifts in the military doctrine and addressed the civic-military interface that seeks to enable more joint and coordinated state action.

Explanatory and analytical research that addresses the roots of this process of change has been scarce. Pizarro (2018) maintained that the national army adopted a new doctrine and structure to adapt to a changing situation in which old challenges coexist with emerging ones. Furthermore, some experts have ascribed the increasing emphasis on state-building and stabilisation tasks in the new military doctrine to the peace process (Vera et al., 2019). In contrast, others underscored the internationalisation of the army and the security forces in general as a primary source of the change (Castrillón & Guerra, 2017; Arroyave, 2019; Valdivieso & Triana, 2019; Uribe-Neira, 2019). Furthermore, González and Betancourt (2018) relate the new military doctrine in Colombia to the post-agreement phase after the peace accords with the FARC and adopting a broader human security concept.

Additional analyses have highlighted the potential that the new doctrine has for the Colombian army's participation in international missions and positively assess the input that the country could make to organisations with which it has signed military cooperation agreements. In this respect, some authors have stressed the role of systemic variables, foreign organisations and cooperation agreements behind Colombia's global partnership with NATO (Torrijos et al., 2018; Helbig, 2019). Furthermore, while Benzig (2019) and Grasa (2019) underscored the possible positive consequences of this transformation, they suggest some necessary adjustments to consolidate the democratic management of the country's security forces, such as civilian leadership and military legitimacy.

On one of the few perspectives that overtly assessed this process with criticism, Leal (2018a) asserted that the reform is a product of a military adaptation to the official peace narrative in the Santos administration (2010-2018) and that the new structure and doctrine of

the military does not parallel the security demands and threats in the country. Furthermore, alluding to the peace process as the trigger for this change, Cruz (2016) highlighted the lack of civilian control and leadership in this process, potentially undermining democratic civil-military relations. Finally, Alejandra Ortíz-Ayala (2019) appraised military reform challenges and stressed the need for a broader security sector.

To summarise, descriptive and normative academic contributions have predominated in the scholarship dealing with the military change in Colombia that is the object of this research. Moreover, most of the analytical work has been rather explorative, and only a few contributions provide explanations on why the reform took place. The latter presuppose that the peace process and the rising internationalisation in the sector are causes of change, seldom assessing these against empirical evidence. Finally, research dealing with this change process lacks dialogue with the existing conceptual tenets of the more general field of military reforms and adaptation reviewed at the beginning of this section.

In this sense, the literature that has addressed the object of this study lacks theory-driven explanatory accounts that contribute to accumulating knowledge to the study of military change. This research aims at bridging this gap, offering a thorough analysis that encompasses both issues of military innovation and the backdrop of political, institutional changes that shape the undertaken reforms in a transitional context. As the analytical framework will show, to deliver a comprehensive account, the hypotheses leading the work stem from structural, agent-related and organisational explanations.

Indeed, the argument that emerges from this approach emphasises the variables that this study considers most relevant to understand the case. This does not mean ignoring the fact that, in the complexity of social, political, and organisational reality, other factors can influence the phenomenon under study. However, this research focuses on the variables described below as the most relevant in an explanation from the perspective of military change. The next section presents the research method, variables, sources, and limitations.

1.2. Methodology

This section presents the elements considered when selecting the case study approach for the research and the type of analysis that guides this work. The research questions and hypothesis are briefly exposed before describing the data sources and the procedure to test the presumed causal relations between independent and dependent variables. Finally, the research design limitations are discussed.

Research Questions, Case Study Method and Process-Tracing Approach

The current study examines the change in the *Ejército Nacional de Colombia* (EJC, "Colombian National Army") during the Santos administration. Upon the executive's acquiescence, the land force enjoyed a high level of leadership and autonomy when conducting this reform, which unfolded parallel to the peace process, yet isolated from the negotiations with the FARC. As previously mentioned, the new elements adopted by the EJC feature conventional warfare, a strong emphasis on interoperability according to international standards, the preparation for peacekeeping and stabilisation missions, and domestic development-related roles. Explaining the outcome of this process of change –the dependent variable– and the factors that led to it, is the aim of this research by answering the following general question:

RQ: Why did a military change occur in the Colombian Army between 2010 and 2018?

Furthermore, these specific research questions (S. RQ) guide the hypotheses formulation and subsequent analysis:

S. RQ1: What changes occurred in the Colombian army?

S. RQ2: Which developments caused these reforms?

S. RQ3: What factors explain the particular implementation and form of this change?

The first specific question logically leads to the description of the military change that took place. The two other questions focus on analytic and theory-guided elucidations. Whereas the second specific question aims to unveil the causes that triggered and unfolded the military

reform, the third one addresses the factors that shaped it: why the reform leaders chose a particular model and standards for the new army's doctrine, structure and training.

Several elements make this a case of significant relevance for an empirical, in-depth analysis of military change. First, as discussed in the literature review, the domestic armed conflict's persistence in a country that stands out for formal democratic continuity is one reason for its exceptionalism. Additionally, the leading role of the EJC's high command and its willingness to "change horses in midstream" contradicts the usual aversion of the military to significant modifications. Furthermore, the case offers a setting to study how military adaptation parallel to warfare converges with reforms in a transitioning society.

As mentioned earlier in this introduction, the Colombian case features transitional elements in the political, judicial, and social dimensions, affecting several actors, including the military. Since the mid-2000s and with the several measures to advance in a peacebuilding and reconciliation process, this Andean country experiences a continuum of conflict and transitional phases after ceasefire accords or demobilisations. On this backdrop, previous actors of the internal confrontation have evolved, either reintegrating or in new forms of criminality. Consequently, old and new threats coexist with attempts to implement a peacebuilding agenda.

Indeed, the adjustments studied here happened while the armed confrontation endured and the government took some political steps to open the road for a future post-conflict. Moreover, as the evidence in the forthcoming chapters shows, the Colombian army embraced the government's narrative of preparing for an eventual post-conflict, even if this situation had not yet materialised and is still far from it. Thus, the analysis refers to a potential or eventual post-conflict scenario given that civilian and military decision-makers termed the future for which the army prepared as such.

Moreover, while there were no variations in civil-military relations or defence and security sector reforms, the army's restructuring plan and a doctrinal reform occurred outside the peace talks. This fact contravenes the evidence of transitions towards post-conflict, in which the armistice accords provide for military sector adjustments (Schultze-Kraft, 2005; Joshi et al., 2015; García, 2015; Grasa, 2019). Finally, and although the analytical framework will thoroughly address this point, the change process arguably corresponds with the theoretical

assumption that ascribes the dissociation between strategic needs and implemented reforms to legitimacy-seeking goals (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152; Goldman, 2002).

In sum, military change during the Santos administration in Colombia offers a relevant puzzle worth a single-case study. Consequently, the research delves into the singularity of this military reform and contemplates the several independent variables that influenced the process to explain the factors triggering this change and the chain of decision-making that caused it. Notwithstanding, this work also accumulates empirical evidence that reinforces and refines the existing conceptual tenets of the field. Without denying that the complex social and political reality in which the studied phenomenon occurred entails other potential factors influencing the outcome, this research focuses on the dimensions and variables presented in this chapter because they are the most relevant for the case and the chosen analytical approach.

Accordingly, this dissertation is a single, within-case study based on the deductive formulation of plausible explanations, which also considers the inductive development of hypotheses when encountering unexpected puzzles (Bennett, 2004, pp. 19-23). Defined as an empirical, in-depth qualitative examination of a phenomenon (Yin, 2012, pp. 4-5), the case study method is suitable for the object of this research, where several variables interact to cause the outcome (George & Bennett, 2004, p. 5). By understanding the problem in its complexity, this perspective ultimately allows for a comprehensive account of military change, although there is no control over this process or its context, as it would be in an experiment (Bennett, 2004, p. 36; Yin, 2009, p. 18).

In order to achieve a satisfactory explanation of the reform that the Colombian army underwent, a theoretical background was developed to formulate guiding hypotheses. Following Eckstein (1975, p. 99) and George & Bennett (2004, p. 75) on disciplined-configurative or interpretative case study designs, the theory-based propositions are used to explain if the phenomenon was to be expected and if the plausible factors to intervene were present or not. For the hypothesis formulation, which will be the matter of the next chapter, the study takes premises from the viewpoint of historical institutionalism, considering both structural and agent-centred factors to explain change, and complements them with assumptions regarding organisational sources of military change.

In concrete, three types of factors enable an exhaustive explanation of this shift in the Colombian army. First, variations in the operational and institutional context caused

uncertainty that led the military to resist detrimental change. Second, relevant civil and military actors decided to adapt, coalescing to deliver a reform to safeguard the army's status quo. Finally, the military's organisational context provided the form and contents chosen for change, responding to expectations and pressures on ideational and material resources. This multiplicity of intervening factors and the goal of providing a thorough explanation underscores the need to conduct a single, within-case study for the current research.

The following hypothesis, developed after a thorough review of relevant theoretical propositions in Chapter 2, will be tested in the light of the case:

The Colombian army engaged in a military change before and outside the peace process with the FARC because (1) political and battlefield developments produced changes in the institutional balance of power concerning the military, which, in turn, led to rising uncertainty for the organisation; (2) agents interested in preserving the status quo resisted adverse changes and resolved this ambiguity by adapting in favour of the military; and (3) did this by emulating models from organisations that provide material and symbolic resources.

Following Van Evera (1997), the chain of cause-effect suggested by the hypothesis was broken down into specific steps to search for evidence for each part of the process to be explained (Van Evera, 1997, p. 65). In other words, the evidence is gathered and systematised to test whether the variables are present and, specifically, if the relations between cause and effect work as theorised (George & Bennett, 2004). This approach is known as *process tracing,* which is most useful for within-case studies such as this, in which a single decision-making process is to be clarified, and the intervening factors are examined in the light of presupposed causal relations and particular scope conditions (Bennett, 2004, p. 19; Van Evera, 1997, pp. 64-67).

Consequently, this predicted interaction of variables was organised in the following three dimensions of analysis to guide the collection and processing of data:

Table 1. Dimensions of Analysis and Variables

Dimension of Analysis	Independent Variables
Structure	Changes in the political and security environment Uncertainty in institutional context
Agents	Resistance to change by pro-status-quo actors Adaptation by resolving uncertainty in favour of the military
Organisation	Emulation responding to pressures to resources Adoption of models deemed successful and legitimate

A couple of precisions are necessary at this point. First, the chain of causality to be verified is not only the simultaneous coexistence of factors but also *how* these variables are supposed to be linked to each other, making "congruence or incongruity between expectation and observation" (Van Evera, 1997, p. 56) a central aspect of the analysis. Consequently, to ensure the study's validity, data was gathered to prove that the variables are linked in the way that the hypotheses predict.

Additionally, although the causality must be traced to confirm or refute the predicted relations at an analytical level, the variables at the three abovementioned dimensions unfold in parallel. In other words, actors react to security and political developments within a structure that constrains them and, in turn, options available to them to respond to the changing environment emerge from their organisational framework. Therefore, it is not the mere chronological appearance of factors that interests the study, but rather the interconnection between them as suggested by the theoretical propositions. The following section presents the type of sources used for the hypothesis-testing and how information was processed to conduct the analysis.

Data Sources and Limitations

As previously mentioned, this hypothesis-driven research focuses on the specific variables and dimensions relevant to the theoretical approach chosen for the analysis. This is not tantamount to stating that no other factors are present in the actual context of the studied

military reforms. However, those in which the research focuses emerge from the analytical framework and are tested with substantial empirical evidence from diverse sources.

Consequently, to ensure multiple within-case observations and gain explanatory leverage, this research gathered and processed information according to the triangulation principle (Bennett, 2004, p. 22; Yin, 2012, p.104). Through the systematic examination of different independent sources and types of data such as grey literature, publications by civilians and military in academic journals, and testimonials of actors involved in the decision-making process, the study conducted a strong test of the hypothesis. After collecting the primary and secondary sources described in this section, a content review was carried out based on the relevant variables and organised according to the beforementioned analysis dimensions.

A significant amount of information supporting the research was found through the systematic review of secondary sources, including academic contributions and media material. However, this section focuses on describing other literature and data sources that were crucial for the analysis. All direct citations of passages or testimonies that were originally published in Spanish have been translated by the author for the purpose of this work.

A crucial source of information to test the hypotheses were official policy and strategic documents issued by the government, the military forces, and the army. This type of material facilitated access to data such as the security context and threats assessment, political and institutional changes that unfolded and prospective analyses about the consequences of these developments for the military organisation. It also served to delve into the content of the reforms and trace the chronology of transformation or adjustment in the political discourse and the relative emphasis given to specific roles and missions. Some examples of these sources are the four-year national plans of development, which comprise the policy objectives for each governmental period; the yearly reports to the congress by the MDN; and the strategic planning guides for the Colombian security and defence sector. Also critical was the review of government reports on progress on the peace talks, the negotiations' content, the partial agreements, and other official protocols related to the peace process that impacted the armed forces.

Internal and public documents issued by the EJC high command describing the reform and its outcome also offer essential insights on the chronology of events, the contiguity of factors shaping the decision-making process and content of the institutional change itself. For

instance, the structural reform directive, the doctrine reference documents and manuals, and training guidelines were examined. Reports by the military on warfare development in the studied period and conduction of operations other than war were also reviewed.

Beyond this type of official documents, the study resorted to additional sources that provide statistics and other data concerning the security situation and threats context in the country. Additionally, information related to budget allocation in Colombia's security and defence sector –published by the MDN, the national planning department, and the ministry of finance– was examined to trace possible resource appropriation and expense distribution changes. Lastly, public opinion polls by private agencies and academic organisations were also considered to review variations regarding the military institution's approval in Colombia.

A further relevant basis for the research is legislation pieces –both proposed and issued– during the studied period, such as cooperation agreements, decrees, statutes, directives, orders and other pieces that regulate or impact the military organisation in general and the army in particular. Minutes of congressional sessions on issues related to reform or promotions of army officers were also reviewed.

Military journals played a decisive role in the present research, especially in terms of attesting ideas and beliefs that supported the decision to implement the military reform and attitudes towards change and adaptation to a new institutional context. At this point, it is important to clarify that, although issues of historical military identity can be in general relevant for the development of armed forces, this is not the case of this study. For one thing, the prevalent contemporary ideas that influenced the decision-making process are linked to the role of the army in counterinsurgency and its role in internal security. This is why the contextual framework and the analysis focus on how officers and civilian actors portrayed and understood the strategic moment at the time of the reforms, the army's role in the country and their assessment of possible future scenarios.

Therefore, articles published by army officers in national and international military journals during the studied period provided essential insights into how military change was conceived and the factors that led to it. Besides, they serve to trace how the reform socialised with the troop and other members and stakeholders to elucidate ideational factors behind the changes that took place and the role of legitimacy in their development. Also central for this objective are articles and columns by active or retired members of the military published on

army or external media and event reports by the army, such as seminars socialising and addressing the peace process, military change, and a possible post-conflict. Statements by officers and civilian officials in media and other secondary sources also provide essential evidence of decision-making rationale.

The research also drew upon over 30 semi-structured and background interviews conducted between November 2018 and August 2020[5] to gather additional evidence supporting or contesting hypothesised explanations. Among the interviewees, active and retired military members who participated in the reform's design and implementation were key informants. However, the study also includes relevant testimonials by civilians who were public servants in the government during the studied reforms. Academics and investigative journalists that have conducted research on the matter were also interviewed for background information. Finally, civilian professors at the war college and who had advised the army in its change process also contributed with important insights.

Although the process tracing method provides an in-depth perspective to understand a complex, dynamic decision-making, it also poses some limitations. An important caveat to consider is the narrow scope of generalisation that this research design can achieve. Indeed, a single, within-case study is not suitable for making broad generalisations (George & Bennett, 2004, p. 22), but its asset rather lies in providing rich explanations of phenomena and strong tests that might support or impugn theories (Bennett, 2004, p. 29). Consequently, the specific findings of this case study cannot be empirically generalised to all cases of military change, regardless of context or scope conditions. Nevertheless, the causal relationships and premises derived from the theory for the purposes of this case study are of abstract nature and may serve to accumulate evidence and knowledge for further research in the field.

Furthermore, case study methods are not suitable for determining the rate of recurrence or representativeness of specific cases in a broader population and lack the "capability for estimating the average 'causal weight' of variables" (Bennet, 2004, p. 20). Without ignoring this when formulating the conclusions, the priority for this study is to understand and explain the inner causal logic of this specific process of change and not estimate the relative weight of each variable.

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[5] Interviews in 2020 had to be conducted online due to travel and contact restrictions as a result of the pandemic. See Appendix 1.

To sum up, the present research is a disciplined-configurative case study that applies an existing theoretical framework for the inquiry of the military change in Colombia. The partial and general premises were formulated based on a review of the literature and a discussion of the relevant theory on the backdrop of the scope conditions. These propositions constitute the steps in the chain of causality to explain the outcome in the process tracing methodology. To this purpose, a deductive, theory-driven empirical analysis was carried out to validate or falsify hypotheses that posit causal relations to understand the process of institutional change and explain the outcome.

Based on the presupposed causal relations, the analysis was performed to process information gathered through the review of several official policy documents, public announcements, articles of military journals and a significant array of secondary sources, as well as semi-structured interviews with members of military and civilian institutions in Colombia.

An explanatory model has therefore been developed through the formulation of hypotheses. In doing so, the research aims not only at explaining this particular case and accumulating knowledge about the military issue in Colombia, but also on the general study of military change and the conceptual tools proposed by theoretical work on the field.

1.3. Chapter Outline

The present study begins by defining the dependent variable, namely, what the research understands as military change. This will be the first task of the analytical framework, which thoroughly develops and justifies the theoretical perspective of this research. For this purpose, it discusses the central explanations that the literature has drawn upon when addressing innovation in military organisations and, in a broader sense, the issue of institutional change. Based on an integrative approach, the forthcoming chapter formulates the central propositions that will guide the analysis. It presents the three partial hypotheses that the empirical part will test regarding the security and political environment and rising uncertainty; the interplay of civilian and military agents that results in adaptation; and their choice to emulate organisational patterns as the best way to counter the adverse effects of institutional and strategic ambiguity.

To facilitate an understanding of the institutional background in which the studied reforms unfolded, Chapter 3 overviews the most relevant characteristics of Bogota's security and defence sector. After depicting the general aspects of the political and security environment in this Andean country, the chapter outlines the most relevant legal provisions guiding the armed forces. Specifically, it addresses the configuration of civil-military relations in Colombia to point out what status quo decision-makers are interested in preserving. Likewise, the two final sections focus on the structure, capabilities and organisational features of the defence sector in general and, in particular, the land force. This chapter also delves into the milestones of military change in Colombia, which can be traced back to the early twentieth century. In this respect, the corresponding section shows why the EJC's contemporary self-perception is closely related to counterinsurgency in the country.

The first specific question guiding this research is the subject of Chapter 4, where the process of change in the Colombian army between 2010 and 2018 is described, including the main steps of the reforms and the civilian and military leaders who championed them. After a review of the chronological development of decision-making, the chapter portrays the content of the doctrine, education and structural reform. Besides commenting on the operational concepts and missions for which the new army reference documents aim to prepare the force, the chapter demonstrates that the way in which the army socialised the new doctrine reveals a will to open communication channels with the civilian public and acknowledges the importance of legitimacy for the organisation. As for the structural adjustment, both organisational reforms and changes in the force deployment are addressed.

Three subsequent chapters deal with the hypothesis testing, thus responding to the two specific questions of what caused the reform process and which factors explain the particular implementation and form of this military change in Colombia. To this end, Chapter 5 delves into the shifting security and political environment that triggered the adaptation. The first section analyses how the overall development of the threats' context and the volatility of the domestic battlefield contributed to operational uncertainty. However, as the second section shows, it was the combination of a political change of direction that opened the door to a peace dialogue with the guerrilla and the rising pressures to the sector's resources what reinforced the uncertainty and led to identifying the need for change.

The argument then addresses how civilian and military actors reacted to this changing environment. After examining the rationale behind decision-making, Chapter 6 provides evidence that resistance to effective or potential detrimental changes emerging from the peace talks monopolised the public discussion and bargaining between the executive and active and retired service members. The chapter then analyses how decision-makers aligned and responded to protect the army's material and ideational resources. While the civilian government resorted to compensation strategies to appease resistance and gain leverage, the military leaders adopted the official rhetoric of peace.

Once the question of what caused the decision to change has been addressed, the dissertation completes the empirical analysis inquiring about the factors that shaped the content of the reforms. Based on the third partial hypothesis, Chapter 7 explores why the army integrated specific ideas or formats into its operational and structural context in response to the identified risks to its status quo. The two sections in this chapter unveil the link between the need to secure resources and improve the organisation's legitimacy, and the implemented reforms.

A final discussion of results and implications for decision-makers concludes this work. After a brief review of the research findings regarding the developments that the Colombian army underwent during the studied period, the last chapter comments on the study results on the backdrop of three central themes that emerge from the theoretical part of this work. These core ideas are the role of uncertainty in institutional continuity or reforms; the influence of power and, specifically, civil-military relations in enabling or averting change; and how ambiguity in the strategic environment can lead military organisations to pursue legitimacy-seeking goals.

2. Analytical Framework

Given the deductive, theory-driven character of this study, the present chapter elaborates on the conceptual considerations that guide the formulation of hypotheses and their subsequent assessment within the case. Central to this task is the definition of the dependent and independent variables and their plausible causal relations, in line with the Colombian military's contextual and institutional conditions. By adopting this theoretical approach and focusing on the chosen variables, the research sheds light on the most relevant factors to explain the studied reforms. As such, the analysis is not a depiction of reality that includes all possible elements that come into play but an explanation of the outcome of the reforms from this specific perspective. Accordingly, the following sections discuss the relevant assumptions and propositions stemming from the literature, their explanatory power in the light of the chosen case, and present the hypotheses upon which the empirical observations are based.

The opening section introduces the definition of military change. In doing so, it provides a necessary point of departure for the study and the categories to approach the first specific research question, namely, how did the EJC innovate during the studied period. The second section identifies and outlines the independent variables, specifically, the factors that explain why did the adjustment occur and what shaped its content. For this purpose, it describes central propositions regarding the sources of military change and explains how they are relatable to the case. Based on the theoretical considerations introduced, the chapter ends with the formulation of the partial and general hypotheses that guide the study and organises them according to the dimensions of analysis.

2.1. Defining the Dependent Variable: What is Military Change?

The outset for this analytical discussion is to define what is military change and why this work subsumes it within the broader concept of institutional change. Scholars in this field of study have often pointed out the paradoxical fact that military organisations tend by nature to preserve their traditions and institutional arrangements and are thus generally inclined to avoid change whatsoever (Posen, 1984, p.2; Farrell & Terriff, 2002, p. 4). This trend towards stability is not only valid for security forces, but it is instead a prevalent feature of large bureaucratic and corporate sectors, in which tradition and hierarchy prevail (Winton, 2000, p. xii; Murray,

2011, p. 20). Indeed, as frameworks that guide an organisations' actors, their behaviour, roles and cooperation within it (Portes, 2006, p. 241), institutions provide continuity and certainty to social interaction.

From this assumption, it is inferred that the military prefers small or no reforms and that not all changes undertaken by fighting organisations imply a revolution. Moreover, it is also plausible that the armed forces incorporate gradual, specific adjustments according to new developments in the battlefield or trends without necessarily altering their overall institutional arrangement. Certainly, it is nowadays more likely that modifications in the military unfold in an evolutionary way (Bekkevold et al., 2015).

This research follows the definition of military change as innovations that alter the strategy, structure or missions of the armed forces and ultimately have operational consequences (Rosen, 1988, p. 134; Farrell & Terriff, 2002, p.5; Bekkevold et al., 2015, p. 5). These can be either gradual adjustments parallel to warfare that are subsequently introduced into the army's doctrine or reforms to the organisation, its way of deployment, capabilities or roles. To this extent, bureaucratic or administrative initiatives can only be relevant for the case study if they have implications in the battlespace (Grissom, 2006, p. 907).

Furthermore, rhetoric adjustments do not necessarily encompass significant change and might leave institutional foundations unaltered. For instance, doctrinal changes need to transcend the formality and impact education and training praxis to be considered part of military change. A further remark must be made related to doctrinal change. Being a series of principles that translate grand strategy into the operational and tactical level, reforming doctrine can entail profound changes in terms of military structure, training, and practices, which capabilities are employed and how (Posen, 1984, p. 13; Avant, 1993, p. 410; Vennesson, 2008 p. 82; Bekkevold et al., 2015, p. 8). In this sense, changing doctrine has a substantial impact on the organisation and how it conducts warfare.

Certainly, the EJC adopted a new doctrine which, according to official statements, resulted from an internal exercise implemented by high-ranking military officers that began since 2011. It emerged from a strategic review of the land force and a self-assessment of the organisations' strengths and shortcomings at the battlefield and organisational level. Official statements and dispositions also refer to a restructuration process that resulted from this appraisal. Moreover, it impacted the objectives of the army in that it entails new missions and

roles. Finally, since military change occurs within the country's political system and its particular civil-military configuration, the research will adopt the analytical perspective of institutionalism to develop the case study's explanatory hypotheses. This will be the matter of the rest of the present chapter.

To sum up, this study presumes the initial standpoint that the announced military reform in the Colombian Army in terms of doctrine, structure and strategy, and the modifications contemplating new international roles and missions, fall into the category of military change. However, it will be the first task of the analysis to confront the information gathered on the backdrop of the abovementioned theoretical definition; this, in turn, will be the answer to the first specific research question. To this purpose, the concept of military change in strategic studies will be embedded within the broader notion of institutional change. The plausible factors explaining this military change are discussed in the following section.

2.2. Identifying the Independent Variables: Sources of Military Change

As previously mentioned, the Colombian army implemented a doctrinal and structural reform with a significant impact on roles, warfare scenarios and, ultimately, capabilities. It emphasises conventional conflict, contrasting its decade-long tradition in counterinsurgency, without discarding the latter. Peacekeeping and stabilisation missions in cooperation with multilateral organisms and other military organisations are also central to the EJC new principles and organisational adaptation. This ostensive shift towards military tasks abroad motivates an initial revision of international relations' analytical approaches.

Substantial contributions to understanding the sources of military innovation have been built upon the realist and neo-institutionalist postulates[6]. Therefore, they should be considered when preliminarily looking for causal relations and hypothetical explanations that answer why and how this change took place. However, as the following lines show, while these theories offer a compelling account of international drivers of military change, given the case's particularities, it is necessary to delve into domestic structures, actors and organisational processes to deliver a comprehensive account.

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[6] Some of these were referred to in Chapter 1, "Literature Review".

This section deals with conceptual tenets that explain military transformation and, in a broader sense, institutional change. First, the main theoretical viewpoints on military and institutional change are discussed. The section further explains why this research draws upon a synthetic perspective that integrates the core assumptions from the field of historical institutionalism in political science with analytical insights from rational choice and sociological institutionalism. It also introduces the assumptions stemming from this pivotal, integrative view as a basis for the formulation of hypotheses and forthcoming analysis.

Causes of Military Change in International Relations

When examining sources of military change, the explanations stemming from international relations organise around two main competing stances. Probably the most widespread account is that offered by realist perspectives. In an anarchic and uncertain system of states as unitary actors who seek preservation and domination in the international system, competition leads them to develop their resources and military capabilities to deter their opponents or succeed in an eventual confrontation.

From this standpoint, a state's strategic requirements and resources determine its behaviour and, therefore, military practices (Glaser, 1994, p. 57). However, this does not necessarily mean that military organisations always innovate: once a military practice has proven to be successful, other states will prefer to adopt it, with the consequence that specific military models widely diffuse throughout the world (Taliaferro, 2006; Resende-Santos, 2007). Following Waltz (1979), "contending states imitate the military innovations contrived by the country of greatest capability and ingenuity" (1979, p. 127).

Indeed, emulation among rival military organisations is a compelling explanation of military change; in conditions of high external threats, this trend will develop rapidly (Goldman, 2002, p. 44). However, it seems unlikely that under relatively low foreign threats, as it is the Colombian case, the trigger for institutional change would come from the competition with other nations' armies or changes in the balance of threat and power at a systemic international level. Moreover, being no international or regional hegemon, this Andean country's foreign policy has usually aligned with the United States as global power instead of building alliances or mobilising internal resources to counterbalance (Tickner, 2011, p. 257). Nevertheless, the

inclusion of international missions and orientation towards conventional warfare remains an important component of the reform.

To this respect, Goldman (2002, p. 41) posits that, when there is no evident relation between the military change introduced and the security environment, it is likely that the reason triggering military change be the state seeking legitimacy. This proposition leads to consider the second analytical approach: neo-institutionalism. In this view, states may adopt forms that it perceives as prestigious and legitimate and due to the interaction and socialisation of institutions between states (Demchak, 2002; Farrell, 1996; 2001). In brief, neo-institutional explanations argue that a states' new military framework does not necessarily follow directly from strategic requirements.

It is persuasive to assume that states interested in status and reputation can introduce changes in their armed forces based upon organisational principles that confer such a favourable image. However, this would only explain why a particular format was chosen for the reform. What exactly triggered the change, why did actors identified the need to reinforce their legitimacy, and which civil-military dynamic unfolded at the domestic level, among other issues, remain overlooked from this perspective. Moreover, alternative variables from the internal security and political context in which the fighting organisation operates are also relevant for the studied case. Finally, it is important to consider the pivotal role that the army had in designing its own reforms.

Accordingly, without entirely discarding the explanation of international diffusion of military blueprints and emulation as a mechanism for institutional change, this research maintains that it is necessary to consider the intra-state institutional environment and the military organisation itself to understand the decision-making process. If the traditional roles and missions of the EJC have stemmed from the internal armed conflict, it is worthwhile to provide factors additional to the international sphere within the hypothesised explanations for the case. This is particularly important in a country with a relatively high level of autonomy given to the armed forces and low involvement of the civilian political authorities in affairs related to security and the military[7]. These issues can be better understood from the viewpoint of institutionalism in political science.

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[7] Chapter 3 further elaborates this point.

Institutional Change in Political Science: Three Schools of Thought

In an essay that reviews how contemporary political scientists study institutions, Hall and Taylor (1996) retrieve the central arguments of what they call the three new institutionalisms, which are different analytical standpoints that developed parallelly but relatively isolated from one another. These are the schools of thought influenced by rational choice theories –which have also influenced the realist viewpoint described above–, the sociological view within organisation theory –sharing some basic tenets with neo-institutionalism–, and historical institutionalism –a view that stands in a pivotal position between the two formers. Each of these "institutionalisms" offers a different account of institutions, their origin, why they persist or change, and their influence on human behaviour (1996, p. 937).

First, a rational choice analysis of institutions conceives these as schemata with information that actors use to calculate their decisions strategically. Therefore, institutions emerge to achieve utilitarian goals as a negotiated response to some coordination problem and persist because of their role in minimising transactional costs in decision-making dilemmas among actors (Shepsle, 1989, p. 140; Peters, 1999, p. 44). In other words, they offer certainty, information on possible outcomes and agent behaviour, and are thus prone to persist (Campbell, 2004, pp. x–xi). Moreover, institutions are likely to prevail when they offer advantages to the relevant actors making decisions, compared to possible new institutional arrangements, which explains the path-dependence that prevails in political and social processes (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 939).

This is a convincing view of the origins of institutions and how uncertainty shapes actor behaviour and decision-making, including the undeniable role of strategic action and preferences in political outcomes. Nevertheless, it does not provide a thorough account of why and how institutions change, since it is more concerned with their emergence and persistence. It also tends to focus solely on actors when providing explanations –at the expense of environmental factors– and dismisses the possibility that some institutions can also be adopted for ideational and not only material interests. Consequently, an analytical perspective that exclusively takes the rational choice approach to study institutional change has significant shortcomings for the studied case and would fail to comprise factors beyond individual decisions.

Secondly, the sociological viewpoint defines institutions as symbolic systems, moral frameworks, and mental schemes, reflecting their context's values (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). According to this view, a new institutional practice is likely to emerge and be adopted because it conveys normative appropriateness to the organisation and its participants (March & Olsen, 1996). This assertion does not necessarily mean that a rational, instrumental logic does not exist behind decision making. It instead suggests that, even when actors are making choices based on a strategic calculus, they do it based upon broader culturally and socially embedded repertoires. Similar to neo-institutionalism, one of the central explanations of this school of thought regarding how new institutions emerge is diffusion and how they are adopted for their ability to award legitimacy to actors embracing them (Cambpell, 2004, p. xviii).

Besides the rather too broad definition of institutions, sociological institutionalism neglects the tensions and difficulties inherent to reform processes. It portrays it without considering actor competition and the power of agents making decisions when creating or reforming institutions –a "bloodless process" as Hall & Taylor phrase it (1996, p. 954). Moreover, while it focuses on macro-level variables, such as institutional diffusion, this perspective tends to forget the micro-level of agents' bargaining and choice. In doing so, it portrays institutional change based on structural and culturally-based explanations, downplaying the actors and interests behind those actions.

Both tensions and the role of agents' decision-making are crucial in the studied case. On the one hand, the ongoing confrontation and governor's decisions parallel to peace talks as the backdrop of the military reform are likely to have raised sensitivities and pressures. On the other hand, the civil-military interface is important to understand actors' choices, interests, and leeway. These arguments make a case for going beyond the portrayed view of institutional change by exclusively sociological approaches.

For the present research, the rational calculus as underlying logic for decision making and the quest for legitimacy are not necessarily mutually exclusive explanations. Ensuring and achieving material interests can sometimes be achieved through mechanisms that rely on shared ideas and values. Additionally, given that the reform contains elements that are seemingly at odds with the army's strategic environment, it is worth considering the logics of appropriateness for analysis. Consequently, it is necessary to resort to a third line that encompasses both possibilities.

In a pivotal position between the two previous views, historical institutionalism's take on institutions incorporates strategic, rational calculation and the ideas and beliefs underpinning or framing them. Historical institutionalism depicts institutions as the rules governing relations between social actors; they constrain and shape interaction (North, 1990, p.3). In this view, institutions are "formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organisational structure of the polity" (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 938).

Like in the sociological interpretation, ideas play a central role in historical institutionalism (Peters, 1999, p. 66). In this view, institutions emerge and are entrenched in existing structures that shape the new ones. These pre-existing templates are usually selected or preferred for the instrumental purposes that actors *believe* they entail (Hall, 2010). Here lies the concept of path-dependence that is central to historical institutional analysis: the present institutions tend to influence the new ones, to the point that abrupt changes are only possible in critical junctures that open a window of opportunity for this to happen (North, 1990, pp. 96-101; Skocpol & Pierson, 2002).

However, historical institutionalism provides another crucial explanatory element: the power that certain actors or interests may have in a society or political system determines some institutions' chance to emerge rather than others. From this view, institutions are frameworks that restrict and enable action (Tang, 2011, pp. 58-9) and have power distribution implications for the social actors concerned by them (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, pp. 8-14). Therefore, agents favoured by an arrangement will avoid any reform. Nevertheless, should it be at risk of being altered, they may mobilise to retain the underlying order or adapt to mitigate adverse changes. In this sense, actors can both select new institutions from existing templates considered appropriate or legitimate and, at the same time, do it for a rational motivation according to the power distribution effects that they may have.

By bringing those different analytical elements into play, historical institutionalism offers a sounder theoretical basis to understand processes that modify institutions. It comprises both the structural factors allowing and limiting institutional change and the strategic calculation and beliefs that come to play when actors decide to install new institutions or adjust the existing ones. Additionally, it considers the power that actors enjoy and exert to impose or resist a new institutional arrangement.

The propositions here advanced allow to answer the research questions regarding what changes took place and what triggered this reform. However, the question of how the Colombian army changed the way it did is still to be confronted; in other words, why did its leaders select the model and content for the reform. This issue is addressed from the perspective suggested by Terriff (2002) when approaching military diffusion and, conversely, on the hypothesised mechanisms of isomorphic change developed by DiMaggio & Powell (1983). The forthcoming section presents these assumptions.

Security Environment, Civil-Military Interplay and Organisational Context

Since technology has a definitive effect on warfare, its potential as a driver of military innovations is most evident (Farrell & Terriff, 2002, pp. 12-3). The Colombian military introduced several changes related to equipment and technology in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which eventually produced substantial advantages over irregular threats[8]. However, this is not valid for the most recent reform, which focuses on doctrine, structure, missions and roles. New equipment and arms have been sparse, whereas maintenance and renovation of existing capabilities still need more and long-term investment. Accordingly, this research assumes that variables related to new technologies would not have explanatory validity when developing and testing hypotheses.

Following Winton (2000), this case study argues that the army's security environment, the political and social system in which it operates, and its particular features as an organisation influence military change (p. xii). Developments and pressures emerging from the battlefield, such as shifts in the enemy's strategy or rising threats to national security, can trigger military change. Likewise, state politics might influence this adaptation, for instance, when civilian authorities lead the process to install doctrine reforms (Posen, 1984); by the initiative of the military who can actively resist civilian intervention (Avant, 1994); or triggering internal dynamics within the military organisation (Rosen, 1991).

Certainly, military change holds a close relation to the interaction of politics and the security environment, which translates into grand strategy (Posen, 1984, p. 194). Such developments do not happen in a vacuum but on the civil-military interface (Farrell & Terriff,

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[8] Chapter 3 further elaborates this development when describing previous experiences of military change in the EJC.

2002, pp.10-1). This idea is consistent with the previously mentioned assumption that actors' decisions are limited and enabled by the power structure in which they operate. Given that strategic decisions and the choice of who and how undertakes a military reform occur within a broader institutional framework, the latter must be integrated into the analysis. Such a structure responds to the civil-military configuration in the country.

At this point, it is worth mentioning some key features of the relationship between civilian leaders of the security sector and the armed forces in Colombia. The fact that the Andean state has faced challenges regarding monopoly on the legitimate use of violence is one of the reasons why civilian authorities have conceded high levels of autonomy to the military and delegated the management of public order to the armed forces (Pizarro, 1991; Dávila, 1999; Andrade, 2012).

In this sense, the interplay between governors and service members in Colombia has been defined as an autonomy-subordination continuum, a sort of civil-military symbiosis, where the security forces enjoy prerogatives and yet remain subordinate (Borrero, 2006; Leal, 2011; Schultze-Kraft, 2012, p. 421). Therefore, the civilian elite refrains from intromission in military affairs in exchange for conditional political subordination[9]. This trend to reach convenient arrangements for both sides will be again relevant when formulating the hypothesis regarding actors' interests and decisions.

The impact of norms in changing organisations is also relevant to the studied case[10]. Indeed, as Posen (1984) affirmed, organisational theory is more useful when aiming to explain the character of a particular doctrine adopted (p. 38). In this sense, when analysing how US military ideas influenced change in the transatlantic Alliance from 1989 to 1994, Terriff (2002) provides an account of institutional reform from a dual interpretation that seeks answers to why and how it took place. First, from a neorealist perspective, this contribution shows how systemic-level changes in the nature of threat and balance of power triggered a transformation in NATO's strategy and structure (Terriff, 2002, p. 92). However, to shed light on the origins

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[9] As Croissant et al. (2011) explain, this is a typical weak compensation mechanism to achieve civilian control in a democracy.
[10] Although the diffusion of military innovations has received attention from experts in strategic studies (see Introduction, Section 1.2. Literature Review), there has been little attention to military change processes in developing countries, where emulation plays an essential role (Farrell, 1996, p. 131).

of the specific change implemented, the author uses a sociological standpoint emphasising organisational processes (pp. 107–11).

The mechanisms he describes for the changes adopted by NATO at the beginning of the 1990s stem from the seminal work by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) on isomorphism, which is the tendency of organisations to mirror others. These authors claim that, rather than being driven by competition and the quest for more efficiency, most contemporary organisations emulate others and adopt existing templates (pp. 150-4). Their article provides three possible sources that influence organisations in emulating others in the same field, which they call isomorphic change.

First, the higher the degree of resource centralisation and reliance on another, the higher the probability that an organisation will adopt the institutional blueprint of that one it depends on, corresponding to the expectations of resource suppliers and the society within it operates (1983, p. 150, 154). Second, the greater the uncertainty in the institutional environment and ambiguity of goals for an organisation, the more likely it will emulate a peer it considers successful (pp. 154-5). Finally, the stronger the professionalisation networks between two organisations and the higher the reliance on academic credentials for choosing people in managing positions, the higher the probability of adapting to incorporate the appropriate norms in the organisational field (p. 155).

Rather than competing with the explanation provided by historical institutionalism, the view of isomorphic change adds a valuable supplementary insight on a recurring mechanism behind the institutional templates chosen by organisations when pursuing reforms (Portes, 2006; Dobbin et al., 2007). This is consequent with the possibility that new institutions are adopted not only for the material but also for ideational drivers, in that it includes the role of beliefs in decision-making (Sarigil, 2007). If an organisation is likely to adopt a model deemed "successful" or "appropriate" under certain circumstances, ideas also have a role in institutional change. However, following historical institutionalism's propositions and the first explanation for isomorphic organisational change, this research considers material interests as part of the factors generating the reform. In this sense, ideas and beliefs are relevant only in that they support the former. This will be further explained when discussing the hypotheses in the last part of this chapter.

This section explained why it is convenient to adopt historical institutionalism as a more comprehensive perspective for this research. First, it acknowledges the relevance of the social and political environment in which organisations and actors are embedded. Particularly, it considers the distribution of resources that results from institutional arrangements. Second, it conceives actors, their calculation and their power in preventing or preferring change according to their interests and beliefs of what new institutions would entail for them. Finally, it stands in a pivotal position that allows insights into the organisational logics and how actors choose certain ideas for reforms according to their effect on material and symbolic interests. The main propositions stemming from this pivotal stance are introduced in the next section to clarify the central assumptions guiding this study and their causal relations to explain the military change in Colombia.

2.3. A Synthetic Approach for a Comprehensive Understanding of Change

Consistent with historical institutionalism, the present work agrees with the assertion that "actors select new institutions for instrumental purposes but draw them from a menu of alternatives that is made historically available through mechanisms such as those described by sociological institutionalism" (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 957). Additionally, historical institutionalists have drawn attention to the relationship between institutions, power relations within institutional change and the role of ideas and belief systems in that process (Portes, 2006; Hall, 2010). These are crucial elements for the study of military change since their organisation entails power relations through an internal hierarchical structure and its interaction with the civilian authorities and their position within the whole state structure. Moreover, the military usually mobilises material and ideational resources, such as equipment, budget, members, legitimacy, and prerogatives.

This section will recapitulate the main assumptions that stem from this analytical approach, and that will guide the further formulation of hypotheses. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) developed an integrative viewpoint that aims at explaining institutional changes which, as they describe, is based on "historical institutionalism but it is also consistent with some rational-choice perspectives that emphasise power over cooperation (…) as well as some sociological accounts that focus on the political-distributional underpinnings of specific

cultural or normative practices" (2010, p. 8). These authors suggest some propositions that will be considered for the forthcoming analysis.

First, they contend that *institutions often change in gradual ways* and not necessarily in a unidirectional way. That is, the linear inertia of path dependence that explains continuity in the view of historical institutionalism may be broken in subtle, slow, non-linear ways over time (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, pp.15-8). This does not mean that there are no significant changes in institutional arrangements. However, it entails that it is possible to observe such developments in shorter periods and not necessarily require shocking external events to unfold. The immediate implication of this statement for the analysis is to avoid the tendency of only looking at one critical juncture as the trigger for change and contemplate different intervening factors that accumulate over time or mutually interact to produce gradual change –not necessarily in an abrupt manner.

For the studied case, military change in the 2010-2018 period is not likely to appear as an abrupt transformation. It was not an army revolution and new elements introduced with the reforms coexist with old ones. Moreover, some elements that could also imply a significant change such as the troop size, resources, and civil-military issues, which would perhaps imply much greater reforms, have remained relatively stable, coexisting with the new elements introduced in the doctrine, education, structure, and strategy fields. Notwithstanding, it is still relevant enough if it meets military change conditions, as exposed in the first section of this chapter when defining the independent variable.

Secondly, *both endogenous and exogenous factors are sources of change* (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, pp.5-7). This implies that not only external events are a trigger for change in institutional arrangements; internal, gradually unfolding developments can also lead to institutional change. As mentioned, the recent military change process in Colombia began before the peace process with the FARC. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider not only possible intervening factors external to the institution –such as it would be the case if the peace process had triggered the change–, but also endogenous developments in the organisation –such as, for instance, internal planning or bottom-up adjustment processes and the promotion of agents of change to the military top brass.

Thirdly, *institutions have implications for power distribution* since they allocate resources and privileges to different actors in different ways (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, p.8). This

characteristic produces dynamics that end up motivating change, especially for organisations that mobilise significant and highly valued resources. Consequently, as distributional instruments, institutional arrangements may produce inequalities in terms of resource allocation. Since they may benefit some groups more than others or grant special prerogatives to certain actors, altering this order may entail shifts in power relations and related tensions (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). As the next section will elaborate, this can lead to an aversion to change but also to introduce modifications to maintain the status quo.

Concerning the subject of this research, this is also a plausible development. There might have been institutional changes or shifts in the political environment causing parallel power distribution shifts or expectations. These may have raised doubts as to how it would affect resource allocation for the military. As an example of why there might have been resistance to further changes, it is important to recall that the Colombian armed forces –and notably the army–had a significant rise in resources, size, and structure parallel to counterinsurgency development. Among others, the rise in the defence budget since 2002 was possible due to a so-called war tax[11]. This was partly justified by the fact that the FARC had increased their size and operational areas throughout the country, even close to Bogota, the capital city (Schultze-Kraft, 2012, p. 412; Pizarro, 2018, pp.162-3).

To summarise, when explaining how institutions emerge, change or prevail, this research assumes that actors and, ultimately, organisations guide their behaviour upon what is rationally, cost-efficiently convenient and socially appropriate to gain legitimacy. Both drivers of action are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Consequently, this perspective allows for explanations of decisions and changes in a given institutional arrangement that consider rational decisions to uphold power and social appropriateness and legitimacy as possible ways to achieve this. Having described the main assumptions that are to be considered in this study, the subsequent lines introduce the dimensions of analysis that will guide the research.

2.4. Dimensions of Analysis and Propositions Relevant to the Case

This section presents the key assumptions from which the independent variables of this case study are identified. In the light of the previously introduced propositions, the factors that

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[11] The third section in Chapter 3 ("Structure and Capabilities of the Security and Defence Sector") further describes this point.

are likely to have influenced military change in the Colombian army are subsumed in three interconnected dimensions of analysis: the structural, the agent-based, and the organisational factors shaping the new guidelines adopted. The subsequent paragraphs deal precisely with these initial causes that emerge from environmental factors.

Structural Triggers of Institutional Change: Changing Environment and Uncertainty

Institutions have repercussions in power distribution, which is especially true for those with reasonably important assets. Therefore, developments that affect their underlying power structure or have the potential to do so are a crucial trigger for change (Terriff, 2002, p. 92; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Since the armed forces in Colombia have traditionally focused on counterinsurgency and tasks related to asymmetric domestic threats, it is conceivable that potential shifts in the country's security environment led to the incorporation of adjustments in the military organisation.

This assertion follows both from experience and the propositions developed by authors studying military change and adaptation beyond top-down processes (Cohen, 2004; Farrell, 2010; Murray, 2011). However, such bottom-up processes parallel to an ongoing confrontation usually entail minor and gradual adaptation at the operational or tactical level, but not necessarily on doctrine or structural level. Moreover, this would not suffice to explain the army's institutional shift towards international tasks, while the domestic threats continue.

To this respect, Hall (2010) posits that variations in one institutional arrangement might produce imbalance or shifts in power balance for other institutions and that this is what ultimately motivates change. Indeed, political change that affects the military organisation's status quo is likely to cause modifications, for instance, in roles and missions (Terriff, 2002). For this reason, it is argued here that a *combination of factors related to the security and political environment can trigger the military change by altering the power balance concerning the army.*

This proposition points out the structural factors causing change. It is necessary to elucidate why exactly these developments in power distribution predict a reform. In other words, how do changes in the security environment and in the institutional framework of the military lead actors to implement changes. The rational-choice argument embedded in the

historical institutionalist synthetic perspective offers a compelling explanation, which is why the forthcoming subsection further elaborates this point.

At this point, it is necessary to recall that institutions provide actors with certainty and lower transactional costs. Thus, change is usually averted because new institutional configurations entail uncertainty and ambiguity (Hall, 2010, p. 207). However, uncertainty rising from external factors leads to the unfolding of endogenous adaptation dynamics within the affected institution. In consequence, *political or warfare changes that produce significant uncertainty for the military result in institutional accommodation.*

Summarising, factors linked to the political-institutional environment and developments in the battlefield and the attempt to avoid unfavourable change are causes that interact to trigger institutional change. To this respect, the theory suggests that the dynamics causing reforms are specifically related to shifts in the balance of power affecting the organisation. This, in turn, brings about an environment of uncertainty and ambiguity for the actors interacting within the affected structure, since the eventual result of newly introduced rules is difficult to foresee. The following considerations explain the interface between these structural triggers and the organisational pathway towards military change.

The Role of Agents: Resisting and Adapting to Ambiguity

The argument advanced until now suggests that the unpredictability rising from the battlefield and political developments makes the affected agents evade change. Accordingly, *concerned actors will resist change that jeopardises their status quo.* However, considering that they are not isolated but are embedded in a more extensive system with other institutions, when perceiving inevitable alterations in that greater context, individuals will strategically decide to accommodate to reestablish the power relations or somehow compensate the affected resources. According to Mahoney and Thelen (2010), "[t]hose who benefit from existing arrangements may have a preference for continuity but ensuring such continuity requires the ongoing mobilisation of political support and often active efforts to resolve institutional ambiguities in their favour" (p. 9). Paradoxically, the will to resist a variation in the existing power distribution might lead agents to adopt a particular type of change that they believe will counter unfavourable developments.

In the case of interest for this research, mobilising political support and resolving uncertainty to favour the affected actors occurs on the civil-military interface. Given the symbiotic relationship between the political elite and the armed forces in Colombia[12], by which the latter remain subordinated in exchange for a relative autonomy, it is likely that the decisions to reform also stem from a coalescence of civilian and military actors. The analysis will delve in which specific interests were at play during the studied period. However, if the power distribution is at risk, it is possible to affirm here that *actors whose interests are challenged decide to introduce changes that preserve or confer material and ideational resources.*

To recapitulate, it is likely that the tendency to resist undesirable reforms motivated actors' alignment to preserve their interests, a purpose for which they may have introduced changes that ensure a less adverse power distribution. The assumptions presented until this point should allow the present research to signal the factors enabling and constraining actors' decisions to install change or prevent it. However, explaining why the army changed in the way it did or why its leaders chose a determined form for the new institutional arrangement is still missing. The next section addresses this matter.

Emulation as Adaptation: Isomorphic Organisational Change

Having addressed the causes that are likely to unfold the studied reforms, the question that is still unsolved is which factors may have shaped the particular change adopted? How do decision-makers calculate that a given institutional change will be advantageous or unfavourable to them? An initial relevant argument is that the beliefs concerning the effects of institutional change work as schemes to condition the type of reform implemented (Hall, 2010, pp. 207-208). That is, agents involved in a potential institutional transformation will strategically resolve which reform to implement based on what they consider is likely to result from it and, more importantly, whether it will be favourable to them or not.

In doing so, individuals minimise uncertainty and have information to decide what type of change would benefit them based on previous experience of their own or other organisations. As previously mentioned, actors aiming to preserve a given status quo are likely to mobilise political support to avoid profound reforms that impact the existing power

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[12] On this point, see section 2.2. in this chapter and further remarks in Chapter 3.2. "Legal Framework and Civil-Military Relations".

distribution. Consequently, they are prone to introduce adaptations that increase their legitimacy and, therefore, ensure stability.

This inference is coherent with the evidence that military innovations can also emerge from the diffusion of models through organisational networks (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152) and stem from legitimacy-seeking goals and not necessarily from strategic needs (Goldman, 2002, p. 45; Terriff, 2002, p. 94). In this respect, the mechanisms of isomorphic organisational change described by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) are useful for the case. First, *when an organisation's resources are at stake* –and accessing them relies heavily on another–, it is *likely that it will incorporate standards expected by the latter and following the expectations of the society it operates in* (p. 154). Second, *under conditions of ambiguity, actors are likely to introduce reforms based on other organisation's benchmark that conveys the idea of success and appropriateness* (p. 155). In sum, it is plausible that the implemented principles were chosen for their potential to access material and symbolic resources.

To conclude the theoretical basis of the research, the final section will summarise the main relevant propositions introduced until now and formulate the hypothesis that will guide the study.

2.5. Summary and Hypothesis Formulation

This chapter defined military change as modifications on how the fighting organisation operates, with implications in its objectives and the framework that guides its actors and their interaction. In this sense, military reforms can be embedded in the broader category of institutional change and, for the hypothesis formulation, the chapter retrieved propositions from this field and that of strategic studies. After addressing the different theoretical approaches to unveil possible causes of change, the chapter concluded that historical institutionalism provides a strong standpoint from which the rational-choice and sociology of organisations' perspectives can be integrated.

Three dimensions of analysis are necessary to provide a comprehensive account of military change causes in the studied case. The first one comprises two main environmental, structure-based variables. Here, military change is likely to occur when battlefield and political developments produce shifts in the power distribution relevant to the military organisation.

Additionally, these shifts in the balance of power generate uncertainty and ambiguity for agents affected by possible change, which, in turn, triggers the decision to adapt. The preceding considerations lead to the following partial hypothesis:

> **PH1.** *Changes in the security and political environment affected the balance of power for the military and, by leading to uncertainty, triggered an institutional change.*

Secondly, the analysis examines how actors accommodated and made decisions in reaction to the changing environment. The theory suggests that a high level of uncertainty about how a new institutional arrangement will affect agents is likely to lead them to resist a profound reform. Nevertheless, individuals interested in perpetuating a power distribution favourable to the military may resolve the emerging ambiguity by introducing changes that preserve their material and ideational resources or mitigate the risk to them. The next partial hypothesis results from these considerations:

> **PH2.** *Uncertainty led actors to resist changes adverse to the military and then introduce reforms to preserve the status quo.*

Finally, at the organisation's level, mechanisms or pathways of isomorphic change come into play to shape the institutional outcome. Indeed, under conditions of ambiguity, the organisation is likely to emulate organisations with which it shares professional networks that can provide material and ideational resources. From the previous statements, it is possible to formulate the third and final partial hypothesis explaining the particular reform choice:

> **PH3.** *The army emulated models from military organisations that provide material and symbolic resources.*

Finally, from the preceding assumptions and partial hypotheses, the following hypothesis is formulated to lead the analysis:

> *The Colombian army engaged in a military change before and outside the peace process with the FARC because (1) political and battlefield developments produced changes in the institutional balance of power concerning the military, which, in turn, led to rising uncertainty for the organisation; (2) agents interested in preserving the status quo resisted adverse changes and resolved this ambiguity by adapting in favour of the military; and (3) did this by emulating models from organisations that provide material and symbolic resources.*

In general, the foregoing analytical framework underscores the interplay between structure-based factors –such as shifts in the correlation of forces in the field, as well as uncertainty in the political environment and ambiguity in the strategic goals– and agent-based factors –including strategies put in place by pro-change and status-quo agents guided by material and ideational interests–, that emerge as factors that trigger or hamper institutional change. Furthermore, the research will test hypotheses built upon the theoretical assumptions of institutional isomorphism as a source of military change. This strand in the literature posits that, under circumstances of uncertainty and ambiguity related to means and ends of an organisation, it is likely that the latter emulates others within the same organisational field, especially those it deems to be successful, legitimate or confer material resources.

As the previous lines suggest, far from including all possible intervening factors in the process of military reform in Colombia, the present work will analyse this outcome in close relationship with variables stemming from its political and security environment. Additionally, it bears in mind the relative power of civil and military actors in decision-making and the organisational bonds and capabilities' sources to understand where expectations and pressures to change come from. Therefore, the following chapter offers a contextual basis to understand the institutional stance in which the EJC operates.

3. General Features of the Defence Sector and the Army in Colombia

This chapter reviews the most relevant characteristics regarding the institutional and security context in which the Colombian land force operates. In doing so, it provides a general standpoint to understand the conditions in which the studied reforms unfolded. The first section depicts some essential aspects of the country's political system and threats' environment. The second section deals with the institutional framework in which the army operates, emphasising issues concerning the relationship between the military and politicians. After this, the chapter overviews the defence sector structure and capabilities, including a brief description of the organisations that belong to it. The chapter's final part focuses on the EJC, including past reforms and innovations, organisation, resources, and social composition.

3.1. General Political and Security Context

Like most Latin American countries, Colombia is a presidential democracy highly marked by a centralist tradition. After implementing several reforms to promote political and administrative decentralisation in the late twentieth century, its demography, infrastructure, services and economic opportunities are still highly concentrated in a few main development poles. While being the third country by population in the region, with 48 million people and 44 inhabitants per square kilometre, Colombia is not a particularly dense country (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística [DANE], 2019a).

However, according to the latest census, the capital's metropolitan region (Bogota, 10 million) and the next four main cities concentrate a third of its population (DANE, 2019b). This strong centralism correlates with low demographic density in peripheral and rural zones. Indeed, according to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2011), 30 per cent of the population resides in three-quarters of the municipalities, mostly rural, which constitute 94 per cent of the country's surface area. The persistence of an internal armed conflict mainly, although not exclusively, in the hinterlands underscores the state's unachieved task of achieving the legitimate monopoly of violence. This partially explains their emphasis on public order issues and domestic roles as a core mission of the Colombian military forces in a highly challenging topography for territorial control (see Map 1).

Map 1. Colombia - Topographical Map.

Source: Instituto Agustín Codazzi (2012)

Nevertheless, ongoing violence and internal security problems have coexisted with stable democratic institutions. This paradox has been thoroughly addressed by those studying the coincidence of violence and order in Colombia (Pécaut, 1987; Deas, 1997; Robinson, 2013), a nation which, in David Bushnell's words, has found a way to exist "in spite of itself" (1993)[13].

Fundamental to the contemporary institutional order is the political charter that entered in force in 1991 after an unprecedented process of democratic opening. However, contrary to most Latin American countries, this was not a post-dictatorial transition. Indeed, while the region was plagued by military rule in the twentieth century, at least from a legal perspective, Colombia kept its civilian democratic tradition. The government of General Rojas Pinilla (1953-57) was the sole exception to this and was installed and ousted by the political elite (Ruhl, 1981, p.142; Pizarro, 1996, p. 90).

Not only has the armed conflict persisted in the setting of formal democracy, but also alongside a relatively stable macroeconomic performance (Vargas, 2013). Moreover, after decades of being classified as a low-middle income country, since 2008, the country moved to the up-middle income group (World Bank, 2020). Nevertheless, social indicators regarding inequality and wealth concentration are not likewise favourable in a country where, for instance, one per cent of the population concentrates 40 per cent of the national income (DANE, 2019c, p. 26; CEPAL, 2016, p. 126).

Additionally, as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has reported, there are significant challenges in terms of social vulnerability, mobility, and economic informality to be overcome (2019; OECD et al., 2019, p. 207). Indeed, although a multiplicity of factors caused and fuel the internal armed conflict in Colombia, the scholarly consensus points out that social and regional exclusion gaps are an essential part of why it emerged and persists (see, for instance, Bejarano et al., 1997; Montenegro y Posada, 2001; Pizarro, 1996; González et al., 2003).

The domestic conflict is a crucial yet not the sole factor influencing the armed forces' traditional focus on internal roles and missions. Indeed, the defence sector mirrors the country's low profile in foreign relations (Tickner & Borda, 2011, p. 43). As Borda (2019) explains, Bogota's excessive emphasis on local issues to the detriment of international affairs

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[13] In a more recent contribution, a comparative case study by Carolina Galindo Hernández (2019) challenges this argument, underscoring the trade-offs that security policies have entailed for the quality of democracy in Colombia and Peru.

has marked its foreign policy agenda. This relative lack of interest for matters overseas contrasts with the national geostrategic situation, which enjoys a coastline of 2,900 kilometres, 44.8 per cent of the territory in marine zones and naval borders in and access to the Pacific (west) and the Atlantic Ocean (north) (Dirección General Marítima, 2021).

Consistent with the regional tendency in Latin America and the Caribbean, inter-state tensions have rarely escalated to international wars, and conflicts are usually settled via diplomatic, not violent ways (Skaar & Alca, 2014, p. 6; Pion-Berlin, 2016, p. 42). Only a few episodes of territorial disputes in Colombia have stressed the importance of defending its sea borders. Such is the disagreement with Venezuela on the limits of their territorial waters over the Gulf of Coquibacoa. This case can be traced back to post-colonial times and resurged in 2015 with Caracas' creation of four operating maritime and insular zones for comprehensive defence (Tovar, 2015). The other exception is the differendum with Nicaragua over the territorial and maritime boundaries they share in the islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina in the Caribbean Sea (International Court of Justice, n.d.).

Overall, the Andean country has not encountered major external threats in its contemporary history nor participated in an inter-state militarised confrontation with a rival nation. The Leticia War between Colombia and Peru (1932-33) was the exception to this and preluded the violent internal conflict that would arise in the 1940s. Moreover, the armed forces' deployment in international missions has seldom occurred.

A case that stands out is the participation of the Colombian Battalion 1 in the Korean War, with a contingent of more than 3,200, of which 150 were officers who fought alongside the US (Ramsey, 1967, p. 557; Dufort, 2017, pp. 327-28). Later, in 1956 after Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula, the Colombian Battalion 2 was deployed: 490 soldiers and officers were assigned to patrol the Khan Yunia zone of the Gaza Strip for two years (Ramsey, 1967, p. 550). Since 1982 and until the current date, the country's infantry Battalion 3 serves as part of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) overseeing the 1979 Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt (Arroyave, 2019, p. 361)[14]. Beyond these exceptions and the ongoing contribution

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[14] At the time of writing, 275 Colombian army and navy members support the peacekeeping mission in the Sinai Peninsula (IISS, 2020, p. 348).

to international observation missions[15], Colombia's participation in overseas missions is modest (see, for instance, Chinchilla & Vargas, 2016; Galán & Cañas, 2019).

While this South American nation has seldom participated in international warfare scenarios or experienced external threats, the domestic realm has deeply influenced its contemporary security agenda. First with a bipartisan civil war (La Violencia, 1948-1958) and then with the emergence of guerrilla warfare in the 1960s[16], the armed forces have been responsible for internal security and public order issues (Borrero, 1990, p. 175). A defence statute issued in 1966 by the national government opened the way for civil defence organisations to confront violence, a problem that increased with the surge of self-defence, paramilitary groups supported by local elites, active and retired military (Romero, 2003; Gutiérrez & Barón, 2006; Duncan, 2006). The rise of drug trafficking in the 1980s as a source of financing for the conflict, the drug cartels with their private armies and, after their dispersion, the consolidation of the paramilitary phenomenon in the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* ("Colombian United Self-Defence Groups", AUC) added to the sources of destabilisation (Camacho, 2002).

Finally, Colombia's neighbours have perceived it as a source of insecurity and instability (Vargas, 2010b, p. 153). At the turn of the twentieth century, the escalation of the internal conflict led to the perception of a spill-over effect of the crisis in neighbouring territories (Ramírez, 2004; Bejarano & Pizarro, 2005; Mason & Tickner, 2010). Even after the overall situation has improved, weak governance and security issues remain a cross-border challenge. For instance, illegal armed groups have found a strategic rearguard in Venezuela and Ecuador, where they control routes for criminal activities such as drug trafficking, transport of arms, among others (Idler, 2012; Carrión, 2016; Rodríguez & Ito, 2016). In a mutually reinforcing crisis, the recent aggravation of Venezuela's political and humanitarian situation has reinforced the already existing problems at the border and the region (Maihold, 2018).

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[15] Colombia has also sent a military member in the United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon peacekeeping mission (UNIFIL, 2020) and two to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) (MDN, 2018a, p. 100).

[16] The year 1964 saw the emergence of the FARC and the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* ("National Liberation Army", ELN), a group that still operates and challenges the functioning of state institutions and rule of law. The *Ejército Popular de Liberación* ("Popular Liberation Army") arose in 1967 and although most of its combatants demobilised in 1991, some fractions still remain active.

The virtual absence of external threats and international conflicts, parallel to a long-lasting domestic confrontation with irregular forces, has marked the contemporary history of the military in Colombia. In turn, this situation has set the conditions for a blurred, almost non-existent frontier between defence and security (Vargas & Álvarez, 2011, p. 335). Similarly, as the following section will demonstrate, although existing legal precepts establish formal subordination of the armed forces, the persistence of internal threats has hampered the consolidation of democratic civil-military relations and management of the defence and security sector.

3.2. Legal Framework and Civil-Military Relations

As a presidential democracy, Bogota's executive branch plays a substantial role in decision-making. This feature of the political system partially explains the modest role of the legislative in exerting control over the sector, which raises caveats on democratic management and oversight of the security forces. Indeed, as Chapter 2 previously discussed, the political elite has granted the armed corps a relatively high degree of autonomy for internal security and public order issues. This civilian acquiescence in exchange for a conditional political subordination has historical roots (see, for instance, Dufort, 2017). However, the most salient event that marked this pact occurred after the military government of Rojas Pinilla (1953-57).

Short after he assumed office as successor of the military junta, the civilian President Lleras Camargo (1958-62) faced a coup attempt. He then addressed the officer corps, emphasising the need to separate roles and functions between civilian authorities and the military (Deas, 2003). Lleras Camargo asserted that he did not want the armed forces to get involved in government tasks; conversely, politicians should not dictate to the armed forces their role, discipline, regulations, or staff (Andrade, 2012, p. 150). Since then, sector leaders have referred to this accord as the ideal of the separation between governors and soldiers (Galindo Hernández, 2005, p. 504).

The unintended detrimental effect of this so-called "Lleras Doctrine" has been twofold. On the one hand, it has served to justify poor civilian management and disdain for military and security affairs (Dávila, 1998). On the other, it has given the wrong impression that depoliticising the armed forces is tantamount to their abstraction from the political sphere (Borrero, 1990, p. 181). Moreover, as Porch (2008) asseverated, this civil-military configuration

has hindered the formulation of an effective grand strategy, as an ideal product of the interface between the political and military realms (p. 130). However, even with occasional rising tensions and without an ideal subordination, the civilian authority has formally prevailed over the officer corps (Rivera-Páez, 2019b, p. 225).

A milestone of paramount importance for control over the military was the 1991 Political Constitution (Const.). The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed the return of civilians to the head of the ministry and measures to prevent human rights abuses enabled by reiterative states of exception and the 1966 defence statute. Nevertheless, the pressure exerted from service members, the fear of the polity that robust control would raise sensitivities and resistance, and, to some point, a lack of interest for issues in the field prevented substantial changes in comparison with the previous legislation (Pizarro, 1991; Leal, 2018c, p. 244). In this sense, profound democratisation of control, oversight and management of the sector is still a pending task in the Colombian society.

In legal terms, the president leads the command-and-control chain and has absolute responsibility for the security and defence sector (Const. art. 189). In this sense, as the next section will elaborate, the MDN has a somewhat administrative role in the sector. In contrast, the head of state is the commander-in-chief and the first and foremost responsible for war operations and preserving public order. The president is also responsible for promoting servicepeople and submits the higher ranks to the corresponding congress committee's approval (Const. art. 173). However, the legislative usually ratifies the executive's decisions regarding the promotion of command and staff level military personnel. Overall, the state's power over the military is highly concentrated in the presidential figure.

It is the legislative body's responsibility to approve the entry of foreign troops and the declaration of war (Const. art. 173). Although relatively weak in the praxis, the two chambers of Congress have responsibilities over the MDN and the armed forces. In financial issues, the commissions for budgetary affairs review and approve the sector's resource allocation within the national budget[17]. However, there are shortcomings in control and oversight on defence expenditure, partially because of insufficient expertise and transparent access to information (Porch, 2008, p. 134; Grabendorff, 2009, p. 82; Transparency International, 2016, p.2). Additionally, the bicameral parliament's second commissions are responsible for international

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[17] This is however not specific to the military sector: the congress approves the expenses of each administration (Const. art. 150).

affairs, economic integration, migration, monuments, and defence-related issues. In sum, there is no congressional organ that exclusively deals with security and defence issues and building a more robust legislative participation in decisions concerning the public force is still under way (Rivera-Páez, 2019b, p. 225).

Moreover, just as all other ministries, the MDN submits a yearly report to the legislative describing the sector-relevant legislation issued during each parliamentary period and progress in accomplishing the armed forces' organisational goals. Although this is a vital accountability exercise, which is also made available to the public, the document tends to have a general quality and be more a unilateral formality to fulfil than a control mechanism. Congress can also summon political control debates in which the minister and high-ranking officers respond to questions of concern for the sector. This oversight mechanism is usually a measure to which the political opposition resorts when scandals or tensions rise, although they usually offer a chance to display support from most parties.

The law provides for states of exception only in case of external war or internal commotion due to public order disturbance (Const. art. 212-3). This addition to the political charter was essential to prevent the abuses that occurred with the frequent use of the state of siege during the second half of the twentieth century. The new legislative framework also emphasised International Humanitarian Law, prohibited civilians' trial by the military and the suspension of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Const. art 214).

Regarding the military forces' role and mission, the Colombian charter defines them in general terms as defending sovereignty and territorial integrity (Const. art. 217-8). It also separates the military from the national police, as the public force's civil body. However, there is a frequent superposition of tasks between these two, especially in dealing with public order issues, the fight against crime and counternarcotics (see, for instance, Jiménez & Turizo, 2011, p. 122-4). Furthermore, the constitution refers to military service stating that every Colombian must take up arms "when public needs demand it to defend national independence and public institutions" (art. 216).

The regulation also stipulates substantial restrictions on servicepeople's political rights. Active members of the security forces are barred from voting and being elected, engaging in political parties' activities or debates or in any movement that makes a political statement (Const. art. 219). Union association of active servicepeople is also banned (Const. art. 39).

Finally, armed forces' members who have exercised this role in the twelve months before their election date cannot hold public office (Const. art. 179).

The original purpose of restricting the civilian and political rights of service members was to ensure the public force's non-deliberative nature. Indeed, the measures can be traced back to the early twentieth century when the military and the police corps fuelled interparty violence, instrumentalised by the conservative and liberal parties (Andrade, 2012, pp. 149-50). However, this formal prevention from meddling in political affairs has been erroneously understood as the military being "apolitical", which detaches the institution from its role in a democratic political system. In short, the awareness of servicepeople's role as citizens in a democracy, which should transcend the collective subordination to the civil power, is sacrificed for alleged political neutrality.

Regarding the definition of issues related to doctrine, education and structure, the law does not explicitly provide a function for the civilian executive or legislative branches. Moreover, the forces' operational command does not lie with the ministry but, first, with the military forces' general command and, ultimately, with the president (Vargas & Álvarez, 2013, p. 338). Recent progress includes more involvement of civilians both from the MDN and outside of the state structure, but there are still realms where the officer corps has the upper hand, and the ministry's role remains formalistic (see Bruneau, 2005, pp. 233-4; 2013b, pp. 154-5). In short, the armed forces enjoy a relatively high autonomy to define their operational, educational and force deployment parameters, which are delimited by their internal statutes and rules.

According to article 222 of the constitution, servicepeople's professional training must include education in democracy and human rights. However, episodes of abuses and anti-democratic practices have pointed out the need to strengthen oversight mechanisms in this legitimacy-sensitive matter (see Velásquez, 2011, pp. 36-9; Palma, 2020, pp. 17-8). Such is the case of the *falsos positivos* ("false positives"), the illegal execution of civilians presented as military operational results. Although previous official figures and independent estimates differ, the Colombian transitional justice tribunal's[18] most recent finding revealed that, between 2002 and 2008, army members executed at least 6,402 people under these circumstances (Asmann, 2021).

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[18] The *Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* (JEP, "Special Jurisdiction for Peace") was the transitional justice mechanism that resulted from the peace accords between the government and the FARC.

The scandal first emerged during 2008, as reports published by local and US media revealed that EJC members had kidnapped youngsters nearby the capital, transported them to a region on the way to the Venezuelan border and killed them to present them as guerrilla combat casualties (Romero, 2008; Semana, 2008; Evans, 2009). Further investigations pointed out that a document issued by the MDN in 2005 (the "*Directiva Ministerial Permanente 29, 2005*") had established an economic rewards' system, which incentivised body-count (see Lasillavacía.com, 2009).

Then at the head of the MDN, Santos publicly acknowledged the problem, announced corrective measures were under way and affirmed this was a matter of the past (El Espectador, 2009a). He relieved several officers and ordered measures to investigate and prevent such cases in the future. However, the minister sustained the usual generalised support of civilian leaders of the sector to the top brass.

In this case, pressure from Washington conditioning continuity on military cooperation was decisive to accelerate changes (Amnesty International, 2008; DeShazo et al., 2009, pp. 48, 65). These included, among others, improving accountability and the drafting and issuing of the first comprehensive ministerial human rights policy (MDN, 2008a; Washington Office on Latin America [WOLA], 2016). Nevertheless, contrary to what Santos affirmed, the issue is far from being solved. Overall, there is still much to be done in building a better collective and individual understanding of the role of the Colombian armed forces in society and the institutional framework they belong to (Human Rights Watch, 2015; Rivera-Páez, 2019b, p. 225).

In judicial matters, the law stipulates that receiving orders by a superior does not exempt a public servant from liability when violating constitutional precepts to the detriment of any person (Const. art. 91). Notwithstanding, members of the armed forces are exempted from this provision. In this case, the responsibility falls on the superior that gives the order. In the 2016 peace accord, the government deviated from this rule and gave the military forces a special and differentiated treatment compared to provisions for the FARC. In 2017, the Constitutional Court approved a nuanced formulation of how to determinate superior responsibility of service

members for crimes that occurred during the internal armed conflict, which is not based exclusively on rank, hierarchy or command jurisdiction[19].

Additionally, the constitution recognises military jurisdiction as an administrative body of justice (art. 116). Indeed, military criminal justice handles crimes committed by members of the armed forces while on active duty and concerning the service (Const. art. 221). However, high-ranked officers are judged by the supreme court of ordinary justice following a formal accusation of the national attorney general (Const. art. 235).

To summarise, the existing institutional foundation that determines general rules applying to the military aims to ensure civilian control that curbs the armed forces' power. In practice, however, there are several reasons why democratic management and oversight fails to be effective or only partially functions. In order to provide further insights into the organisational environment in which the Colombian army is embedded, the following section delves into the Colombian MDN structure and the entities that belong to it.

3.3. Structure and Capabilities of the Security and Defence Sector

While the ministry is the formal head of the security and defence sector in Colombia, the strong presidentialism and the fact that the head of state is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, confine the ministry to a management function. Its responsibilities also comprise supporting policy formulation and execution (see Decreto 1512 del 11 de agosto de 2000), which, consequent with the described emphasis in internal security, is highly marked by public order issues.

The military force's commander is next in the chain of command, followed by each of the three services' commanders at the same hierarchy level. Thus, instead of a joint staff integrated by all branches, there is a single general command of the military. Although not a formal rule, an army general usually holds this position[20] and leads from the EJC headquarters,

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[19] According to the approved law, "the responsibility of members of the public security forces for the acts of their subordinates must be based on effective control of the respective conduct, on knowledge based on the information available to them before, during, or after the commission of the respective conduct, as well as on the means at their disposal to prevent the commission or continuation of the punishable conduct, provided that the factual conditions permit it, and if it has occurred, to promote the appropriate investigations" (Acto Legislativo 1, 2017, art. trans. 24).
[20] Only exceptionally has a commander of other service different than the army been tasked with the general command of the military forces in Colombia. The most recent case was between 2010 and 2011, when admiral Edgar Cely was

which underscores this force's substantial preponderance over the navy and the air force. Even in the implementation of joint operations since the mid-2000s, the army has a robust prevalence and exerts pressure in the sector to rule the military forces (Borrero, 2006, p. 135; León, 2011a)[21].

The defence sector is divided into a central structure and several associated organisations assigned to it, officially referred to as the decentralised sector (see Función Pública, n.d., p. 3)[22]. The former comprises the ministry and the public force, which combines the military forces and the national police. The military is, in turn, formed by three forces: the EJC, the *Armada de la República de Colombia* (navy, ARC) and the *Fuerza Aérea de Colombia* (airforce, FAC). The *Comando General de las Fuerzas Militares* ("General Command Military Forces", CGFM) coordinates these three independent branches but is not a joint capability. An army general usually leads the CGFM. Besides the public force and the general command, the military health departments and the maritime direction (DIMAR) also form the central sector.

A group of logistic and corporate entities responsible for administrative, industrial and commercial activities form the decentralised defence sector (Departamento Nacional de Planeación [DNP], 2009, p. 28). Among them are the organisms that have administrative autonomy but report to the ministry: the military retirement fund, the institute that manages the army's housing, the civil defence, the central military hospital, the logistics agency of the military forces, and the superintendence of surveillance and private security (DNP, 2009, p. 28).

Additionally, there is a group of industrial and commercial corporations: the *Industria Militar Colombiana* ("Colombian Military Industry", Indumil), the military commercial airline (Satena), the *Corporación de la Industria Aeronáutica Colombiana* ("Corporation of the Colombian Aeronautical Industry", CIAC), among others (see Función Pública, n. d., p. 63, 68, 80). Finally, four autonomous organisations also form part of the defence sector: the *Corporación de Ciencia y*

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designated by president Santos. After only one year in the position, pressure from the army leadership led the president to oust the admiral and designate an army general for this role as it is already tradition in the country (see León, 2011).

[21] Another unwritten rule is that officers at the highest rank of the armed forces are usually appointed ambassadors after their retirement. For instance, Gen. Alberto J. Mejía, in Australia (2019 to date); Gen. Alejandro Navas, Argentina (2013-17); Gen. Freddy Padilla de León, Austria (2010-13); Gen. Jorge E. Mora, South Korea (2004-06).

[22] The term decentralised does not imply a regional distribution of this multiplicity of sub-sector organisations but rather their relative administrative independence. This is also key to understand why denominating the MDN budget as "military expense" can be misleading.

Tecnología para el Desarrollo de la Industria Naval Marítima y Fluvial ("Science and Technology Corporation for Naval, Maritime and Riverine Industry Development", Cotecmar); the *Universidad Militar Nueva Granada* (military university); the military sub-officers' social group; and the Matamoros Corporation, that works for the benefit of the military and police wounded in action and the families of those killed in action (MDN, 2016, pp. 125-6).

At the beginning of every administration, the ministry drafts and issues a security policy and strategy guideline, usually after the national plan of development has been published by the *Departamento Nacional de Planeación* ("National Planning Department", DNP) and approved by the Congress. There has been an improvement in defining guiding principles for the sector, policy frameworks and the definition of strategic documents, particularly since the mid-2000s (Bruneau, 2013b, p. 155; Marcella, 2016, p. 164). However, Colombia lacks a defence white paper or a similar long-term document that outlines the grand national strategy with corresponding priorities, systematic actions towards its implementation and resources (see, for instance, Bonett, 2013, p. 21; Llorente, 2018).

In terms of the officials leading the ministry, since the 1990s, a civilian has been appointed at the helm of the sector. Before this, 17 generals had consecutively held this position for four decades (see MDN, 2018b). Three deputy ministers –civilian or retired military– are responsible for the vice-ministries of policy and international affairs, strategy and planning, and the social and business group of defence. No active members of the forces hold leading positions of the ministry, although a retired general or admiral usually holds the position of deputy minister for the social and business group[23]. Only during interim periods, for instance, when a minister resigns or a new one has not been appointed, the general commanding the military assumes the responsibility for the whole sector. As for other MDN staff positions, previous research estimates that there are six military personnel for every civilian in the ministry (Bruneau, 2013b, p. 155).

It is also worth mentioning that, rather than having particular expertise in security and defence issues, the Colombian ministers of defence usually have a business-related and

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[23] For example, retired Gen. Fernando Tapias had this role between 2009 and 2010. Former Admiral David Moreno holds this position since January 2021.

managerial profile[24]. This trend can be ascribed to the perception that the financial and administrative tasks related to the multiplicity of organisations that form the sector are a priority or, in other words, that the defence ministry and its ascribed entities are to be managed as a company[25]. Another feature concerning the background of recent ministers of defence is their previous experience as diplomats or in international multilateral organisations, such as the case of Santos (2006-09) or late Carlos Holmes Trujillo (November 2019 to January 2021). An outlier of this trend was Juan Carlos Pinzón, whose family comes from the military milieu and had already served as deputy minister[26].

Before delving into crucial features of the military and the army, it is worth mentioning some relevant characteristics of the police corps. The Colombian police force is the only one in the Americas subsumed under the ministry of defence. Like other aspects of Bogota's security sector, this particularity is rooted in the twentieth-century bipartisan violence and the internal armed conflict. In 1953 then president Gen. Rojas Pinilla decided to incorporate this civilian corps into the Ministry of War –the MDN's predecessor– to subordinate it to the military and prevent it from further being instrumentalised by political parties and participating in the social turmoil (Andrade, 2012, pp. 149-50). Suggestions of removing the police from the defence sector are not uncommon in the country and have revived in recent years, especially in view of changing threats (see, for instance, Llorente et al., 2016; Leal, 2018b). However, the argument still prevails that this would mean politicising the corps –in case of ascribing it to the ministry of interior– or weakening the executive command and coordination of all armed forces to counter internal threats.

Despite belonging to the defence sector, the Colombian police are not subordinated to the military forces. Their commander reports administratively to the MDN and operationally to the president. Notwithstanding, the police remain a semi-militarised armed force in this Andean country. Even though several steps have led to their specialisation as a civilian corps for law enforcement, they maintain counterguerrilla and antinarcotics operations and blurred roles with the military (Bulla & Guarín, 2015, pp. 6-7). Moreover, the excessive use of force against civilians in the context of social protests in Colombia in recent years, in some cases with

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[24] For instance, Luis Carlos Villegas (2016-18) or Guillermo Botero (2018-19), both former leaders of industrial and commercial associations. Diego Molano (2021 – to date) was also appointed emphasising his public sector management experience.
[25] Interviews with Armando Borrero and Jean Carlo Mejía.
[26] Chapter 4.1. further describes Pinzon's background.

lethal consequences, has revived the debate on the need for police reforms. However, the highly polarised political environment and lack of civilian leadership make such a change unlikely.

Indeed, the last major police reform occurred in the early nineties when president Gaviria appointed the first civilian minister. Amid a highly deteriorated security situation, the 1993 reform sought to address rising concerns and critique due to corruption and abuses committed by members of the civilian security corps. The measures increased civilian control over the police at a local and national level, improved professionalisation, working conditions and specialisation, prioritising tasks beyond the armed conflict (Borrero, 2012). A decade later, as part of then President Uribe's security policy measures, in 2002, the government launched "Plan 10,000" to increase the police force by this number in a short period. From 110,000 members of the police force in that year, by 2009, more than 35,000 additional police had been recruited (Schultze-Kraft, 2012, p. 410). As of 2020, the national police had 159,247 personnel, of which 4,137 were civilian and 138,892 professional uniformed members (Policía Nacional, 2020).

Nevertheless, there are still several shortcomings in the structure and training of the police. Indeed, like other police forces in the region, the *Policía Nacional de Colombia* is not exempt from low levels of citizen trust, corruption scandals and abuses that question their relation to civilians (see Rivera et al., 2019, pp. 28, 65; HRW, 2020). Among other issues afflicting the police, the drive to massively recruit to build up the force fast in times of crisis has sacrificed quality criteria in the selection process and training. Additionally, the police lack sophisticated and transparent disciplinary and penal control mechanisms, with informal ways of administering internal justice (Tobón, 2021). Besides the strong emphasis on public security issues over other policing tasks, civilians often give them already troublesome roles that should be assumed by other public entities, for instance, the management of the penitentiary and prison system. Additionally, although maintaining public order is a responsibility of local governors, there are often divergent interests and demands between a major and a commander of a jurisdiction, which creates tensions that emerge in times of social unrest.

Finally, in the Colombian theatre, coordinated action between the military and the police force is crucial, especially in rural areas. However, there are also several shortcomings in

this respect. Indeed, during the years of the Uribe administration, there was progress in expanding police presence throughout the territory. On the one hand, during that time of increasing military and police size, the government prioritised rural areas at the expense of the urban territories (Llorente & McDermontt, 2018). On the other hand, rural security lacked a sound coordination strategy between the military and the police and is still a pending task (Velásquez, 2015).

The dimension of resources and organisations belonging to the sector is one of the reasons why the executive sees the ministry as an administrative vehicle rather than a policy instrument for security and defence matters. The two forthcoming sub-sections will overview the military capabilities and resources' distribution among the organisations that make part of the public force in Colombia.

Troop Size and Budget Distribution of the Military Forces

Behind Brazil, Colombia has the second-largest annual defence budget (10.5 billion USD) and troop size in Latin America and the Caribbean (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 2020, p. 388–9). Regarding military expenditure per capita (currently at 200 USD), between 2004 and 2010, the country held second place after Chile in the South American region and since 2014, third after Uruguay and the former (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], 2020). Moreover, although in absolute figures Colombia's troop size is one place behind Brazil, since 2004, the country has been first in the region in terms of armed forces personnel as share of the total population (1 per cent) and labour force (2 per cent)[27].

According to the MDN, as of 2018, the Colombian military forces totalled 255,000 members and, with the additional 177,000 national police, 432,000 service people form the security forces (2018a, p. 95). As previously mentioned, from the three military services, the army has traditionally been the dominant force compared to the other two branches, which reflects its comparative size and resources. In average, between 2008 and 2017, the EJC represented 84 per cent of the military personnel, the ARC, 12, and the FAC, 4 (see Contraloría General de la República [CGR], 2018b, p. 2 and Chart 1).

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[27] See World Bank (2019) and Our World in Data (2016), respectively.

Chart 1. Active military personnel in Colombia, 2008-2017

It is worth considering that the annual defence budget includes several non-military expenses of the sector that correspond to the decentralised organisations (Ministerio de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 2019, p. 31). Moreover, it comprises the police budget, which adds up to almost a third of the total defence finances (Diagram 1) and 42 per cent of the public force allocation (Diagram 2). Consequently, although some databases equate the MDN budget to military expenses[29], the denomination can be misleading.

Around a third of the sector's budget is allocated for operational expenses, such as payroll, procurement of goods and services, and military retirement pension (CGR, 2018b, p. 5). Additionally, while the decentralised sector receives 25 per cent of the total sector's resources (Diagram 1), 12 per cent of the public force's finances and a fifth of the military correspond to other management, health and operational expenses that are not appropriated for the services (Diagrams 2 and 3, respectively). Moreover, during the past decade, a modest

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[28] Detailed information on troop distribution per branch in Colombia is still regarded as highly sensitive and there are several discrepancies when consulting different sources. For instance, in 2017 the MDN reported 201,365 EJC personnel, 31,061 ARC and 12,633 FAC (Donadio et al., 2017, p. 3). Currently available and updated MDN information does not discriminate per military branch. Data on active personnel reported by IISS Military Balance has remained the same since 2017 (223,150 EJC, 56,400 ARC, 13,650 FAC) and differs from the official report by the military forces command.

[29] The SIPRI Military expenditure Database uses MDN budget as source of information for military expenditure. See SIPRI. (n.d.).

one to two per cent was invested in equipment purchases and maintenance, which poses limitations to capabilities' upgrading and procurement (CGR, 2018b, p. 9; DNP, 2019).

Diagram 1. Overall Distribution of Defence Budget in Colombia, 2014-2020*
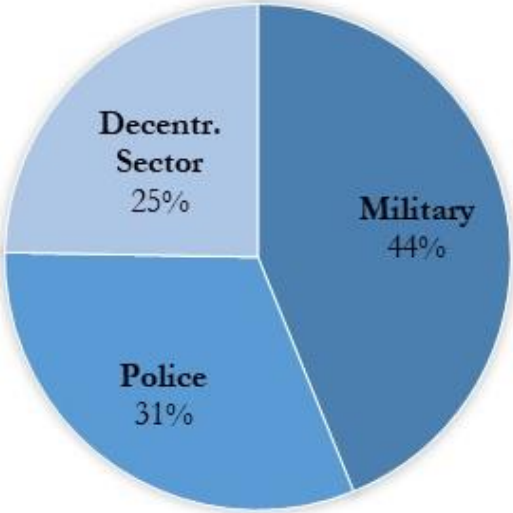
Source: own elaboration according to MDN budget data (MDN, n.d.)
* Percentages based on average distribution during that period.

Since 1998, three or more per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) has been assigned to the defence sector, corresponding to a tenth of the whole government spending (SIPRI, 2020). Notwithstanding, Colombia underwent the first three decades of counterinsurgent war without having high military expenses (Borrero, 1991, p. 175). Indeed, it was only in the mid-nineties and early 2000s –when the political centre and the main cities, including the capital Bogota, felt threatened by the FARC's advances– that the budget boosted.

A first step was the local consecution of additional resources. Concretely, in 1996 the Congress approved a law bill that taxed legal entities and natural persons with a certain amount of assets to finance improvement of military and police equipment (Portafolio, 2006)[30]. That year, the defence budget went from 2.8 per cent of the GDP to 4.4 reaching almost 15 per cent of the national finances (SIPRI, 2020).

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[30] The resources were invested in communications, weapons, boats, trucks and other equipment.

Diagram 2. Distribution of Public Force Budget in Colombia, 2014-2020*
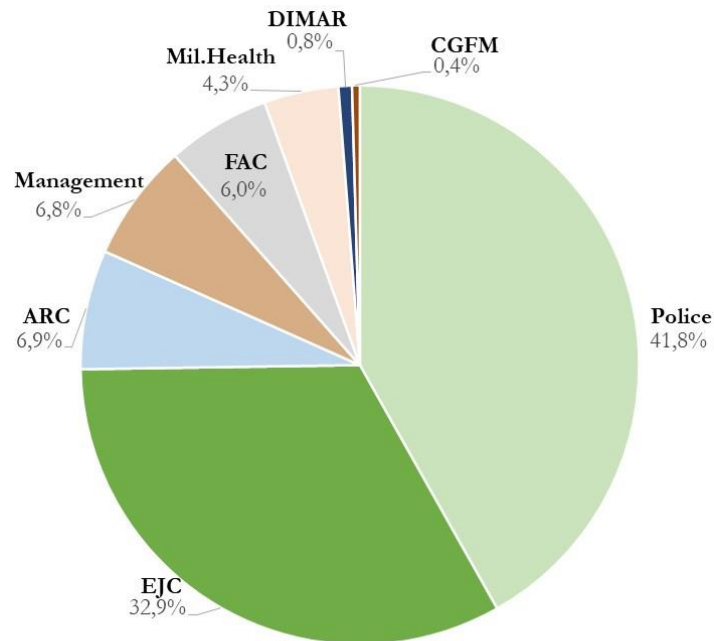
Source: own elaboration according to MDN budget data (MDN, n.d.)

* Percentages based on average distribution during that period.

This tax was initially called by the government a "peace contribution"[31] –the public opinion named it "war tax"–, then a wealth tax and, subsequently, a tax for the consolidation of the democratic security. Ultimately, these fiscal measures allowed for additional appropriations to bolster military capabilities (DNP, 2014b, pp. 13-4). For instance, at the beginning of Álvaro Uribe's first tenure (2002-06), he declared a state of emergency due to the security situation. He issued the so-called wealth tax as a continuation of the former "peace contribution", which was prolongated in the second administration and invested in equipment and arms, strengthening troop size and creating mobile and mountain battalions (Portafolio, 2006; El Tiempo, 2006)[32]. Only during the first four years of this government, the defence expenses related to administration and personnel increased by 70 per cent (MDN, 2007, p. 11).

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[31] The Pastrana government (1998-2002) also charged a so-called "peace solidarity contribution", which was mostly allocated to social programmes in conflict-affected areas.
[32] Approximately 4.5 billion USD were additionally collected during the two Uribe administrations (2002-06, 2006-10) and allocated to the defence budget (DNP, 2014b, p. 12).

Diagram 3. Distribution of Military Sector Budget in Colombia, 2014-2020*
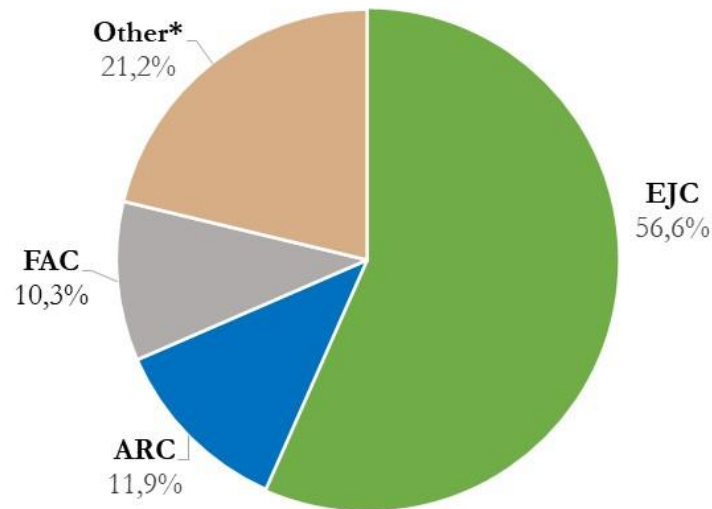
Another decisive step to bolster military capabilities at the turn of the century was Plan Colombia. The Pastrana administration initially conceived it as a comprehensive drug-fighting and alternative development programme to end the armed conflict. However, after the plan began in 2000 it soon changed its approach with a stronger focus on the military component, something buttressed by the Caguán peace process' failure with the FARC in early 2002 (WOLA, 2016).

In the initial phase of 2000–08, the yearly US military aid averaged 540 million USD, which, added to the Colombian resources that doubled the foreign allocation, equated around 1.2 per cent of the country's average annual GDP (Mejía, 2016, p. 4). During its first 15 years, Washington appropriated 10 billion USD to the Plan Colombia, of which around 70 per cent was assigned to the military component, while Bogota invested 131 billion USD in strengthening the defence sector's capabilities (WOLA, 2016; DNP, 2016). Finally, although the following assistance programmes have emphasised the need for a strategy shift, most of the resources have been directed to procurement, training and technical assistance for counter-narcotics and the fight against terrorism (for a thorough account, see Beittel, 2016a, pp. 25 – 36).

To summarise, the Colombian military personnel and budget related to the defence sector is the second largest in the Latin American region. However, in the early decades of irregular warfare, this was not the case. Only until the late nineties and the beginning of the 2000s, the political and economic elite invested resources to streamline the public force's capabilities and counter the progress of insurgent movements. Although equipment and technology significantly improved due to extraordinary taxes and foreign aid, the personnel and administrative expenses substantially increased during the first decade of the twenty-first century. In this scenario, even though all security forces were strengthened, the EJC received a significant investment for operations. Before the chapter focuses on the land force, the following subsection overviews the other two military branches in Colombia and the South American country's defence industry.

Military Branches, Equipment and Defence Industry

The Colombian military has three branches, of which the EJC[33] is the oldest one and enjoys a particular preponderance in the sector. Following the land branch in size and resources, the Colombian navy is the second military force and has traditionally been oriented towards the Atlantic Ocean. The maritime service operates from five bases[34]: ARC Bolívar in Cartagena, for the Caribbean; ARC Málaga, the Pacific base near Buenaventura; two riverine bases in the Southeast territory (ARC Orinoco in Puerto Carreño and ARC Puerto Leguízamo for the Amazonas region); and ARC San Andrés in the northern archipelago.

Of the four naval force branches, the marine corps is the most numerous (23,000 personnel) and exerts a significant territorial presence in the Caribbean and Pacific coasts (Hernández & Vera, 2017, p. 21). Behind the US and the Republic of Corea, the Colombian *infantería de marina* is the third-largest naval infantry force in the world (De Cherisey, 2017). Its emphasis on amphibious capabilities makes it suitable for the country´s 24,700 km riverine network, of which 16,877 km are navigable throughout the year (Ministerio de Transporte, 2010, p.2). This territory has been crucial to counterinsurgency since irregular actors have used it as a battleground and to transport illegal goods.

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[33] Given that this research focuses on the EJC reform, the forthcoming section in this chapter will extensively describe the army's main features; conversely, the lines in this subsection provide a brief account of the other two services.
[34] Unless otherwise stated, the source for information concerning the Colombian navy is the ARC official website: https://armada.mil.co/

With two task forces, one for the Caribbean and another for the Pacific, the coast guard is the navy's second command, mainly focused on counternarcotics and interdiction operations. The naval aviation is the third ARC component, equipped with fixed and rotary wing aircraft and focused on logistical support of naval facilities and operations, and surveillance, search and rescue. Finally, a specific navy command operates from the San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina islands.

Naval equipment includes four German-made frigates acquired in the 1980s which the navy has been long planning to replace, and four submarines of the same origin, two of them acquired in the mid-seventies (SO 209/1200, modernised in 2012) and the other two procured in 2012 (SC U-206) (Sánchez, 2015). In the last decade, the Republic of Korea Navy has donated three corvettes built in the 1980s to the Colombian navy: Donghae-class ARC Nariño, and Pohang-class ARC Tono and Boyacá (Vavasseur, 2020; Manaranche, 2020).

The state-owned shipbuilding company, Cotecmar, administratively belongs to the MDN but, just as the DIMAR, closely works with the naval force for capabilities production and maintenance. Since 2010, Cotecmar has built four of six planned OPV-80-class patrol vessels under German company Fassmer's licence (*ARC 20 de Julio*, *7 de Agosto*, *Victoria* and *Santander*). It has also developed and sold several fast riverine patrol boats (LPR 40) to the Colombian navy and Brasilian armed forces (Saumeth, 2013; 2020). Although the naval force's projection shows interest in bolstering capabilities, several budgetary shortcomings have hindered these plans (for a thorough account, see Uribe Neira, 2020).

The airforce is the smallest military branch and operates from seven commands, their corresponding airbases[35] and a modest combat fleet. Among its air fleet, the FAC currently maintains 19 out of 24 Israeli multirole combat aircraft Kfir C12 bought in the 1990s[36], which have shown technical malfunction in the last years and led to several accidents (Hoyle, 2009; Melman, 2010; Mejía Giraldo, 2014). Although the airforce core mission remains to defend Colombian airspace sovereignty, its capabilities are modest and have a strong focus on counternarcotics (Cook, 2020). Indeed, despite the sector's plans to replace its fleet, with

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[35] Unless otherwise stated, the source of information regarding the Colombian airforce in this section is the FAC official website: https://www.fac.mil.co/unidades-aereas

[36] In January 2021 the air force grounded three of the aircraft because they did no longer meet the technical and therefore safety standards for operation (see Saumeth, 2021).

candidates including until now SAAB JAS 39 Gripen, Eurofighter or, the most probable procurement option, F-16, Bogota still lacks a strategic deterrence system, and budgetary constraints hinder procurement (see FAC, 2019; Reuters, 2019)[37].

Located in the Puerto Salgar base, the first FAC command has combat and tactic squadrons, equipped with Kfir aircraft, and several fixed-wing and military helicopters. The Malambo-Barranquilla base, near the Caribbean coast, and the Apiay base located in the country's geographical centre, are the two next airbases. The Tres Esquinas base in the department of Caquetá has been decisive for counternarcotics operations in the east and southeast regions, traditional guerrilla and other illegal armed organisations' rearguard. The three last bases –Melgar, Rionegro and Cali– are essential for operations in the country's central and southwestern region.

In general, the Colombian airforce possesses a mixture of combat, air-assault, transport and special operations aircraft which have been decisive for counterinsurgency and antinarcotics operations. The fleet includes US Bell 212, AC-47 Spooky for attack and reconnaissance, and the Sikorsky AH-60L Black Hawk fourth-largest fleet worldwide (Isacson, 2013; IISS, 2020, p. 414). Its Boeing KC-767 tanker has participated in US-led exercises and shown its ability to interoperate and carry out air-to-air refuelling (Dussán, 2019). Light-attack combat aircraft such as the US-manufactured A-37 Dragonfly, and the Brazilian Tucano T-27 and A-29B Supertucano are also part of the air capabilities (IISS, 2020, p. 414). In 2012, the airforce acquired unmanned aerial vehicles from Israel's Elbit Systems: two Hermes 900 and four Hermes 450 employed for anti-terror, counterinsurgency, and the fight against drug-trafficking (Saumeth, 2018).

The CIAC is the country's aviation company, manufacturer of aircraft parts. It has also elaborated the 24 training aircraft T-90 Calima that belong to the Colombian airforce fleet and has currently export plans (CIAC, n. d.; Saumeth, 2019). Based on the Black Hawk model and upon Israeli advice, since 2002 the FAC has also produced the 60L Arpía IV armed gunship (Hernández, 2015a, p. 59). Besides military transport and maintenance facilities, the air force operates a public sector airline to facilitate access to Colombia's hinterlands: Satena.

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[37] For instance, in the eventuality of a military confrontation as a result of tensions with the neighbouring country Venezuela, the air capabilities would be insufficient to repel such an attack.

Overall, the state-owned companies (Indumil, Cotecmar, CIAC and Codaltec[38]) are in charge of national procurement, maintenance, and military weaponry production. However, although some equipment is locally produced, Colombia is mainly an importer of the defence sector's equipment. The military aid history with Washington has led to a close relationship between these two hemispheric allies in defence procurement, reflected in the capabilities' origin. Indeed, almost half of Bogota's military hardware imports are of US origin (see Privacy Shield Framework, n. d.). However, Colombian military forces also have weapons and equipment from Brazil, Germany, Israel, and South Korea, also stemming from previous cooperation and warfare experiences.

The EJC is the largest and oldest of the three military branches in Colombia. In fact, aviation and naval force were initially established as army services in the twentieth century. Although both ARC and FAC have tasks different than those related to counterinsurgency and anti-drug operations, their recent history and capabilities have been marked by strong support and jointness with the ground force in irregular warfare. Moreover, the air force is a relatively modest branch in size and equipment, while the navy has participated in international missions and engaged in industrial partnerships during the last decade. As a final section of this contextual chapter, the following lines overview the army's structure, capabilities, and previous military change experiences.

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[38] The *Corporación de Alta Ttecnología para la Defensa* ("High-Tech Defence Corporation", Codaltec) was created in 2012 for the development of digital products such as simulators and software for the defence sector.

3.4. The Colombian Army

Unlike other Latin American countries, the formation of Colombia as a modern state has no foundational myth linked to its armed forces. While in Argentina, Chile, and Peru, for example, the military campaigns of the independence armies were decisive for the consolidation of territorial domination and the formation of the modern nation, in Colombia, the Creole elite had intense rivalries with the *Ejército Libertador* ("Liberation Army") in the early and mid-nineteenth century. Thus, after a military coup in 1854, the elite expelled what was left of the liberation army. Throughout this post-independence phase, political parties and regional elites, along with their private or official militias, entered into violent confrontation for national dominance, resulting in countless civil wars and a fragmented nation to this day.

For this reason, the creation of a Colombian national army occurred at the turn of the century. Consequently, military identity in Colombia is deeply linked to its development during the twentieth century and, more specifically, to issues of domestic security and the control of public order. Moreover, the need to control territory in dispute with irregular groups has given the EJC prevalence within the military and the country's defence sector. Since the 1960s, this focus on counterinsurgency correlated a lack of doctrinal development and training for regular warfare and resource concentration on personnel and light weaponry to favour troop mobility. Against this backdrop, the army's participation in counterinsurgency has been central to its transformation and conception as a force to ensure security against internal threats. Likewise, the priority of territorial control has influenced this army's organisation and deployment.

The following lines briefly examine the initial steps towards a centralised and professional armed corps in Colombia, how the beginning of guerrilla movements coincided with stronger cooperation with the US army and the subsequent modernisation efforts to gain superiority over the insurgency.

Previous Experiences of Military Change in the Colombian Army

As previously mentioned, the Colombian army identifies itself profoundly with its development throughout the twentieth century, when the first national land force was founded and countering internal security issues became its central task. This subsection shows how the first professionalisation efforts came with Bogota's will to minimise the army's size and resources and, parallelly, foster a formal military education with foreign advisors' help. Additionally, although the top brass had already confronted the first irregular movements by the mid-twentieth century, it was through exchange and training with the US army that the EJC formally included counterinsurgency principles. The first decades of countering guerrilla and other illegal armed groups went by without the necessary resources and civilian leadership. At the beginning of the 2000s, when the threat was significant enough to Bogota's elite, a substantial shift in the executive allowed bolstering capabilities and first steps towards a whole-of-government strategy.

First National Army and Professionalisation Efforts

Several post-independence civil wars marked the beginning of an atomised military corps in nineteenth-century Colombia, with local militias and a relatively small national guard for the political centre (Fitch, 1998, p.8). As power remained strongly decentralised, regional elites controlled their private armies as a mechanism to defend their interests (Dufort, 2017, pp. 322-3). In this scenario, conservative president Rafael Núñez proclaimed the 1886 political charter, which centralised government and provided the fundamental initial guidelines for a national, central army.

Internal turmoil did not cease and, in the aftermath of the devastating Thousand Days' War (1899-1902), former army Gen. Rafael Reyes –then at the helm of the executive– introduced the first reforms to professionalise the Colombian armed forces (Bermúdez, 1992). The most important of these initiatives was the begin of military education, with the establishment of the School of Cadets (1907) and the War College (1909). Moreover, the government kept the early-twentieth-century army to minimum size and resources to prevent a possible instrumentalisation for political conflicts (Atehortúa & Vélez, 1994, p. 59).

Leaders in Bogota hired a series of German and French missions to advise early efforts to professionalise the Andean land force (see Atehortúa & Vélez, 1994, pp. 55-72). Nevertheless, economic limitations worsened by internal confrontations in the early 1900s difficulted the continuity of European missions. This shortcoming led president Reyes to invite Chilean officers and advisors to develop the nascent military training system[39]. Later, Swiss advisors accompanied a decade-long army structuring process during the twenties, including establishing and training infantry (Helg, 1986). Moreover, between 1929 and 1934, German officers supported training in the military school for non-commissioned officers (NCOs) (Esquivel, 2013, p. 256).

In this first milestone of military reforms, civilians at the head of the Colombian state sought to establish control by curbing the army's size and resources and beginning professionalisation. Upon the influence of foreign missions, the EJC focused its doctrine, training and structure on regular, inter-state warfare during its early decades of existence. Thus, the first generations of Colombian officers adopted the Prussian elements that the Chilean military[40] had already integrated. Finally, the territorial dispute with Peru reinforced the need to resort to international referents in equipment and doctrine, not only for the EJC but also for developing the two other nascent military branches (Ramsey, 1981, p. 117).

The Korean War and the Beginning of Counterinsurgency

While inter-party violence in the mid-twentieth-century gave birth to the first insurrectional movements in Colombia, an international event marked the history and identity of the EJC. Between 1951 and 1953, an infantry battalion participated alongside the US army in the Korean War. This international experience fostered several improvements in fire and manoeuvre tactics and led to introducing a staff model for EJC battalions (Atehortúa, 2008). Moreover, the close operation with a military organisation overseas bolstered army communications and the activation of intelligence and counterintelligence (Arroyave, 2019, p. 361).

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[39] According to Atehortúa and Vélez (1994), the first Chilean mission took place on 1907 and was succeeded by three more in 1909-1911, 1912-13 and 1914-15.
[40] On the Chilean emulation of the Prussian army in the nineteenth century, see Rouquié (1987, pp. 78-9).

The Korean War episode also boosted cooperation and influence between the US army and the EJC, emphasising counterinsurgency. Indeed, during an armistice period where irregular warfare tactics were employed, Colombian officers became acquainted with this type of theatre (Pizarro, 2018, pp. 149-150). Unintendedly, the experience abroad prepared the EJC for domestic counterinsurgency and a shift towards internal armed conflict against the guerrilla groups that would surge in the sixties[41]. This facilitated access to doctrine manuals and guidelines developed by the US military, including civil-military and psychological operations' frameworks (Dufort, 2017, pp. 327-30). Additionally, the president created the general command (CGFM) to improve control and efficiency at a joint level (Decreto 835 de 1951).

During these first decades of irregular warfare, the army adjusted its doctrine and strategy to the growing internal threat. However, there was a significant difference in how the civilian leaders and the military brass assessed the problem and, therefore, the response was fraught with tensions. Throughout the Cold War, Colombian army officers embraced the anti-communist ideology consequent with the government's alignment to its hemispheric partner (see, for instance, Forero, 2017, pp. 107-8, 124; Ugarriza & Pabón, 2017). Simultaneously, they emphasised the need for a more decisive civilian leadership and a comprehensive response to social and economic grievances fuelling the insurgency (Delgado, 2016). However, Bogota's elite failed to develop such a strategy or even a security policy, responding only with exceptional measures to warrant public order (Gallón, 1980; Pizarro, 2018, p. 96).

Modernisation and Shift to The Offensive in the Turn of The Century

As the second half of the twentieth century unfolded, irregular armed groups were growing in number and in their ability to destabilise the Colombia regime. After the first adjustments to counterinsurgency, the army barely experienced changes and lacked the necessary resources and political backing to respond to the growing threats. In the early 1980s, after decades of only activating more brigades to cover the national territory, it became clear that too many commands reported directly to the army commander (Borrero, 2006, p. 121).

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[41] The EJC rangers battalion (*"Lanceros"*, founded in Tolemaida in 1955) are also an important example of the cooperation bonds between the U.S. Military and the Colombian army that was forged in those decades. During the late 1950s and 1960s, US army rangers travelled to Colombia to create the *"Escuela de Lanceros"*, which has been key to irregular warfare and counterinsurgency training (see Briscoe, 2006).

Consequently, in 1983 the EJC created its first five divisions to improve its organisational structure.

The nineties witnessed the worse blows to the military forces, which, with scarce resources and poor civilian leadership, faced a significant surge in irregular groups' territorial expansion and activity (see Ramsey, 2009, Chapter 1). The top brass took the initiative towards modernisation in the late 1990s and 2000s, even before Plan Colombia (Pizarro, 2018, p. 182). Indeed, the army was once again left to conduct war by itself, without a straightforward, comprehensive governmental approach to the problem (Marks, 2002). Consequently, some changes in the EJC followed battlefield developments but lacked funding to support operational and strategic needs. The additional resources and political leadership that came with the Uribe administration (2002-10) enhanced this initial impetus towards military adaptation.

The subsequent development of counterinsurgency capabilities and strategic adjustment to stop the guerrilla surge were decisive for consolidating the army's role in this type of warfare, and its self-perception as a force focused on counter-subversion. In this phase, the army adjusted its force structure to respond to the threat's nature. Indeed, its previous deployment model caused excessive dispersion of the troop and lacked flexibility and continuity in attack (Leal et al., 2000, p. 56). To overcome this limitation, the EJC implemented substantial changes, including mobile brigades, rapid-deployment forces and counter-guerrilla battalions, which marked the transition towards a more concentrated but more flexible and mobile army (Ortega, 2011, pp. 90-4). The introduction of jointness at the operational level was also crucial. In the mid-2000s, the military forces activated their first joint command with all three branches and created a series of joint task forces (JTF)[42] to combine land, air and marine capabilities in the offensive (Flórez Henao, 2012; Donadio et al., 2018, p. II).

Resources enabled at the end of the Pastrana tenure and throughout Uribe's two administrations supported the strategic, structural and equipment changes. This progress led to military superiority after decades of guerrilla warfare. Indeed, investments in technology, intelligence equipment and other strategic capabilities allowed the army to take the initiative and enter the guerrilla's rearguard (Echandía, 2011, p. 8; Pizarro, 2018, pp. 191–92). Indeed,

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[42] As of this writing, the JTF Omega, created in 2003, has 6,231 army elements organised in three operative and 15 tactical units. See Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta Omega [FUTCO], (2016) and CGFM (2019a).

for Colombian senior and active military members, this milestone of military transformation marked a turning point in its development and is still central to the army's representation.

Furthermore, the troop increased significantly, in particular, due to the introduction of a new type of recruit: the peasant soldiers. In 2003, the executive fostered a military service program for men between 18 to 28 years old to serve in their hometowns after three months of training. During this first year, almost 16,000 Colombians enlisted in this community-based program, and by 2006, the number of peasant soldiers had doubled (Schultze-Kraft, 2012, p. 410). Additionally, during the time Uribe was in office, the size of the public force increased by 54 per cent and the military forces by 30 per cent, while the number of professional military members almost doubled, and regular soldiers increased by 20 per cent (MDN, 2007, p. 15; Leal, 2010, p. 18; Schultze-Kraft, 2012, p. 410).

It is also worth mentioning that, during these years, the army and the other forces adopted the fight against drug trafficking as one of their roles and created its first counterdrug battalions and brigades. Until the late nineties, this was a police task. However, the strong emphasis of Plan Colombia in drug interdiction made a case for including military capabilities in it and, consequently, funding, training, and equipping new army units for counternarcotics (Borrero, 2006, p. 120).

Overall, the officer corps took the initiative to introduce valuable force structure reforms and strategic adjustments. However, following the trend in the previous decades of counterinsurgency, the army was initially left to its own devices, and the establishment in Bogota failed to accompany warfighting efforts with strategic leadership and resources. This situation partially changed with Uribe's presidency when a whole-of-government approach called the "democratic security" was buttressed by additional local and foreign resources that began to enhance the armed corps since the Pastrana administration. The army strengthened its capabilities and reached substantial superiority over the domestic threats by the late 2000s. This development meant a remarkable shift from a low civilian involvement in security and military affairs.

However, as other authors have underscored, the Colombian civil-military interface is not free of tensions and strategic differences in tackling the problem (see Porch, 2008; Delgado,

2015b). Moreover, the head of the executive's micro-management style and direct involvement in commanding army units, bypassing the military hierarchy regular channel, generated not a few resentments (Borrero, 2006, p. 121)[43]. Therefore, although the civilian executive took responsibility in managing military and security issues during those years, the excessive personalism in exercising control undermined the institutional channels of civil-military relations.

Finally, since 2007 and under the name of the "comprehensive consolidation plan", the executive attempted to build upon military gains through inter-agency state presence. The plan began in targeted zones where security had improved, gradually shifting the emphasis from military to civilian control and governance. Besides the army, the navy has had a predominant role in coordinating and facilitating these consolidation activities on the field, particularly through the marine corps. However, there have been several shortcomings in terms of resources and the priority given to these efforts, which still cannot be assessed as a success nor as a failure (see Palma, 2020, pp. 9–12).

In brief, the army's origin and conception as a national force in Colombia are linked to the need to centralise power and the use of violence after post-independence civil wars. Throughout the twentieth century, the various milestones in military change constitute central aspects of the EJC's conception as guardian of public order. Seeking to depoliticise and ensure control over members of the nascent EJC, Bogota kept army capabilities and size to a minimum during most of its contemporary history. Additionally, the executive sought to isolate the force from the political sphere through professional education, for which foreign advice was crucial. Moreover, the political elite restrained from involving in military issues in exchange for subordination.

This configuration continued until the last decade of the twentieth century, when, due to a significant rise in domestic threats, the military leadership initiated a modernisation process. The executive, in turn, provided political and financial support to bolster capabilities. Overall, the development of capabilities for guerrilla warfare and the consolidation of the EJC's role as a counterinsurgent force that combats internal threats are central to the army's contemporary

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[43] Sources consulted during background interviews coincide in pointing out that former president Uribe would directly address and give orders to operational and tactical level staff, sometimes also publicly "scolding" army commanders when he deemed they were not delivering results. Porch (2008) also reports how a deputy minister of defence declared that in Colombia: "The president is like a small god for the military" (p. 135).

identity. Before analysing its most recent reform process, the final subsections of this chapter outline the army's structure, capabilities, and composition.

General Organisation and Capabilities

The EJC operates from its general staff in Bogota and eight divisions[44] that are autonomous within their regional jurisdiction, intending to cover all the national territory, except for insular or coastal zones controlled by the marine corps. The smallest division (1st, Santa Marta) is composed of two brigades, whereas the two largest (5th, Bogota; 7th, Medellín) have five brigades. The thirty-one army brigades are mostly infantry, although with some cavalry and several counterinsurgency mobile units. Colombian army brigades command the operation of between two to twelve tactical and combat support elements, usually infantry battalions, cavalry squadrons and one artillery battalion for direct support.

Given the importance of flexibility and territorial dispersion for the local theatre of operations, battalions rarely concentrate on a single area. Additionally, some brigades have air-defence or air-mobile infantry battalions, besides the army aviation brigade in Bogota, commanded directly by the general staff and operating the helicopter, fixed-wing and army aviation battalions. The army headquarters also commands the engineer brigade in Tolemaida, although all divisions have at least one engineer battalion, tasked with infrastructure construction, maintenance, and humanitarian demining. Finally, each of the seven mobile brigades commands counterinsurgency battalions and one combat service support company.

Two additional elements are essential for the EJC territorial deployment, counterinsurgency operations and the fight against drug-trafficking: jungle brigades and high mountain infantry battalions. The army has activated three jungle brigades in the past twenty years to patrol and command operations in the southeast part of Colombia, mostly in the Amazonas region and near the border with Peru and Brazil. The land force is also part of the joint jungle brigade in Leticia, combining capabilities with the airforce and marine corps.

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[44] Unless otherwise stated the source of information regarding the Colombian army in this section is the EJC official website. See: https://www.ejercito.mil.co/conozcanos/organigrama. A summarised overview of EJC units can be found in IISS (2020, 412-3).

Since 2001, when the FARC threatened to take over Bogota from the adjacent Sumapaz moorland, the army has activated ten mountain battalions. These units have the critical task of patrolling and controlling the strategic mobility corridors through which irregular groups transit and transport arms and supplies for drug trafficking. Given that these corridors often coincide with protected upland areas and nature parks, these battalions also have an environmental protection function.

The Colombian military land branch also has several tactical elements that report directly to the general staff and with functional or army support responsibilities. Among them are the special counternarcotics brigade in Larandia; the engineers' brigade in the Tolemaida base, and the special communications brigade in Facatativá, in the capital metropolitan region. Five additional units are worth mentioning. Considered the "Colombian army's war machine"[45] and a symbol of its modernisation process, the *Fuerza de Despliegue Rápido* ("rapid deployment force", FUDRA) was created in 1999 to execute offensive counterinsurgency and anti-terror operations. This light infantry, air-assault unit operates from the Tolemaida base and can be deployed in all Colombian territory's geographical conditions and is supported by army aviation and the airforce.

With four battalions that operate from Tolemaida, the Special Forces Brigade has anti-terror units with jungle warfare expertise. Its highly-trained members participate in the annual US army-sponsored exercise, "Fuerzas Comando", which Colombia has won 10 out of 15 editions (Ramos, 2019). The Colombian special forces have a history of training and collaboration with the US army, which is why its officers are usually graduates of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (Finlayson, 2006). As for the *Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal* ("Unified Action Groups for Personal Freedom", GAULA)[46], these are elite units in charge of hostage-rescue operations and against organisations undermining personal freedom. The GAULA coordinates actions with the Office of the Attorney General's technical investigation team.

The *Agrupación de Fuerzas Especiales Antiterroristas Urbanas* ("Urban Counter-Terrorism Special Forces Group", AFEUR) is another army anti-terror element. It focuses on high-value

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[45] This is how the EJC describes the FUDRA in its homepage. See: https://www.ejercito.mil.co/conozcanos/organigrama/unidades_militares/unidades_especiales/81
[46] The national police and the other military branches also have this type of element.

targets and terrorist groups in Colombia's main cities, also preventing and reacting to attacks. Finally, the army has recently created a group for tracing information on the illegal trafficking of firearms, ammunition, explosives, or military equipment (*Grupo Griam*).

As previously stated, the EJC has always been the prevalent military branch, although its size and resources were relatively moderate until the mid-nineties, when it began to grow progressively and then duplicated its size between 1998 and 2004 (Borrero, 2006, p. 119). Between 2001 and 2012, the number of active military in the army went from 147,000 to 230,000 (Diálogo, 2012)[47]. Moreover, the land force concentrates a quarter of the defence sector's overall budget and more than half of the military force's annual funding (see Diagram 3 above). Of this total of effective members, around 20 per cent are officers and NCOs (see MDN, 2008b, p. 79; 2013a, 73; Donadio et al., 2018, p. 3).

In terms of equipment, the Colombian army has focused on armoured, lightly armoured and tactical vehicles, allowing the land force to better control the territory, marked by irregular topography. Even for conventional territorial defence purposes, the ground conditions do not justify heavy equipment. The army operates several armoured vehicles[48], such as US-manufactured M-113 personnel carriers and M-117 security vehicles. Infantry equipment also includes the Canadian wheeled light armoured vehicle 8x8 LAV III, and armoured Humvees with TOW anti-tank missile launchers (Hernández, 2018, p. 8). Additionally, for mine-resistant mobility purposes, the army has four South Afriacan RG-31 Nyala multi-purpose vehicles.

The Brazilian-made Cascavel EE-9 and Urutu EE-11 armoured vehicles, the U.S.-manufactured ASV M-1117 and Israel's 4x4 M-462 Abir are among the cavalry equipment (Hernández, 2018, p. 9). In terms of artillery and anti-tank equipent, the EJC possesses TOW anti-armour systems, 106mm recoilless rifles, M1 81mm mortars and the 120mm French-made Brandt heavy mortar. Finally, Colombian artillery battalions use the US M-101 105mm towed howitzers and are equipped with Israel-made Nimrod air-to-surface missiles. Finally, UH-60L Black Hawks and Bell UH-1N Huey helicopters are crucial for the army's aviation in assault operations. RQ-11 Raven drones are also part of the army aviation's equipment (Hernández, 2018, p.11).

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[47] The three military branches grew at a similar rate: both the EJC and the ARC increased their troop at 150 per cent while the airforce did so at a 120 per cent (Diálogo, 2012).
[48] Unless otherwise stated, the source for army capabilities is the *Military Balance* (IISS, 2020, p. 413).

The state-run local manufacturer of arms and ammunition, Indumil, has the national monopoly of detonating material and supplies for mine exploitation fabrication (Decreto 2535 de 1993). This company produces weaponry and ammunition for the EJC. Although initially developed for the Colombian armed forces, in 1995 Indumil acquired the license from Israel Weapons Industries (IWI) to produce Galil ACE sniper rifles locally, which it now exports from Bogota back to Tel Aviv (Schipani, 2013; Oliver & Valpolini, 2018). The company also produces the Colombian Córdova handgun, sold to the local security forces, state agencies and private companies (Indumil, 2017).

Conscription, Socio-demographic Background and Military Education System

The Colombian army is a largely conscript force on the path towards professionalisation. Eighteen-month military service is compulsory for men (Ley 1861 de 2017, art. 13), although women can voluntarily enrol and pursue a military career since the nineties (Borrero 1991 p. 178). Nevertheless, it was only until recent years that female members began to enter the army's technical and professional education institutes[49], and in 2018 women pursued the general staff course for the first time (Pelcastre, 2018). Overall, the EJC has a relatively low three per cent of female personnel among their active members, compared to the eight and 24 per cent of the navy and air force, respectively (MDN, 2018a, p. 110). As of 2018, there were ten times more male officers and fifty times more NCOs than their female colleagues at those ranks (MDN, 2018a, p. 107).

Until the last decade of the twentieth century, only officers and NCOs pursued a career, and the troop consisted mainly of the so-called regular soldiers (Borrero, 1991, p. 177). However, in recent years, the army has gradually moved towards a more professional force. Between 2008 and 2017, the number of officers and NCOs incremented by 13 and 6 per cent, respectively, while regular soldiers are currently around 40 per cent of the EJC active members (CGR, 2018a, pp. 29-31)[50]. Moreover, after the substantial growth in the first years of the new century, in the last decade, the number of peasant soldiers decreased by 97 per cent, regular soldiers by 18 per cent and the army's overall size by 15 per cent (CGR, 2018a, p. 30).

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[49] According to the *Red de Seguridad y Defensa de América Latina* (RESDAL), female members of the army entered the War College in 2009 and the school for non-commissioned officers in 2017 (2018a, p. 37).
[50] In the mid-2000s, around half of the army troop were conscripts (Borrero, 2006, p. 126).

Military service in Colombia is an unequal system (see Porch, 2008, pp. 133-4; Vargas & Álvarez, 2013, pp. 347-8). Conscripts who have a high school degree are assigned to administrative roles, while youth coming from low-income families and with educational limitations are tasked with operational, combat-related responsibilities (Saquety, 2006, p. 52; Rico, 2016). According to the Ombudsman's Office, between 2009 and 2013, almost 80 per cent of the regular soldiers came from the most impoverished part of the population, while another fifth were middle-class Colombians society (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2014, p. 128)[51]. In other words, youngsters who have poor access to education and other social services are those who conduct operations and support to combat missions in the army.

Additionally, depending on their income and assets, families with sufficient financial resources can pay a sort of compensation bonus to receive the *libreta militar* ("military card") to prevent their sons from being recruited. The *libreta* is an identification document that certifies compliance with compulsory military service. However, it also has implications for professional life since organisations can request this as a requirement for men to be employed.

Regular soldiers play a crucial role not only in kinetic military action but also in civil-military cooperation. However, draftees receive only three months of instruction, their low educational level sometimes verges on illiteracy, and their economic remuneration is lower than the minimum wage in Colombia (Rico, 2016). These educational standards among recruits and the high rotation in the troop mean significant challenges for a force in the road towards professionalisation and pose ethic and strategic questions (Rico, 2016; Leal 2018, p. 248). Equally worrisome is the justification of abuses by some officers who claim that soldiers sometimes "do not know how to use cutlery or a toilet" and hence misunderstand orders ending up in mistakes[52]. For instance, during a legal hearing in February 2020, a former army commander tried to explain the extrajudicial killings as a result of soldiers' low educational level and social background (Oquendo, 2020).

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[51] According to the official socioeconomic division (*estratos*), 78.6 per cent came from the 0, 1 and 2 strata; 21.3 per cent from 3 and 4; and 0.1 per cent from 5 and 6 strata (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2014, p. 128).

[52] Although this comment was recently publicised by the media covering the hearing of former Gen. Mario Montoya in the JEP, in other occasions, service members have expressed similar justifications.

The professional training of soldiers, NCOs and officers is organised through schools and centres mostly although not exclusively located in Bogota[53]. Additional training centres for recruits are located in the country's central, north-eastern and eastern region. Soldiers between 20 and 26 years of age that aim to pursue a military career enter the academy for non-commissioned officers: the *Escuela Militar de Cadetes* ("Military School of Cadets", ESMIC). This school is a higher education institution accredited in by the Colombian ministry of education, where future Colombian army officers begin studies in military sciences and parallelly pursue a complementary career in one of five subjects: law, international relations, civil engineering, logistic administration, and military physical education (ESMIC, 2018).

At the beginning of the fourth year at the military school, the cadets are granted the *alferez* (ensign) rank and are commissioned to infantry, cavalry, artillery, or any other arm, according to their specialisation. After completing their four-year military and professional education, ensigns graduate and receive the sub-lieutenant rank in an official ceremony that makes them part of the army's junior commissioned officers' ranks (RESDAL, 2016, p. 142). In the organisational structure, the Centro de Educación Militar ("Military Education Centre", CEMIL) is responsible for all army specialities' schools and the combined arms school[54].

The next stage of the military career is the *Escuela Superior de Guerra* ("War College", ESDEGUE), which is the higher education military institution for senior officers of the three military branches, future generals and admirals. Besides training the selectees for the flag and general ranks, the college offers programmes for professors, military attachés and official reserve professionals (ESDEGUE, n.d.-a). Senior army military officers nominated for promotion to colonel and general ranks pursue an eleven-month training curriculum in the War College. Majors aspiring to be promoted to lieutenant colonel attend the *Curso de Estado Mayor* (general staff course, CEM) and colonels to being promoted to brigadier general must have completed the *Curso de Altos Estudios Militares* (advanced military studies course, CAEM) (ESDEGUE, n.d.-b).

Despite being a specifically military training entity, the War College has been increasing its contact with civil organisations and universities in its courses. There is a specific program

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[53] For a thorough review on this topic, see Vargas and Álvarez (2013).
[54] The CEMIL's official website provides a thorough overview on each school. See: https://cemil.edu.co/index.php/escuelas-cemil/

on national security and defence studies (CIDENAL) offered to high-ranking public servants, civil society members and selected police and military personnel. Research and other joint academic projects have also begun to serve as a communication and exchange instrument between Colombia's military and civilian sectors. Finally, the ESDEGUE also trains National Police Officers and members of foreign military forces from allied countries on specific topics and situations (n.d.-a).

Regional allies like Chile and Brazil have traditionally been close cooperation partners in military affairs with Bogota. Consequently, the Colombian army maintains an active relationship with its homologues in both countries, particularly for personnel exchange, training and joint exercises. However, due to the long and intensive history of military aid already described in this chapter, the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) is the EJC's closest and most prevalent ally in training, procurement, and technical assistance.

3.5. Summary

This chapter showed that the Colombian land force has predominated among the military because of the threat's nature and the corresponding resources and roles assigned to the EJC. In general, throughout its contemporary history, the country's security sector has been primarily focused on domestic missions, with rare exceptions of international deployment of troops or inter-state confrontation. Moreover, due to the prevalence of irregular armed groups in the national territory, army capabilities have focused on counterinsurgency and anti-narcotics operations. Consequently, its structure and equipment favour lightness, mobility, and ad hoc units, reinforced with joint task forces with other services in the last decades.

The national legal framework provides for significant civilian control measures over the public force. However, there are still missing steps in the road towards consolidating the democratic principles of civil-military relations and defence and security management. For one thing, military subordination has been conditioned to a low degree of political involvement in the sector. Additionally, the civilian-led ministry has a rather administrative role, with a business-management orientation, rather than consistent with expertise in the area.

As for the legislative, its oversight role is minimal. Besides the absence of congress committees that exclusively deal with the matter –usually treated along with foreign and international trade affairs–, they are limited to approving high-rank appointments and control debates whenever a scandal surfaces. Therefore, control is excessively concentrated in the president's role, which raises concerns over how democratic is the control that the executive exerts. Furthermore, the Colombian military's ground-based branch has progressed in modernisation and professionalisation, but its social composition is marked by socioeconomic inequality and education limitations.

Contemporary milestones of military change began in the early twentieth century, with former generals at the helm of the state establishing the first education system and subsequent civilian governments hiring foreign missions to structure and professionalise the first national army. The participation of a Colombian infantry battalion alongside the US army in the Korean War consolidated cooperation and training bonds with this hemispheric partner, preceding decades of irregular warfare. It was only until the late nineties and the first decade of the twenty-first century that the EJC capabilities were bolstered to advance counterinsurgency. In essence, previous experiences of land force reform in Colombia have resulted from a combination of factors in the political environment, threat behaviour and cooperation with other military organisations. The next chapter will describe the most recent process of change in the Colombian army, thus addressing the first specific research question.

4. Military Change in the Colombian Army, 2010-2018

The recent reforms introduced by the land-based branch of the military in Colombia had been gradually unfolding in the previous years to the Santos administration during his period as minister of defence. Nevertheless, it was in his presidency when these changes gained pace, took a definite form in legal and policy documents, and were actively communicated to the public by the army's high command. The elements incorporated into the EJC's institutional framework are mostly a result of top-down decisions by the military, with the support and approval from civilian leaders who conceded a relatively high degree of autonomy for this process. However, as will be discussed in the forthcoming analysis (Chapters 5-7), the executive took essential decisions to enable and accelerate the reforms.

Changes occurred in two broad senses. On the one hand, a strategic adaptation was designed and implemented parallel to warfighting and, subsequently, to ongoing peace talks with the main domestic security threat: the FARC. On the other, the army drafted and issued a reform in doctrine, education, and force structure, which has consequences for its roles and missions and, ultimately, for the operational level. Evidence reveals simultaneous war plans' adjustment and the strategy to fight irregular threats while preparing for a much broader spectrum of tasks, both related to combat and peace endeavours. Overall, cumulative, staggering changes that appear to respond to battlefield evolution surfaced during the studied period. In contrast, other innovations are more disruptive, with implications in how the force is deployed and organised in the territory, the adoption of new operational concepts and expanding the scope of roles. Although still in its initial phase due to time and budgetary constraints, the outcome is an ambitious model of a multi-mission army that aspires to be prepared for fighting the next war at home or abroad and engaging in joint, coordinated, inter-agency actions for stabilisation missions and development projects.

The following sections outline the fundamental decisions, events and actors involved in the new approaches to strategy, doctrine, education, and structure in the EJC. The chapter begins with a chronological overview of the implemented changes and mentions the key civilian and military actors that championed the reforms. Afterwards, the content of the reforms and innovations will be briefly described, emphasising elements that have relevant repercussions in warfighting and future missions and roles. In the subsequent chapter, these elements will be discussed in a larger political and institutional context for the analysis and hypotheses testing purposes.

4.1. Relevant Milestones and Actors of the Reform

Although seldom mentioned as part of the process of military change in Colombia in the past decade, a noteworthy shift in the planning method and a series of decisions to reform the armed forces' education system set the first important institutional elements that would later frame the reforms that are the object of this study. According to official documents by the ministry in Bogota and testimonials of high-ranking army officers, the idea of moving from a threats-centred to capability-based planning began to gain attention in the late 2000s, although it was only during the first years of the Santos presidency that officials applied it to strategic review exercises (MDN, 2011a, p. 55-6; Herrera, 2015a; Santos Pico, 2016).

While this is not a new military planning approach, it was novel for the Colombian security forces. The sector leaders had been drafting military plans according to potential conflict sources, assessing the already existing threats and those likely to emerge, their plausible advances, and the best way to face them. Battlespace developments were proving this was no longer an effective stance, and the capability-based model slowly started to be incorporated until it became part of the ministerial guidelines and, ultimately, of the army's strategy design (MDN, 2013b, p. 135; 2014a, pp. 136-7; Lara & Jiménez, 2019, pp. 42-3).

The second building block that preluded the army reform and which has been overlooked is the policy that aimed to modernise the armed forces' education system, formulated and issued when Santos was minister of defence. Indeed, in 2007 the MDN released an education plan concerning the need to increase professionalisation in the security forces (MDN, 2008c; Cardona, 2017, p. 79). The purpose of the Project for the Modernisation and Restructuring of the Education System of the Armed Forces (SEFA, for its acronym in Spanish) was that officers from all services would be prepared not only for combat-related skills but also for professional, management or technical tasks. Moreover, the army created the education, doctrine and science and technology directorates to foster developments in these areas (EJC, 2009a).

Among other expectations of these initial reforms, all regular soldiers should pursue technical studies to facilitate their reintegration to productive life; professional soldiers should additionally complete their high-school education; NCOs must have a technological career and specialisation, and officers must pursue masters and even doctoral studies (Vargas & Álvarez, 2013, p. 344-5). Within this framework of modernising the military instruction system, doctrine

and education acquired a much more formal character and organisational relevance in the army. Additionally, after observing that the traditional education centres could not cope with the whole of the demand for personnel training, in 2010, the EJC created the instruction, training and retraining battalions (BITER, for its acronym in Spanish) and, in 2012, it activated the brigade basic training centres (CEEB) in order to discharge the BITERs from the basic training for soldiers performing compulsory military service (EJC, 2014).

In this process of change, several civilian and military actors fostered and facilitated the reforms. Although they were not the only ones to participate in these reforms, some played a central role in their formulation, continuity and dissemination. A brief description of their professional careers follows, providing an understanding of their part in promoting the changes studied here, either from the defence sector or within the military institution. Additionally, this background information will be useful for the final chapter of the analysis, which addresses the influence of professional networks in disseminating reform ideas. After dealing with this matter, the chapter addresses the main milestones and elements of the reform and the chronology of decision-making.

Civilian and Military Actors Leading Change

Considering the high concentration of power in the Colombian executive, the president and head of the defence sector is key to the analysis. However, it is of particular relevance for this case, since Juan Manuel Santos was in charge of the sector for twelve straight years, first as a minister (2006-09) and then as head of state (2010-18). Born to the founding family of one of the country's largest newspapers *El Tiempo*, Santos belongs to the national traditional political elite. Although he enrolled as a cadet at the Naval Academy of Cartagena, he pursued no military career and instead graduated in economics and business. After holding high-level positions in Bogota and abroad, Santos was appointed as foreign trade minister, designee to the presidency –a *de facto* vice-presidency before the position was formally created– and was afterwards part of the negotiating team with the FARC in 1994 (see Wallenfeldt & Ray, 2020).

During his time at the helm of the MDN, the military delivered several major blows that substantially diminished the guerrilla top and mid-level ranks due to capabilities bolstered

in the last years. It was also during that period that the *falsos positivos* scandal surfaced[55]. Although elected president in 2010 under the premise that he would continue the legacy of former president Uribe, he invested his political capital on brokering a peace accord with the oldest and largest guerrilla group in the western hemisphere from the beginning of his tenure. This seemingly strategic shift earned him the fiercest opposition and criticism from his predecessor. The peace process also meant bargaining with different stakeholders, including the military sector, and involving international partners and organisations to endorse the negotiations. Moreover, his administration emphasised Colombia's participation and inclusion in multilateral organisations, of which NATO and the OECD are the most salient.

After a year in office, Santos appointed Juan Carlos Pinzón as minister of defence, to date the civilian with most years in this position (2011-15). Pinzón is an economist with a career in private financial corporations who served as Santos' chief of staff minister of finance (2000-02). In this position, he coordinated the MDN budget and joined the task force that formulated the democratic security agenda (Lasillavacía.com, n.d.). He was also Santos' deputy minister for strategy and planning (2006-2009) and chief of staff during the first year of his presidency (2010-11) (Pinzón Bueno, n.d.).

When appointed as minister of defence, the public opinion, members of the government and the public force underscored his family bonds to the armed forces: married to a daughter of a former military officer, his father and grandfather were both servicemen as well (Quintero, 2015; Balling, 2015). A "general without uniform" (KienyKe.com, 2011) or "general without stars" (Escobar, 2015) were some of the headlines chosen to highlight his closeness to the armed forces, although he never pursued a military career. When he served as deputy minister and during the Santos administration, he led the public force transformation and modernisation plans, supporting the strategic review that the army initiated and then transcended to the military forces.

Pinzón was one of the fiercest critical voices coming from within the government and more than once expressed scepticism regarding the FARC's intentions. Some dubbed him the "hardliner" of the Santos administration in what the public thought was a good-cop-bad-cop strategy. In May 2015, he was appointed ambassador in Washington as the successor of Luis Carlos Villegas, a former industrial leader who had participated in the Havana talks and who,

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[55] As Chapter 3 explained, this term has been used to refer to the illegal execution of civilians by members of the army to present them as military gains over the guerrilla.

in turn, was sent to Bogota to lead the defence sector. In 2017, Pinzón decided to run for president and based his campaign on overt criticism of Santos and the peace process, which did not deliver any substantial political result for him.

The coincidence and continuity in civilian leadership certainly played a role in creating the conditions for the army to undertake its reform. Beyond the political centre, prominent figures in the Colombian army fostered and developed the changes studied in the present work. During Santos' two administrations, a total of six generals commanded the ground force, some of which are worth mentioning here for their time in that position and their support for the reforms, in some cases also when promoted to the military forces' command. Gen. Alejandro Navas (EJC commander, July 2010 – August 2011) initiated the army's institutional transformation plan and parallelly led the formulation of the campaign plan to defeat the FARC[56]. Before this position, he was chief of operations of the military forces and commander of special operations, the JTF Omega and the FUDRA (Colprensa, 2010). Besides his vast operational experience, Navas also pursued studies in US military centres and ended his service as commander of the military forces (September 2011 – August 2013).

General Sergio Mantilla (EJC commander, September 2011 – August 2013) decisively supported the project aimed to reform the army's doctrine and the plan to envision the future of the force[57]. Mantilla commanded special forces units, the FUDRA and other tactical and operational elements throughout his career, before being promoted to chief army operations (Senado de la República, 2010, pp. 1-2). He also attended the rangers' course in Fort Benning and pursued advanced infantry studies and masters' studies in the US's National Defence University (2010, p. 2).

Mantilla was dismissed, allegedly because of tensions with Minister Pinzón, and Gen. Juan Pablo Rodríguez (EJC commander, August 2013 – February 2014) was appointed to replace him. After being at the helm of the land force, Rodríguez led the Colombian military, until his retirement in December 2017. He pursued command, general staff and rangers instructor courses at Fort Benning (Senado de la República, 2013, pp. 8–9). Gen. Rodríguez

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[56] The "Sword of Honour" plan, see reference below in this section.
[57] See reference on CEDEF below in this section.

was also planning director and commander of joint special operations, two divisions and several tactical units[58].

After Gen. Jaime Lasprilla's command between 2014 and 2015, Gen. Alberto Mejía was promoted to head of the Colombian army (EJC commander, December 2015 – November 2017). The eldest son of a former army commander who was also at the helm of the Colombian military forces, Mejía began his career as professional in military science. A US Army Ranger graduate, he afterwards pursued master studies in international security affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey; strategic studies at the United States Army War College (USAWC), Carlisle; and national security at the Colombian War College (Cancillería de Colombia, n.d.). In 2016 he became the 63rd member of the USAWC International Fellows Hall of Fame[59] (Diálogo, 2017; see also Martin, 2017).

Among other high-ranking positions, Gen. Mejía was commander of the rangers' and infantry schools, the special forces brigade, the education and doctrine command of the military forces, and director, army planning (Senado de la República, 2013, p. 10). During his tenure as commander, aviation and air assault division (2011-13), he was appointed director of the strategic review exercises[60], from which the army drafted the initial version of the Sword of Honour and, ultimately, the first steps of the reform. He was afterwards designated commander, joint special operations (2014-15), before he assumed as army commander; during 2018, he was commander of the military forces (Presidencia de la República [Presidencia], 2017).

Although not necessarily at the helm of the EJC, other high-ranking officers had a crucial influence on the changes that this chapter describes. For instance, Gen. Luis Fernando Navarro was army chief of staff between 2016 and 2018, leading the organisation's restructuring during those years and the doctrine and education centre's creation. Before holding this position, Navarro was director of the comprehensive action department and commander of the FUDRA, the JTF Omega and the joint special forces (CGFM, 2018). He also served as military attaché in Chile, where he also pursued studies at a civilian university. At the time of writing, since December 2018, Gen. Navarro is the military forces' commander

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[58] He commanded the operation against FARC leader Alfonso Cano, among others. Civilian and military sources confirmed his relevance in fostering the reform process.
[59] During this ceremony, Mejía proudly referred to the bonds between the two armies, by the example of the close cooperation between his father and then Capt. John Galvin, advisor to the EJC Ranger School in the late 1950s.
[60] See reference on CRE-i below in this section.

and, to date, has been interim minister of defence on two occasions[61]. Gen. Mario Valencia was army chief of staff (2019-2020) and commander, transformation army of the future (2016-2018). Before this position, he was the first chief of staff for planning and policies and led operational and tactical units (Comando de Transformación Ejército del Futuro [COTEF], 2016).

Two active brigadier generals had a salient role in the formulation and execution of the army reforms. Between 2018 and 2020, BG Juan Carlos Correa Consuegra directed the SOUTHCOM Exercises and Coalition Affairs (J7/9), as the first Colombian army officer to serve as an active member of this organisation[62] (MDN, 2017, pp. 86-7). Besides serving in special forces and cavalry units throughout his career, BG Correa Consuegra was head of army planning and transformation (2015-2016), the National Training Centre (CENAE) and the Tactical Retraining School between 2017 and 2019 (Senado de la República, 2017, pp. 18-9).

Correa Consuegra pursued a significant part of his studies and military career in US academies. He is a graduate of the peace and stability operations course at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, the US Army Ranger, Pathfinder, and US Armor Schools (Senado de la República, 2017, p. 18). He also holds a master of strategic studies from the USAWC and a master of military arts and science from the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) (William Perry Center, 2019, p. 2). Under his direction, the strategic review exercises continued to deliver advances that led to the army's structural and doctrinal reform. He also led the creation of the first combined arms tactical unit[63] and, since February 2021, leads the special anti-narcotics and transnational threats command.

Head of army planning and policy staff since 2020, BG Robinson Ramírez served as a member of the general staff of the Education and Doctrine Command (CEDOC), commander of this unit (2018-19) and the Army Logistics Command (2016-17) (Ramírez, 2018b, p. 12). BG Ramírez holds a master's degree in security and defence from the War College in Bogota. After completing postgraduate studies in logistics at the civilian Universidad de Los Andes in Bogota (2008), and the command and staff course at War College (2009), Ramírez was on

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[61] As explained in Chapter 3, in absence of the civilian head of the MDN, the commander of the military is appointed as acting minister. This happened in late 2019, when then minister Guillermo Botero resigned after a congress member revealed that eight children were killed in a bombing against a criminal organisation led by a former FARC member (see Rueda, 2019) and in January 2021, when minister Carlos Holmes Trujillo was in intensive care and died due to a Covid-19-caused complication.
[62] In the framework of the agreement between the United States Department of Defense and the MDN, regarding the assignment of Colombian defence personnel to the SOUTHCOM.
[63] See reference to FUTAM in section on structure in this chapter.

assignment abroad in Santiago, where he studied in civil universities[64] (Revista Ejército, 2017, p. 53).

Finally, retired Col. Pedro Rojas was the first director of the EJC doctrine centre (CEDOE) until October 2020, when he retired. He was awarded a distinction for academic research in 2016 to structure and implement the Damasco project, which led to the formulation of the new army doctrinal reference documents. His research monograph for the master's in national security and defence at the Colombian War College proposed a doctrinal reform in the EJC (Rojas, 2014), which set some essential conceptual bases for the Damasco doctrine. He represented the education and doctrine directorate in the Design Committee of the Army of the Future (CEDEF) in 2013 and was director of the Minerva Strategic Plan to strengthen education and doctrine in 2015 (Rojas, 2019, p. 16). Col. Rojas is also a columnist in national media and frequently publishes in military and civilian scholar publications.

As previously mentioned, these are not the only actors who participated in the planning and execution of reforms during the studied period. However, the abovementioned civilian leaders and military officers played a preponderant role in their development, and, consequently, their statements and publications are relevant for the forthcoming analysis. The next section delves into how the innovations and new formats were integrated into the organisation, the instances and the timeline in which they unfolded.

Chronology and Milestones of the Process

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the EJC took initial though decisive steps aimed to progressively shift the land force from a largely conscripted military towards a force of specialised and professional soldiers[65]. The two institutional advances in strategic planning and education received relatively low attention from the public. However, they set a relevant basis on which the army reform would develop in the next administration, triggered, accelerated and influenced by the factors that the next chapters thoroughly address.

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[64] He is a graduate of the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education, Universidad de los Andes, Chile (2010) and holds a MSc. in Logistics Systems Engineering, from the Universidad Católica de Chile (2010). He is also graduate from the Advanced Management Programme of the Universidad Javeriana (2015).

[65] Although this is not the first time that the executive in Bogota took decisions towards professionalisation -see for instance the reforms addressed in chapter 3-, the plans and policies referred to in this section are related to the studied doctrine, education and force structure reforms.

Indeed, decisions were made to increase professionalisation, putting education and doctrine in a more central place for institutional endeavours, while also being considered a crucial capability to foster and improve the force's performance. During the first years of the Santos administration, the EJC had advanced faster in the formulation of the education and planning reform and, especially, the doctrine component, later adjusting it to the ministry's capability-based planning guidelines and the education plan framework (Herrera, 2015a; Santos Pico, 2016). As Gen. Valencia and others affirm[66], the Colombian land force had already begun its transformation plan, while the MDN was catching up with the army's pace:

> In 2012, the Minister of National Defence began a capacity planning process that contemplated a joint vision that seeks to enhance the strengths acquired by defence sector institutions in previous years. The army was already designing its transformation plan and aligned it with the Ministry's process in 2012 through the Strategic Committee for Transformation and Innovation (CETI); in 2013, it incorporated these guidelines to the CEDEF (Valencia, 2016, p. 32).

Moreover, progress in the army capability-based planning went further, while it was only until 2018 that the ministry formally issued it as an institutional guideline (MDN, 2018c). Following these decisions, in 2010 the head of the sector coordinated a prospective assessment with the different services of the armed forces to foster modernisation and transformation of the security and defence sector (MDN, 2011b, p. 56). The question about the future of the public force began to be consistently addressed from the executive, although not publicised. Official documents depicted this adjustment as a response to the improvement in security matters in the country, budgetary issues, and expectations on more efficient, coordinated and joint planning between all fighting organisations (MDN, 2014a, p. 8).

However, for the Colombian army, the process took a relatively independent, much more dynamic path[67]. The EJC high command appointed 150 active and retired members of the military, as well as civilian advisors that worked close to the sector, to carry out a thorough assessment of the threats and security environment in the country. This exercise focused on designing a new military strategy. In 2011, the then commander of army aviation and air assault, Gen. Mejía, was commissioned by Minister Pinzón to lead the first of six strategic review

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[66] Velasco (2018) and interview with Mikel Ibarra also confirm that the army had progressed in the planning and prospective exercise, and it was afterwards that it aligned its process of change with the MDN model.
[67] Military and civilian sources confirm that the EJC took the initiative of conceiving and implementing the reform (Interviews with retired Gen. Eduardo Herrera, BG Óscar Tobar Soler, Mikel Ibarra, Rocío Pachón).

committees (dubbed CRE-i for its acronym in Spanish). Working as a think tank, the CRE-i focused on analysing the correlation of forces with the main threat, FARC, and how to achieve a definite victory over the insurgent group (Ibarra, 2017, p. 57).

Mejía guided the first versions of the CRE-i before being appointed army commander. Both at the helm of the land force and later, as commander of the military forces, he continued to foster these and other reforms that emerged from the strategic review. Among other elements, the participants of the committees carried out a prospective analysis that contemplated at least four plausible, not mutually exclusive directions in which the strategic environment could evolve: the criminalisation and splitting of the FARC into smaller structures; a negotiated peace; an overall degradation of the conflict; and the FARC's military strengthening (Pizarro, 2018, p. 363).

A further novel element that contrasted with previous war planning efforts was conducting an analysis of the guerrilla as a system composed of interconnected sub-systems that should likewise be countered and attacked from different perspectives (MDN, 2015a, p. 43; Correa Consuegra, 2017a)[68]. The officers leading the strategic review concluded that it was necessary to adopt a joint, coordinated, inter-institutional and differential approach to accelerate the threat's defeat. Moreover, the participants acknowledged that both operational and non-operational aspects needed to be encompassed to prepare the army for future threats or strategic scenarios (Ibarra, 2017).

This process gave birth to the series of war plans named Sword of Honour (*Espada de Honor, 2012-2016*)[69]. These plans attempted to attack the 'rival system' in coordination with other civil and military state agencies, ultimately preventing the FARC from using the peace talks as a platform to gain political and military strength as it had been in the past (Rodríguez, 2018). The evolution in the security environment and the political framework in which this strategy was implemented will be discussed in the forthcoming analysis as central factors that influenced the studied reforms. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning here the peculiarity of the two intertwined paths towards military change.

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[68] The main sub-systems encompassed in the differential strategic stance were command and control; structures; methods or modus operandi; environment or territorial space; raw material or resources; and workforce or militants.
[69] In 2017, the Military Strategic Plan for Stabilisation and Consolidation, Victoria, and in 2018, Victoria Plus, would follow the Sword of Honour plans, with an emphasis on post-conflict threats.

Interestingly, the adaptative, strategic review that the Colombian army implemented led to more significant doctrine and force structure reforms. Indeed, the first CRE-i did not only examine the threats and the security context: the army itself as an organisation was subject to evaluation and prospective analysis (Pérez Laiseca, 2016). Consequently, experts gave special attention to aspects that could bolster EJC capabilities and promote a more efficient institutional design.

According to interviewees who participated in these committees[70], for the first time in decades of devoting their utmost attention to operations and combating irregular groups, officers in charge of planning, intelligence and other key areas focused on structural aspects of the force and long-term planning. In other words, army leaders had the opportunity to invest time and intellectual endeavours in organisational analysis instead of only focusing on adapting to threats' development.

Between 2011 and 2016, a yearly strategic committee took place following this methodology to conduct the process that would result in strategic adaptation, and subsequently in the army reform (MDN, 2015a, p. 73; 2018a, pp. 27-8, 76-8). There were also thematic committees. For example, the fifth CRE-i focused on comprehensive action and unified action (CGFM, 2017, p. 17), and the sixth, which took place in 2018, served to hand over the process of change to the new military forces leadership (EJC, 2018).

In 2012, the EJC created the CETI, which focused on the army´s operational development and how it could optimise its performance (Correa Consuegra, 2017a). A year later, a similar team was appointed: the strategic committee to design the future force, CEDEF (Rojas, 2016, pp. 36-38). This advisory group conducted capability-based planning to identify and foster the army's strengths to face future threats and challenges, in line to have a multi-mission force (Ciro & Correa, 2014, pp. 25-6; Velasco, 2018, p. 36). Later, in June 2013, with President Santos' announcement that Colombia was interested in establishing a strategic partnership with NATO, the CEDEF had the additional task of designing the army's transformation plan to align it with the Alliance's standards[71].

With the perspective of increasing cooperation with other military organisations, interoperability led the officers responsible for updating and modernising doctrine and

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[70] Interviews with Jean Carlo Mejía, retired BG William Pérez Laiseca, Col. Pedro Rojas, and Rocío Pachón.
[71] According to Gen. Mejía, the goal was that the army be on a par with military organisations that are member of the North Atlantic Alliance (Colprensa, 2016).

education standards in the EJC. Consequently, in 2014 the army registered a new initiative, named Damasco, at the DNP, to appropriate resources and ensure sustainability for the project. This endeavour's main goal was "to review, update, organise and make the doctrine of the Colombian army interoperable" (Rojas, 2017, p. 114). Damasco was later included in a broader plan, Minerva[72], which was aimed at improving military education and doctrine (Rojas, 2015a, p. 43).

As a result of the first phase of the Damasco project, during the second half of 2015, the army's fundamental manuals (MFE) were elaborated. This series of reference documents contain the current conceptual guidelines for the ground-based military branch. A year after, then army commander, Gen. Mejía, designated a high-level team of military professionals, both active and retired, and civilian experts to further develop the new doctrinal guidelines. The next section of this chapter will describe the content of these manuals.

Parallel to the conception of the new fundamental principles for the army, in 2015, a group of reserve officers was designated to assess the army's organisational and force structure. This board of high-ranking officers formed the advisory group for army transformation (GREAT, for its acronym in Spanish)[73] and analysed how the force growth between 1998 and 2014 impacted its efficiency and effectiveness (COTEF, 2018; EJC, 2015a). According to this assessment, the steady and rapid increase in troop size, territorial deployment, operational units, and resources, hindered command, control, operational and strategic supervision (Pérez Laiseca, 2016). The GREAT submitted this result to the army command for revision and approval and was ultimately issued as the Resolution 0004 of 2016, which reforms the organisation and force structure (EJC, 2016a; 2016b).

Even though the army had been defining relevant change elements since the beginning of Santos' administration, it was only until October 2015 that the reform was made public and began to be socialised. The choice of timing to publicise the new doctrinal approach and the decision to restructure the army raised suspicion from diverse political sides. Few days after the peace delegations in Havana declared that they had reached an agreement in transitional justice, and it was evident that a final accord would be signed, Gen. Mejía shared the army reform with the public in an academic forum at a civilian university in Bogota.

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[72] This plan encompasses a total of thirteen projects and 46 proposals to improve and modernise the army's training, education and doctrine system.
[73] See Pérez-Laiseca (2018, p.9).

A series of media interviews and a communication campaign from the land force aligned efforts to disseminate the new doctrine's content and purpose. However, a sole debate in the chamber of representatives was the institutional opportunity to discuss and ask about the army's decisions, buttressed by the civilian-led MDN (Cámara de Representantes, 2015). During this session, the minister, along with the military forces and army commanders, insisted on the independence of the new doctrine from the political decisions in the country and the peace talks.

The different institutional change elements were finally condensed in August 2016 in the Transformation Plan Army of the Future (PETEF), which drafted the institutional reform to transform the Colombian army into a multi-mission force (Mejía, 2016b; MDN, 2016a, pp. 20-21). In this document, the EJC purports to be ready for a wide range of tasks in areas such as defence, public order, risk management, development, environmental protection, and international cooperation (Fuerzas Militares, 2017). The following sections will describe in detail the content of the doctrine and structure reforms.

4.2. Doctrine and Education Reform

The doctrine reform that began in 2014 with the conception of the Damasco project and resulted in the publication of the new army reference documents between 2015 and 2018 encompasses changes related to how doctrine is organised and communicated, concepts that have consequences in warfighting, and the kind of roles that the EJC is to fulfil. Overall, this dimension of the recent military change in the Colombian army has three essential elements that differentiate it from previous tenets of the land force: preparedness for a wide range of missions; a stronger emphasis on operations other than war; and operational concepts that foster flexibility and mobility and unified action. The main goal of these changes is to transform the army into a multi-mission force that operates with other civilian and military organisations (MDN, 2016b, p. 22).

Doctrine-related texts, handbooks and official documents guiding operations are no novelty for the members of the EJC. Nevertheless, they had been entirely classified material,

with no versions available to those outside the military sector[74]. Even primarily general aspects were considered sensitive material. Consequently, the fact that the Colombian army published and made explicit efforts to socialise its warfighting guidelines and doctrinal concepts with the civilian general public should not be underestimated.

Beyond being a bare formality, this detail is far from minimal in a social and political context where even the term "military doctrine" has often automatically raised criticism and associations to negative referents[75]. Whereas the new manuals share no critical issues related to national security, this is a first proactive effort from the EJC command to make fundamental instruction material and concepts available for all citizens, decision-makers and other organisations (Centro de Doctrina del Ejército [CEDOE], 2016a, p. 4). Secrecy and aversion to share such material have long caused suspicion and usually negative assumptions, hindering oversight and debate. In this respect, it is a formal, initial, albeit significant step towards transparency and accountability.

The communication and diffusion strategy of the Damasco doctrine deserves a few additional remarks. First, the documents have been made available on online platforms and actively publicised through social media and digital applications (Rojas, 2017a, p. 116). Additionally, Gen. Mejía released the reform in October 2015, during an academic forum where civilian experts discussed with former and active military members the future roles of the public force in the country (Universidad del Rosario, 2015). "Understanding the strategic moment that Colombia goes through, I have decided to undertake the first comprehensive review to the whole of military doctrine", he affirmed (EJC, 2015c, 5:45). The national and local press reacted to the declaration, and a strong media campaign followed to raise additional awareness of the issue (for instance, El Colombiano, 2015a; El Tiempo, 2015b; Vanguardia, 2015; Semana, 2016b).

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[74] Some early examples of these reference documents are the counter-guerrilla rules of engagement issued in 1969 (*Reglamento de combate de contraguerrillas*, EJC-3-10), the 1977 urban guerrilla and counter-guerrilla handbook (*Manual de Guerrillas y Contraguerrillas Urbanas* – EJC 3-18) and the handbook for combating bandits or guerrillas (EJC-3-101). In the years before the doctrinal reform, new guidelines had been issued although kept classified, for instance, the 2009 army staff handbook (*Manual de Estado Mayor*, EJC 3-50), the army field manual (*Manual de Campaña para el Ejército*, EJC 3-20), and the 2010 irregular combat operations and manoeuvre regulation (EJC 3-10-1). The non-classified versions of these documents, where available, were not accessible for civilians outside of the sector.

[75] The most known referent for the Colombian scholar and civil society circles that have been critical of doctrinal guidelines in the EJC is the so-called *doctrina de seguridad nacional* ("national security doctrine"), which was linked to the Southern Cone dictatorial experiences. The strong influence of the US army handbooks has also been a source of distrust.

Indeed, it received particular attention not only for the remarkable fact explained before but also because of the country's circumstances. By that time, the government and FARC delegations discussed the most intractable issues in Havana and, in previous months, the guerrilla had insisted on a military restructuring and doctrine reform as part of the peace process. Consequently, the public understood the revelation of a military reform as a response to a forthcoming ceasefire with the rebel group or even as a concession to their demands. The army commander had to clarify that this was not the case (El Colombiano, 2015b; Bonilla, 2016)[76].

Far from asserting that the army led no previous intensive communication campaigns, the intention here is to underscore that changes or reforms had not been publicised in such an active and massive way. Moreover, the army has increased contact, openness, and cooperation with civilian experts and, particularly, academic institutions[77]. Another exercise to foster exchange with civilians took place between 2016 and 2018, as a series of regional dialogues in cooperation with the National University and UNDP in Colombia and other international and local organisations, to socialise the reforms with the local community (UNDP, 2016; COTEF, 2017a, p.9; Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2018). However, the result of these exchanges is not evident and was restricted to three capital cities in the central departments of the country: Bogota, Villavicencio and Ibagué.

Beyond facilitating access to the doctrine's content, the name selected for the project that encompassed these changes, Damasco, entails a message that has also been slightly overlooked. Documents and interviews with army officers that led the doctrine reform refer to Paul the Apostle, who according to the Christian gospel, converted in the city of Damascus (CEDOE, 2016a, p. 1; Stenson, 2018). While explaining this name's choice, the reference documents explicitly allude to the conversion from the "bad" Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted Christians, to the "good" Paul the Apostle[78], who devoted the rest of his life to teaching the gospel.

This rhetorical device aims at reinforcing the message of an army that adopts an entirely new approach, that renewal in the military thought and values has occurred (Rojas, 2016, pp.

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[76] This point will be further elaborated in the next chapters when analysing the factors that influenced the reform.
[77] Interviews with Henry Cancelado, Jean-Carlo Mejía, Eduardo Pastrana, retired BG William Pérez Laiseca, Eduardo Pizarro and Alejo Vargas.
[78] In his introduction to the doctrine reference document MFE 1.0 Army, Gen. Mejía stressed this shift using the terms "wrong" and "good" to refer respectively to the past and the future after the doctrinal change (CEDOE, 2016b).

37-8). Additionally, it seeks to convey the meaning of "spreading the gospel", in this case, the new army principles and concepts (Acore, 2016a). Using a central figure of religious connotation is no coincidence in a country where, albeit officially declared a laic state, the praxis in many political and social organisations is still strongly marked by catholic and, with rising influence in past decades, evangelicalism. The Colombian military forces are no exception to this[79].

Besides resorting to symbology and similes between "preaching", "conversion", and the diffusion of doctrine in religious and military contexts, this holds close relation to the army's relation with society. According to the officers who led this reform, legitimacy should be at the centre of the new doctrine and the overall spirit of the reform[80]. Consequently, civil-military cooperation and units related to comprehensive action were given a higher and more central role in the force hierarchy and the education reform, as will be described below.

Another matter of form with operational implications is the standardisation of the several reference manuals and the adoption of codes, terminology and hierarchy for the doctrinal material. According to interviewees[81], the previously existing documents that guided the EJC training and operations were far from being systematically organised and sometimes too detailed to be named doctrine or not adjusted to the local strategic context (see Stenson, 2018). Moreover, they were mostly campaign manuals and sometimes literal translations from the US army's material[82]. A further problem identified by officers who participated in the strategic committees and interviewed for this research was that incorporating bottom-up lessons learned on the battlefield to doctrinal and education inputs lacked systematicity.

Finally, the potential of multiplying or integrating new knowledge acquired by high-ranking officers during international training and mobility experiences was more than often lost when coming back home. They were appointed to the operational units or commands on the ground straight after their return, without retrieving valuable lessons as input for curricula

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[79] The motto of the JTF Omega is "God and Victory" and the army has had several in the same line: "Fatherland-Honor-Loyalty. God in all our actions", "Faith in our cause" or "God in all our actions and absolute faith in our cause" (see Rojas, 2015b). Colonel Rojas also affirmed: "From the very dawn of our formation schools, absolute faith in God is part of the military DNA" (Rojas, 2017b).

[80] Civilian experts that participated in the strategic review and advised the doctrine reform also underscore this idea (Interviews with Rocío Pachón and Erik Rojas). Legitimacy as centre of gravity will be addressed in the forthcoming analysis.

[81] Interviews with BG Óscar Tobar Soler and Col. Pedro Rojas.

[82] Interviews with Henry Cancelado, Juan Pablo Gómez and retired BG William Pérez Laiseca.

in the war college or education directorate in Bogota[83]. The EJC aspires to tackle these shortcomings with the new lessons-learned model implemented with the reforms and a more systematic, formal way of developing and updating doctrine upon experience on the field.

It would be erroneous to state that this is the first effort to renovate doctrinal concepts in the EJC (see, for instance, Cabrera & Mazo, 2016). However, it is evident that since the implemented reforms, the Colombian army strives for a more modern and standardised approach to the matter. In this respect, the importance of interoperability should be stressed, as will be thoroughly addressed in Chapter 7. Following the US army code system, concepts and guidelines, the new doctrine should facilitate the cooperation and coordinated action with armies from other allied countries, for instance, in the framework of the NATO strategic partnership, an agreement the government was working on since the beginning of the Santos administration, as the president announced in 2013. The next lines overview the content and organisation of the new EJC reference documents.

The New Doctrinal Manuals

As previously mentioned, the Damasco project was conceived to renovate and restructure the army's doctrine. The army's fundamental manuals were the first documents to be issued[84], providing the essential elements for land warfare, the army's institutional philosophy and values (Rojas, 2017 p. 116). The EJC now has two capstone reference documents, MFE 1.0 The Army and MFE 3-0 Operations, which contain the central concepts that unify and frame the development of the other hierarchical categories of the manuals. These capstone documents intend to explicitly connect the land force doctrine with the national grand strategy and link the joint military doctrine and the army doctrine (CEDOE, 2016a, p. 12).

Additional to these two documents, 15 fundamental manuals were published and classified at the first level of the new doctrine, to provide the principles guiding the operational and generating force army units. On the second level, for each MFE a fundamental reference

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[83] Interview with BG Óscar Tobar Soler.
[84] The MFEs are 17 reference documents. They were presented by the army's high command on August 5 2016, in a special ceremony at the Military School of Cadets. They are available to the public at the CEDOE website in: https://www.cedoe.mil.co/centro_doctrina_ejercito_nacional_colombia/doctrina/manuales_fundamentales_ejercito_mfe

manual (MFRE)[85] expands and specifies the tenets and key concepts of its corresponding issue, as well as their underlying operational concepts (Rojas, 2016). These handbooks deal with topics such as the principles of the military profession, terminology and symbols, intelligence, operations, offense and defence, stabilisation missions, support to the civilian authorities, leadership, among others.

The third level is formed by the army campaign manuals (MCE)[86], which codify tactics and procedures and underpin the contents of the MFEs and the MFREs. They address the warfighting functions and the various steps to develop the army's operational expertise in a detailed manner. MCEs target the conduction of training for operations. Finally, the manuals of army techniques (MTE)[87] are at the fourth level, where the techniques and procedures developed in the theatre of operations and training centres are detailed. Each MTE derives from multiple existing sources, military publications and documents of the army's instruction, training and operations units (CEDOE, 2016a, p. 14).

Concerning the impact that the content of the recent EJC doctrine change has in warfighting, the ground force introduced two new concepts: unified land operations (ULO) and mission-type command. (Gómez, 2017; Rojas, 2017a, p. 117-8). None of these innovations is of the army's own making. However, they introduce new approaches to operations and command in this military organisation (Espíndola, 2016, p. 19). The ULO concept aims to provide the Colombian military readiness for a wide range of military missions, in which the army integrates their actions and synchronises capabilities either with other services, state agencies, or with allied countries and multinational forces (Lara & Jiménez, 2019, p. 42). In short, it is the basis for joint, coordinated, inter-agency and interoperable action.

Consequently, the EJC integrated mission-type command to promote flexibility, initiative and speed in decision making and action on the battlefield (Rojas, 2016, pp. 39-40; Jiménez, 2018). These concepts should apply to all types of operations adopted by the land force: offensive, defensive, stability or defence support of civil authorities. Moreover, they should facilitate engagement in combined arms manoeuvre, which, in turn, is related to force

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[85] The MFREs ("*Manuales Fundamentales de Referencia del Ejército*") are available at: https://www.cedoe.mil.co/centro_doctrina_ejercito_nacional_colombia/doctrina/manuales_fundamentales_referencia_458641

[86] These handbooks remain classified and of restricted access. See: https://www.cedoe.mil.co/centro_doctrina_ejercito_nacional_colombia/doctrina/manuales_campana_ejercito

[87] Also classified material. See: https://www.cedoe.mil.co/centro_doctrina_ejercito_nacional_colombia/doctrina/manuales_tecnicas_ejercito

structure changes addressed in the next section. The mission-type command should facilitate further flexibility and subsidiarity in executing operations and rapid decision-making at the operational level (Zabala, 2017).

As can be inferred from the previous lines, the revision of the Colombian land force's doctrinal basis orients it towards a multiplicity of strategic scenarios and missions. Since the traditional role of the EJC has been far from the regular tasks and focused on irregular, domestic warfare, a noticeable shift is the will to prepare the army for eventual inter-state conflict. Likewise, beyond facilitating guidelines and training material exclusively for warfighting functions, the new doctrine also provides a basis for peacekeeping and stabilisation scenarios.

A last element of content worth mentioning is the integration of armoured warfare concepts which are also novel to the EJC, a traditionally light-armoured force. Why and how these elements were incorporated into the new army doctrine will be addressed in Chapter 7. It is nevertheless noteworthy that, without yet having the equipment or even the strategic scenario for such a type of deployment[88], the Colombian ground military begin to prepare towards this type of warfighting.

Adjustments in Education to Match the Doctrine and Structure Reforms

In 2013, the EJC issued a series of directives and policies to foster training and instruction (Velandia, 2014). Within this path towards modernisation and enabling a multi-mission force, the army created several new training centres and units, giving a central role to the force's education and professionalisation in this transformation plan (Herrera, 2015b; Ramírez, 2018a). Then minister Pinzón launched a broader reform plan, called Minerva, publicised as the "modernisation roadmap" of the military for the next 15 years. It was initially conceived by the army's education and doctrine directorate and endorsed by the planning and transformation directorates (EJC, 2015b). The plan encompasses the initiatives and projects to modernise the Colombian ground force, bolster capabilities based on personnel development and transform it into a multi-mission force (Rojas, 2015a, p. 47; Correa Consuegra, 2019). The

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[88] This element is connected to the FUTAM and the hypothesis of an armed confrontation in the Colombo-Venezuelan frontier (Interview with Mikel Ibarra). The EJC has acquired a few capabilities for this unit.

executive appropriated a budget equivalent to 150 million USD for the Minerva between 2015 and 2022 (El Tiempo, 2015a).

A noticeable adjustment in education is creating units and coursework aimed at preparing servicemen and women for peacekeeping operations, domestic and international missions related to post-conflict duties. However, there has also been a significant degree of accumulative, continuous change in this area. For instance, in 2011, the EJC created its School of International Missions and Comprehensive Action (ESMAI), merging the school of support to international missions with the one for civil-military relations[89], which had already provided training in these areas two decades (ESMAI, n.d.).

Parallelly, the executive submitted and achieved Colombia's adhesion as a voting member to the Latin American Association of Peace Operation Training Centres (Chinchilla & Vargas, 2016). Among other training programmes, the ESMAI has hosted the United Nations staff officer course in cooperation with the Brazilian Peacekeeping Operations Training Centre (Corrêa da Rocha, 2015, pp. 79-80), and it partnered with the US-based non-profit Peace Operations Training Institute for e-learning programmes[90]. Besides the focus on possible new missions abroad, the ESMAI kept and strengthened its focus on unified action with civilian state agencies to promote development (Karan & Niño, 2018, pp. 21 - 22)[91].

Following these decisions, in 2017, the army command created the training Centre for International Missions and Comprehensive Action (CEMAI) in order to prepare members of the land force to participate in operations abroad as well as domestic roles linked to development, civil-military cooperation and projects in coordination with other state agencies (Correa Consuegra, 2017a; Fuerzas Militares, 2017). The CEMAI comprises three units: the already existing ESMAI; the Human Rights and Legal Affairs School of the Army (ESDAE); and the Language School of the Army, ESIDE.

Besides the Damasco doctrine, another six leading proposals are part of the Minerva Plan. For instance, there is a component that fosters bilingual and postgraduate education for servicemen and women in Colombia and abroad (Barreto, 2015). Among the changes adopted in this respect, the army created its language school, and the target was set for 2022 to have 80

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[89] The *Escuela de Relaciones Civiles y Militares* (ESREM) existed since 1991, when a group of officers and NCOs interested in the field of civil-military cooperation began to teach doctrine on this matter.
[90] See https://www.peaceopstraining.org/programs/ntcelp/latin-america/esmai/
[91] Karan & Niño (2018) thoroughly explain how the curriculum of the ESMAI emphasises and integrates these topics.

per cent of the military members in foreign languages. Bilingualism has become an essential goal for the army –although hitherto an ambitious goal that requires intensive investment and progress in time. For instance, as of 2018, only 10 per cent of the public force officers' corps was bilingual (MDN, 2018a, p. 12), and, for the period 2017-2018, around 6.900 members of the land force participated in English training courses (see Revista Ejército, 2018).

The army also created two new units related to the doctrine reform and expectations over new roles and missions. On the one hand, the Combined Arms Training Centre (ESACE), located in Buenavista, La Guajira –northern department of Colombia bordering Venezuela. This centre aims to prepare and train the use of armoured vehicles and tanks. This training element is related to the increasing emphasis on jointness and unified land operations at a doctrinal level. Lastly, the army created an International Demining Centre (CIDES), which in 2019 joined NATO's network Partnership Training and Education Centres (PTEC) (Sepúlveda, 2019). As of 2020, the available courses of the ESMAI were mostly related to humanitarian de-mining and transparency and ethics, under the framework of the building integrity programme, also in close relation with the NATO global partnership agreement.

Equally important is the activation of a centre of lessons learned (DILEA, for its acronym in Spanish), where army elements should analyse combat, attention and disaster prevention, training, and administrative cases (DILEA, 2017, p. 38; Valderrama, 2018). The DILEA also aims to publish and disseminate lessons learned that allow organisational learning and feedback at all levels through the generation, adaptation and updating of army doctrine (Rojas, 2015a; Cabrera, 2016, p. 38).

Finally, the EJC command created four new arms, additional to the already existing artillery, cavalry, infantry, and engineers. With these reforms, the land force established the specialities of communications, military intelligence, air aviation and comprehensive action (ESMIC, 2017). Although these areas had existed for decades in the EJC, it was only until this education reform that they were assigned the level of an army branch where service people can be commissioned. In the view of Gen. Mejía, this aspect of the reform allows for a "better use of human talent, project a better army of the future, with specialities in which each member plays only one instrument of the orchestra but does it at the highest level of performance" (Bonilla, 2016).

Although ambitious and still too recent to witness a complete transformation, the army's training system responds to the goal of transiting towards a more professional and specialised force. Furthermore, the EJC has introduced the novel operational and command concepts in the instruction programme of members pursuing a career. Indeed, some of the central new doctrinal principles are already part of the War College's programme[92]. These include the staff (CEM) and the advanced military studies (CAEM) curricula, which officers take before being promoted to the colonel and general ranks, respectively (see ESDEGUE, n.d.-c).

To summarise, doctrine and army personnel education took a prominent place for the land force during the last decade. The shift towards capability-based planning and the strategic review that analysed the major threat and the military organisation itself as a system enabled a renewed focus on combat-support aspects. This, parallel to a decrease in the intensity of hostilities, allowed planning and intelligence officers to conceive the reforms studied with a focus on greater specialisation and professionalisation of the force.

Of particular importance is the army command's decision to facilitate public access to the new doctrinal documents, with a marked interest in socialising them with the civilian public outside the organisation. Besides, the reference manuals for the EJC have been organised in a systematic, hierarchical manner and with elements that facilitate interoperability with other military organisations. The content of the doctrinal documents issued between 2016 and 2018 includes the unified land operations concept as a basis for joint, coordinated, inter-agency and interoperable action. Moreover, it incorporates the mission-type command approach to enhance flexibility, initiative, and decision-making agility.

Adjustments in the education system comprise the creation of units and the inclusion of new doctrinal tenets in the War College curricula and programmes of other military training facilities. The will to prepare for combined arms, offensive, defensive, and stability operations, and support of civilian authorities is salient in this respect. Moreover, the land force seeks to prepare its personnel for international missions related to peacekeeping and actions beyond warfighting. Finally, by creating four new arms in communications, comprehensive action, intelligence, and army aviation, the EJC established additional specialisation options for commissioned officers in combat-support areas. The shift towards specialisation, tasks-division

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[92] Interviews with Armando Borrero, MG Francisco Cruz Ricci, Col. Fernando Farfán, Col. Pedro Rojas, BG Óscar Tobar Soler.

and incorporating new roles and missions can also be witnessed in the structural reform, which will be the subject of the following section.

4.3. Changes in Force Structure[93]

Recent changes in the EJC structure are related to both organisational and command aspects aimed towards efficiency and control and the land force's deployment. The command structure differs from the previous in that it favours a more horizontal model of command in the military hierarchy, enhances division of tasks and ultimately, facilitates specialisation within the different branches. The new arms created for commissioned officers are also reflected in the new structure of commands. Overall, this area of reforms unveils a combination of gradual and disruptive changes. However, some are still to be tested on the battlefield, for they constitute initial, preparatory steps towards the abovementioned new roles and missions. It also includes new operational units with deployment structures that focus on more flexibility and modular brigades that are proper for combined arms, while parallel aiming to convert previous ad hoc, mobile structures into stabilisation units that remain in the territory.

Analyses conducted by the GREAT and interviews with high-ranking officers reveal that the persistence of low-intensity, irregular warfare during decades in the country had left the land force with an excessive combat-focused structure and functions. This strong emphasis on operations neglected planning, support functions and institutional design. Usually described as a "combative force", the EJC commanders have experienced no proper interwar or peace period that allows them to project the army to the future and plan modernisation processes.

Certainly, the security environment has obliged the Colombian ground force to continuously adapt to threats' developments, sometimes more, others less successfully[94]. This reaction to conflict advances, in turn, resulted in a structure strongly focused on operations, overlooking the army's force generation and combat support functions[95]. Moreover, the strategic level and planning were overlooked while commanders steadily focused on the tactical

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[93] Unless otherwise stated, the source of information for changes in the army's structure is the Ruling N° 0004, February 26 2016 (EJC, 2016a).
[94] The progress by the military forces and, particularly, by the army during the late nineties and early 2000s described in the previous chapter, are one of the most striking examples of adaptation and modernisation parallel to ongoing, intense warfighting.
[95] Interviews with retired BG William Pérez Laiseca, November 2018, and Rocío Pachón, May 2020.

and administrative level –or were overwhelmed trying to manage all of the latter (see, for instance, León, 2016). In this respect, the structural reform issued in 2016 partially responds to a dynamic of internal, organisational improvement, emphasising management, command and control, and striving for efficiency (EJC, 2016a, pp. 9-10).

In terms of organisational structure, the previous arrangement concentrated all directorates under the army general commander and chief of staff. According to the structural reform leaders, this centralisation and direct control of all aspects of the organisation under the two most important staff of the hierarchy and the exponential growth of capabilities in the last decade had created problems of command and inefficiency in decision making. Moreover, planning and strategy had often been disregarded on behalf of administrative, bureaucratic tasks, especially at a high command level.

Consequently, the command structure was reformed. Instead of having operations and planning directly under the supervision of the commander of the army, the new configuration separated these functions from the main leading position of the land force and submitted them under the second army commander's responsibility. Three chief-of-staff (*jefatura de estado mayor*) were created: planning and policy, operations and force generation[96]. The former two management and action areas already existed in the Colombian army, under other name and position, while the latter is a new one.

Functions of logistics, maintenance, instruction and training, recruitment, health care, and infrastructure, now under force generation, were previously concentrated under the army general command, tasked with planning and conducting operations. The expressed aim of this separation of functions –and the fact that the army commander is not the first direct responsible in the chain of command for operations and army generation– is to achieve a more efficient and optimised way of controlling and leading the diverse processes of the land force (Bonilla, 2016).

The structural adjustments also concerned the army units, and some of them were put in place before the reform was made official. Specifically, previously existing elements related to planning, doctrine, training, intelligence, communications, comprehensive action, humanitarian de-mining, aviation and air assault were either reformed or created during the

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[96] A current version of the EJC organisational structure and a detailed description of each unit can be found in: https://www.ejercito.mil.co/conozcanos/organigrama

Santos administration. For instance, in 2013, the EJC created the Directorate for Planning and Transformation, JEPLA, to coordinate and supervise the restructuring process set in motion with the strategic review exercises.

Likewise, at the second army command level, the Directorate for International Relations (DIRIE) was reformed, and, in 2016, the EJC activated a Directorate for Compliance and Transparency (DANTE) under the supervision of the second army command. In the same year, the army created its army futures command (COTEF), reporting directly to the general staff, to continue leading this development through the PETEF (Ibarra, 2017). The COTEF guides and supports the Colombian army commander in the formulation of strategic policies, plans, and analyses to modernise capabilities.

Another unit with a central role in the new structure placed directly under the army command level is the Directorate for Strategic Communication (DICOE). Created in 2012, the DICOE was initially located under the Central Office for Comprehensive Action, and, with the 2016 restructuring, it was granted a higher level in the institutional design. Indeed, army leaders conceived the DICOE as a tool to better approach the organised civil society and the Colombian population in general (EJC, 2017a). This, in turn, relates to the will of the officers that carried out the reforms to bring the EJC closer to the public and put legitimacy at the centre of its strategy[97]. Notwithstanding the rising importance of this area, which is among the new arms in which officers can be commissioned, the focus has been until now rather on internal and external media and publicity campaigns than on strategic communications in a broad sense.

Regarding the division of tasks into the three mentioned areas that were beforementioned, the chief-of-staff for Planning and Policy (JEMPP) was created with the purpose of institutional management, coordinating intelligence and preparing operations. The chief-of-staff for Army Force Generation (JEMGF) now focuses on recruitment, training and equipment supply. Finally, the chief-of-staff for Operations (JEMOP) is responsible for leading the force towards territorial deployment. It was transformed by adding new divisions and commands according to the new roles and missions assumed by the army.

For this restructuring, existing departments and units were de-activated, others were renewed or underwent specific changes, but in general, this area presents the least novelty in

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[97] Chapters 5 and 7 will elaborate this point.

the reform. For instance, under the JEMPP, eleven directorates were created to deal with previously existing functions and planning tasks. Under the JEMGF, the army activated four new commands and re-located the engineers' command (COING) under this unit.

The Colombian army military engineers play a crucial role in operations. Before the reform, this area was a directorate, but since 2014 it was given the command level and is now one of the EJC specialities. Four major tactical units are part of the COING: the special brigade of military engineers, the construction brigade, the humanitarian demining brigade and the national centre against mines and explosives (the latter two also recently created). Over 8,000 military engineers are deployed throughout the Colombian territory and, among others, have cleared five municipalities of antipersonnel mines and built ten construction macro-projects (Military Engineers Command, 2017).

The personnel (COPER), recruitment and reserve (COREC), CEDOC, and logistics (COLOG) commands were all created in 2016. However, these were established aggregating new units and previously existing elements modified or relocated under these new commands. It is noteworthy that personnel, recruitment and reserve issues were given, compared with the previous hierarchy, a greater relevance in the army structure, which reinforces the aim of working towards army professionalisation.

Beyond these organisational adjustments, the army operations area underwent several changes, creating new units. The novelties are both in terms of additional elements and the type of structures. Regarding the deployment forces, the eight existing divisions were maintained, while the aviation and air assault division (DAVAA), established in 2007, was reorganised in 2014 and relocated under JEMOP.

Moreover, five existing task forces for irregular warfare were reorganised and given a new denomination as operative commands, emphasising stabilisation missions, therefore marking a shift from ad hoc structures towards more stable ones. In this respect, Col. Rojas explains that in the face of an eventual post-conflict inland strategic scenario and with the possibility of regular warfare, the force structure should emphasise combined arms brigades directed to more stable commands and less ad hoc units (2017, pp. 108-9).

Additionally, a new unit was established to support operations in the islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina, where the maritime territorial dispute with Nicaragua is still a source of tensions. Moreover, four combat support commands were created for

intelligence (CAIMI), counterintelligence (CACIM), communications and cyber-defence (CAOCC), and comprehensive action[98] and development (CAAID).

This last element deserves a more detailed description since the army created a new arm to commission officers in this area, and it received higher relevance in the force structure with this reform. Comprehensive action refers to army roles beyond warfighting, such as participation in development projects or coordinating activities with civilian and international agencies. For instance, the staff of major and minor operational units have a comprehensive action and development element that works as a liaison with civilian agencies and the community and, if necessary, with superior army levels (Comando de Acción Integral y Desarrollo [CAAID], 2018).

However, this point further stresses that the implemented reforms are partially a product of gradual, cumulative processes, and not necessarily all elements are a disruptive transformation. Indeed, several military journals and official documents refer to the Colombian army's precedent experience with psychological operations and civic-military action dating back to the 1960s. This includes issuing a joint strategy for comprehensive action of the military forces' general command in the early 2000s. Moreover, since the second half of the 2000s, there has been an explicit intention to drift away from mainly philanthropic activities carried out by military members in the communities affected by armed conflict towards more coordinated, inter-agency, civil-military cooperation[99]. Therefore, it is not new to see the army carrying out actions other than war in a strategy to gain legitimacy and undermine the guerrilla's social base.

Consequently, parallel to the implemented reforms and the intent to boost comprehensive action, in 2014, the army launched the *Fe en Colombia* ("Faith in Colombia") programme, which began as an alternative development initiative to substitute illicit crops (Ommati, 2016). The programme is part of a so-called qualitative leap in civic-military action to foster territorial governance, regional development, and state and military legitimacy. In the words of Rocío Pachón, former advisor of the army transformation process, "the role that the army seeks to fulfil through its transformation process related to comprehensive action is to contribute to the coordination of the state institutions that are responsible for the security and social matters, in order to act in a joint, coordinated and interagency manner" (2016, p. 152).

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[98] *Acción integral* is how the Colombian military has dubbed this approach to military operations beyond combat.
[99] This goal was the spirit behind the plan for consolidation in specific zones formulated during the second Uribe administration (for a thorough account, see Delgado, 2015b).

However, according to official documents, interviews[100] and the review of secondary sources, actions falling under the category of comprehensive action and the Faith in Colombia programme remain hitherto in the psychological-operations category. For instance, the activities that the army reports in this area range from facilitating logistics to health brigades in peripheral regions, going through hairdressing, shoe repair and recreational activities for children[101], to building or repairing houses, vegetable gardens, schooling and sports infrastructure, roads and bridges (MDN, 2011b, p. 38; Pachón, 2016, p. 151; COTEF, 2017b; Cruz, 2019).

Four new strategic deployment forces were established along with the FUDRA, which, as Chapter 3 mentioned, is a light-infantry air-assault unit created in 1999 for counterinsurgent operations. Additional to this existing tactical element, in 2016 the army created the special forces division, DIVFE, and the special forces brigade was transferred to the joint special forces command of the military in Colombia. The third element is the CECAT, the special command against transnational threats activated in 2015, reinforcing the land force's new approach to warfare.

Finally, a medium combined-arms task force, the FUTAM, was established in 2015 in the new Buenavista military fort, at the northern department of La Guajira, on the desert border with Venezuela (see Ibarra, 2017). The army commanders activated this element as a pilot version of the multi-mission, modular force, thought for future warfare scenarios, including international deployment, anti-tank and mechanised capabilities. (Hernández, 2015; Correa Consuegra, 2015). With two mobility and manoeuvre elements (infantry and cavalry), the FUTAM is the first attempt of the Colombian military towards a more interoperable, modular force-structure to put in practice the armoured warfare concepts and train personnel in the corresponding equipment (Rojas, 2014, p. 4).

Furthermore, the army plans to transition to a system of military forts and cantons and heavy, medium and light brigades (Correa Consuegra, 2015). At the tactical level, combined-arms, special forces, combat support and combat service support brigades are planned to be standardised and to facilitate logistical support. The EJC also aims at implementing the regiment as a new type of unit in the land force. This type of deployment is intended to facilitate

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[100] Interviews with Juan Pablo Gómez and Rocío Pachón.
[101] For instance, on one of the videos promoting the "multi-mission heroes" campaign, soldiers are also displayed as acrobats and illusionists in a so-called military circus. In fact, the EJC has around seven regional circuses, which are classified under the comprehensive action and development activities of the land force. See CGFM (2020b).

stabilisation and post-conflict related roles (Ibarra, 2017[102]; DICOE, 2016; Velasco, 2018, p. 39). However, this is still a reform that remains formal, for the ongoing challenges and persistence of irregular threats in the domestic strategic environment hinder any shift towards a more stable structure.

In short, the changes in the EJC structure comprise aspects of organisation, command, and force deployment. First, the new structure aims to favour a more horizontal model of command and favours the division of tasks related to administrative and combat support from the operational. Three chief-of-staff are now tasked with planning, operations and force generation. In addition, it encourages specialisation in tasks that are not necessarily directly related to combat and takes initial steps to develop capabilities in the army's new roles and missions.

In terms of deployment, the Colombian land force combines new tactical units with some existing ones. These elements strive for greater flexibility, modular brigades and agility, thus favouring combined arms action. There is also a development whereby ad hoc mobile units are transformed into stabilisation elements in the territory. The emphasis of comprehensive action and development-related roles is also materialised in a new command for this area. Finally, four new strategic deployment forces were activated, including the FUTAM, which responds to combined-arms objectives and border-control and defence.

4.4. Summary

The previous chapter showed that changes that took place in the Colombian land force during the studied period encompass elements of military adaptation, but also reforms to the force structure and doctrine, with implications in the roles and tasks it fulfils. Evidence points out that the army reform that emerged in the Santos' tenure had been gradually unfolding in the preceding years, particularly concerning the identified needs to enhance professionalisation, adopting capability-based planning and a strategic shift that increasingly emphasised joint,

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[102] When the implementation concludes, it should allow for resource optimization and an improved use of military power throughout Colombia's territory by coordinating three brigade types (heavy, medium, and light) with a territorial deployment based on forts and military districts (see Ibarra, 2017).

coordinated actions with the civilian authorities and legitimacy as a central goal of military action.

From its formulation and design, this implied a shift from an exclusive counterinsurgent towards a multi-mission army capable of being deployed for such type of warfare at a domestic level but also abroad, with a greater emphasis in joint actions with other civilian agencies or armed forces. Stabilisation, peacekeeping and development-related missions are now a crucial part of the new EJC guidelines and structure. These reforms began to evolve parallel to an education reform and a strategic review that the army conducted, with a significant leading role from the military in their conception.

Overall, the doctrine and education reform gives professionalisation and interoperability a significant role in bolstering army capabilities. The land force elaborated new doctrine reference documents and made the 16 capstone and fundamental army manuals available to the public. Among the concepts that were introduced into the army's principles and training material, unified land operations and mission-command stand out for their novelty compared to the previous referents in the Colombian ground force. Additionally, actions beyond warfighting were included, for instance, stabilisation missions, operations to support the civilian authorities. The schools and training facilities established in the framework of this reform reflect the growing emphasis on new roles and missions.

The force structure also witnessed substantial although initial changes, both at the organisational level and in terms of deployment. With the purpose of enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in command and control, the army created three chief-of-staff that now separately deal with planning and policies, operations and force generation. These areas were previously concentrated under the general staff. In doing so, the organisation shifted from a vertical to a more horizontal structure that favours specialisation. Four specialisations were activated (communications, military intelligence, air aviation and comprehensive action), providing additional career paths for commissioned officers. Finally, new tactical units that aim to favour combined arms were created.

In sum, the EJC seems to be willing to transit towards an ever more professional force that is prepared for a wide range of scenarios. From the introduced changes it can be inferred that flexibility and agility in decision-making have gained importance, not only for operations on the ground but also for managerial and force generation tasks. It has included in its doctrinal

and training curriculum aspects that aim to prepare the active personnel for operations abroad and more coordinated, joint action with civilian and international organisations. In particular, stabilisation missions and development roles were given a stronger emphasis, in view of possible post-conflict deployments.

The next chapter begins the analysis of what factors led to this specific type of army reform, focusing on developments in the security and political environment in which the Colombian land force operates.

5. Structural Developments that Triggered Military Change: Security and Political Shifts Affect the Institutional Balance of Power

As thoroughly addressed in the theoretical framework, this research builds the case for a comprehensive approach that understands military change as an outcome of multiple intervening variables. Developments in three interconnected dimensions –the structural, agent-related and organisational– are of interest for this work. In this sense, the research will unveil the political and broader institutional context where the reforms occurred, without overseeing the decisive role of individuals and organisational networks in shaping the particular configuration adopted for a reform.

The purpose of the present chapter is to test the first partial hypothesis (PH1) according to which *political and battlefield developments produced changes in the institutional balance of power concerning the military, which, in turn, led to rising uncertainty for the organisation*. Accordingly, the first section deals with the relevant evolving political and security environment factors, while the second one focuses on the link between this situation and the rise of uncertainty and ambiguity in the army's institutional context. Both parts will provide evidence on the structural changes and how relevant actors of the reform appraised them.

Indeed, evidence that serves to test the three partial hypotheses includes testimonials and statements by agents with influence and decision-makers to prove that the rationale to change is as suggested by the analytical propositions. Therefore, while this chapter also includes individuals' statements and visions on the situation, it does it to test that the sector's leaders assessed the ongoing shifts as the hypothesis predicts. As for the part of the analysis dealing with the agent-related variables (Chapter 6), it will inquire into motivations, interests and the interaction between civilian and military leaders. Finally, when testing the hypothesis on the organisational dynamics that influenced the content of the reforms (Chapter 7), decision-maker's viewpoints provide evidence on the link between the previously identified goals and the means chosen to adapt. In short, why the reforms implemented are preferable to counter the rising uncertainty.

5.1. Threats Adapt and a Volatile Correlation of Forces: Uncertainty in the Battlefield

Although this study focuses on the army reform during the Santos administration and, therefore, enquires into the events that influenced military change at that time, the analysis begins by retrieving crucial elements that unfolded in the period when the former president was minister of defence[103] and set the initial frame for change to occur. A combination of shifts in the correlation of forces that already began in those years, added to political decisions that gradually developed, altered the security environment and the status quo affecting the army. These interacting factors triggered a change in the EJC.

The Light at the End of the Tunnel?

The year 2008 marks a critical inflexion point for the military in Colombia. After decades of confrontation against irregular armed actors in the country, the security forces had a consistent offensive trend that inclined the correlation of forces in their favour (Echandía, 2011; Decisive Point, 2014; FUTCO, 2015; Ugarriza & Pabón, 2017). For instance, at the highest peak of the armed confrontation in 2002, the FARC had around 20,700 combatants and the ELN 4,100; after eight years of President Uribe's democratic security policy, the former had lost more than a half of its effective members and the latter two thirds (MDN, 2018a, p. 76).

Indeed, in less than a decade, the two largest guerrilla groups were substantially lessened, mostly due to state forces' operations and individual desertions. Particularly, a series of offensive actions by the Colombian military had successfully neutralised some of the FARC's top, second and third-tier leaders (DeShazo et al., 2009, p. 63; Ortíz & Vargas, 2013, p. 5). Consequently, its leadership structure was severely impacted. Additionally, the largest collective demobilisation by an illegal armed group had taken place in the previous years as the AUC submitted to the Justice and Peace process during the Uribe government. Almost 32,000 combatants entered the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration model, although splinter groups were already forming new criminal organisations (Nussio & Howe, 2012, p. 65).

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[103] As the first section in Chapter 4 mentioned, Santos was at the helm of the MDN during most of Uribe's second tenure, between 2006 and 2009.

Careful intelligence operations enabled Operation *Jaque*[104], which rescued military, police, and civilians held in captivity for years. These hostages constituted a sort of asset for the FARC to exert pressure on the government and international community –among them, former Franco-Colombian presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three US military contractors. "We are at the end of the end ... The time for the final effort has arrived" (Caracol Radio, 2008) was the optimistic expression that retired army General Fredy Padilla de León, then commander of the military forces in Colombia (2006 - 2010), used to describe the situation. Padilla de León repeated this phrase several times when giving his account on this and other previous positive results against the guerrilla, implying that the conflict against the insurgents was soon coming to an end (Bedoya, 2007; Ronderos, 2007). The situation gave the impression that the armed forces had turned the tables on the FARC and the end of this group was close.

This significantly positive strategic moment for the state forces marked the point when a plausible and soon-to-come military victory as the end of the armed confrontation took shape among Bogota leaders. Not only in the national media but also military journals and magazines, the words post-conflict, stabilisation, and even the need for transformation of the armed forces in the light of a peace scenario began to appear more often (Montoya, 2008; Borrero, 2008; Ramírez, 2007; Velásquez, 2011, p. 39). The FARC capabilities had been considerably eroded, and high-value targeting produced the desired outcomes after years of intelligence and increased coordination efforts between civilian and military agencies. Furthermore, the buzz of a possible negotiation with the FARC had been growing in the Colombian capital since the beginning of Uribe's second tenure (Porch, 2008, p. 153).

However, just when the army gained the upper hand, the main threat began an adaptation to overcome the series of setbacks it had faced and was able to lead the confrontation to a stalemate (Pizarro, 2018, p. 36). Indeed, the rebels were lessened but, far from being abated, the oldest existing guerrilla withdrew to its original peripheral regions and in 2008 developed its *Plan Renacer*: a rebirth plan to take power for other means of struggle (Ortíz & Vargas, 2013, p. 6; Cortés & Millán, 2019). Although the public first gave significant attention to the strategic adaptation of the FARC a couple of years later, at the beginning of

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[104] The code name of the operation, the Spanish word in chess for "check" as in checkmate.

Santos' tenure, the military themselves were aware of it as it unfolded, which led them to design and issue a new strategic approach (Ortega, 2011, p. 5; EJC, 2009b; Correa Consuegra, 2017a).

Moreover, the nature of the confrontation had changed. While the Colombian military focused on attacking the leadership structure, the FARC returned to a more defensive strategy and even allied with other smaller guerrilla or former paramilitary groups, splinter factions that were dissidents from the process of reintegration, for criminal purposes (Schultze-Kraft, 2009; Illera & Ruíz, 2018, p. 521; Idler, 2020). The public force offensive also obliged the rebel group to switch to a more regional, localised presence, causing fragmentation in the guerrilla structure (Decisive Point, 2014, pp. 6-7).

This shift and the gradual de-escalation of the confrontation that had already begun in 2006, marked a reduction in operations from the public force (Semana, 2015a). Indeed, while the state forces were still able to take the initiative in offensive terms, the FARC was resorting to its guerrilla warfare original tactics. The insurgent organisation opted for striking its opponent with attacks to military and civilian infrastructure, harrying, ambushes and landmines, and quickly withdrawing to their rearguard and cross-border sanctuaries (see Pizarro, 2018, p. 348; MDN, 2012a, pp. 13-14; Porch, 2014, p. 707).

Some analysts coincide when asserting that, after the positive development of the correlation of forces favouring the military, from 2009, the guerrilla had an upturn in its armed actions (Echandía, 2011, pp. 23-4; Cortés & Millán, 2019). Besides, the military leadership was aware that the terrorist group was focusing on attrition tactics and that the two forces at war had reached an impasse. As retired army Capt. Castaño[105] affirmed when describing the situation as a complex scenario for the public force: "The Farc (…) know that they will neither win nor lose, but they can cause damage" (Castaño, 2011). In this respect, BG Correa Consuegra emphasised the guerrilla's ability to adapt to the several war plans that had curtailed decreased its capabilities. According to him, this "reduced the impact of actions carried out by the armed forces, hence leading to a slight recovery period of the guerrilla" (2017a).

In short, the dynamics of the internal armed conflict had gradually evolved towards a lesser level of confrontation and a more geographically concentrated battlefield, with a positive

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[105] Retired Capt. Castaño was later advisor to retired Gen. Mora, member of the government's negotiating team in Cuba.

correlation of forces for the state. However, at the same time, the main security threat to the military in Colombia had been able to adapt and was successfully resisting a military defeat. The "light at the end of the tunnel", to which Gen. Padilla de León referred to when stating that the end of the armed conflict was near, was getting dimmer.

A Deteriorating Security Environment and Rising Rumours of Negotiations

Additional to the described backdrop, the context at the outset of Santos' government was uncertain and adverse for the army due to several reasons. The most noticeable of them was a widespread perception that the security situation had deteriorated since the administration shift in Bogota (El Espectador, 2012a; León, 2012a; Semana, 2012a). Although a long-term perspective showed that there was not a total resurge of the FARC or a return to the extremely negative strategic scenario of the nineties and the turn of the century (Llorente, 2011), the perception that the security situation was worsening kept on through Santos' first term in office. As a response, the official narrative was that this trend had already begun in Uribe's second tenure (MDN, 2011a, p. 16; El Espectador, 2012b).

Echoing this negative perception, experts in the defence sector who had previously worked for the government became the most critical voices against the incoming president. A leading figure of this growing disapproval was Alfredo Rangel, a former advisor to the MDN who had supported the Santos campaign. At that time, Rangel directed *Seguridad & Democracia*, a think tank dedicated to studying security issues in Colombia. A report published by this research centre accused the new administration of committing "seven cardinal sins" in national security (Centro Seguridad & Democracia [CSD], 2011).

During the first semester of 2012, the media reproduced the report's core assertions that there was a resurgence of the guerrilla attacks due to the lack of reliable security policies (for instance, El Espectador, 2012a; El Heraldo, 2012; Semana, 2012a). Besides appraising the strategy at that point as inaccurate, the report also referred to the president's "dangerous ambiguity" regarding possible peace talks (CSD, 2011, pp. 6-8). Another prominent critical voice from within the sector was Rafael Guarín, deputy minister of defence during the first year of the Santos presidency. During an interview in August 2012, he referred to the ambivalence of the security policy and overall strategy against the insurgent groups (Quevedo

& García, 2012). These civilian experts had high resonance in the media, military circles and, in general, in Bogota's security sector[106].

Along with the growing awareness of relapse in the security situation and evidence that the FARC was implementing its so-called rebirth plan, an institutional factor with operational consequences emerged as an additional source of disadvantage for the military. Both in political circles supportive of the armed forces and the military retirees' association[107], decisions regarding military justice and their legal framework were perceived as causing operational impediments for the troop (Llorente, 2011, p. 5; El Nuevo Siglo, 2011). Interestingly, this was not the first time that such statements had been made (see, for instance, Acore, 2008, pp. 48-9). In fact, some columns and articles written by retired military, interviews and statements by leading voices in the sector had asserted that the FARC had included lawfare actions in its overall strategy, through which it sought to harness the operational ability of the military (Mejía-Azuero, 2008, pp. 28; El Espectador, 2009b).

Santos himself had talked about this when presenting the security strategy as minister of defence (El Mundo, 2009). "We will also fight against the political and legal warfare of these groups that, being outnumbered in the military field, opt to infiltrate the civil society with militias", he affirmed in the presence of members of the public force (EJC, 2009b). However, this perception grew during his presidency, reinforced by other decisions that affected the military's institutional status quo.

The impact of the alleged lawfare against servicepeople was colloquially dubbed *operación tortuga* (operation turtle) to convey that security forces restricted their activities to a minimum, with no offensive approach as a result of legal incertitude and general demotivation (León, 2011a). Concerning this issue, retired army Gen. Jaime Ruíz Barrera, former president of Acore, affirmed that he believed "the worst thing that can happen to a commander is to deliver operational results because that immediately becomes a criminal process. This is why that insecurity feeling has been growing" (Ariza, 2015, p. 56). Consequently, the guerrilla resurge was depicted as a result of the military's legal uncertainty and the lack of a clear strategy against the adapted threats (El Heraldo, 2012; Ortíz, 2015b).

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[106] Román Ortíz, who then led the think tank Decisive Point, another source quoted in this analysis, was also openly critical of the government's security strategy.

[107] The *Asociación Colombiana de Oficiales Retirados de las Fuerzas Militares*, Acore. The next section elaborates on the political relevance of this pressure group.

Besides legal incertitude in the war against the FARC, the rise in criminal organisations that spread after the AUC demobilisation reinforced the imbalance against the EJC. Unlike the guerrilla, the illegal armed groups that formed from dissidents of the AUC demobilisation process –the so-called "criminal bands"– did not seek to dispute political power or legitimacy to the Colombian state but were interested in drug-trafficking and illegal businesses (Prieto, 2012; Duncan & Suárez, 2019). Nevertheless, they began to be considered the next main security threat in the country (Semana, 2011a), managed to exert territorial control in some areas and operated with irregular warfare tactics (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2007; McDermott, 2014).

This ambiguity posed the question of whether military or police forces and methods could legally better fight this rising problem. In fact, the initial response to this rising threat was mainly police-centred. As thoroughly addressed in Chapter 3, there has traditionally been a blurred line between police and military roles and missions in Colombia. Nevertheless, civilians, active and retired members of the armed forces have referred to the lack of clear legal parameters for such operations and the ambiguous approach to criminality as a source of uncertainty and risks for servicepeople (Cámara de Representantes, 2015, p. 66; Giraldo, 2018; Ayala, 2019).

Furthermore, while the FARC adapted to survive and was implementing its rebirth campaign, the insurgent group's leaders showed their willingness to move towards a political struggle. On the one hand, the organisation engaged more in militia tactics and building social and support networks, deepening the warfare's entrenchment amongst the civil population and the strategic challenges for the state forces (OACP, 2018a, p. 126). On the other, the top-ranking guerrilla commanders claimed that they contemplated a new viewpoint towards a negotiated peace. Indeed, they announced they would stop kidnapping, and in April 2012, they liberated the last ten military and police members in captivity (La Nación, 2012).

These gestures gave more impetus and credibility to increasing rumours of a possible peace negotiation. Already in late 2011, Santos had stated that he expected precisely this kind of sign from the insurgent organisation to begin peace dialogues (El Tiempo, 2011). Consequently, analysts and the media were inclined to report it as though the time was "ripe" for a new peace process (El Tiempo, 2011; Palou, 2011; Semana, 2011b; Ortíz, 2012; Peña, 2012).

However, this element raised scepticism, negative assertions and incertitude. Internal documents from guerrilla first-rank members accessed through military intelligence confirmed the increasing weakening of the rebel group and the need to transit towards political action (Ugarriza & Pabón, 2017; Cortés & Millán, 2019). In a paper about the military forces and previous peace efforts with the FARC, retired army Col. Carlos A. Velásquez referred to the hope for an end of the armed conflict as still unclear (2011). In his view, the guerrilla was weakened on a tactical but not strategic level: "In the early days of Juan Manuel Santos' administration (…) the strategic balance of the armed conflict with the FARC is ambivalent" (Velásquez, 2011, p. 39).

Therefore, beyond giving the impression that a window of opportunity opened for peace talks, these signs caused greater mistrust amongst the armed forces' top brass and civilian experts. The general opinion was that this could be another attempt by the FARC to gain political support, international media exposure and military strength through a failed peace process (Ortíz, 2012; Delgado, 2015a, p. 831). To this respect, former military forces' commander (1998-2002), army Gen. Fernando Tapias, affirmed during an interview with national media: "although we support the peace process, there is scepticism because of the FARC's attitude in previous processes, where they promised one thing and did the opposite" (Semana, 2013a). A prominent member of Acore, former army Gen. Ricardo Rubianogroot also overtly expressed the fears and critical assessment that the military had of the peace talks. According to him, the process had an "atypical evolution and (…) produced uncertainty, disorientation and concern in society and in the State" (2013, p. 19).

The government team that was secretly exploring the possibility of negotiating peace with the FARC was also aware of these risks. Indeed, they recognised that the guerrilla could use this chance to its advantage and that the process could affect the correlation of forces against the public force (OACP, 2018a, p. 223). Moreover, the defence sector's report to the Congress after a year of the Havana talks referred to the parallel conduction of war at home and peace talks abroad as a challenging, ambiguous task. It acknowledged the hazard that the rebels used the negotiations as a platform to gain military and political strength (MDN, 2013b, p. 7).

Among other aspects that reinforced mistrust, an alleged guerrilla summit took place in 2013, after the negotiating parts made public that they had reached an agreement for political participation in Havana. The FARC and ELN leaders held a meeting at the border between Colombia and Venezuela "to consolidate a common guerrilla front, thinking that sooner rather than later a negotiation process will begin between the Santos government and the ELN" (García, 2013). Thus, under the government's strategy to hold peace talks in the middle of the conflict, the rebel groups used this opportunity to show their ability to attack and gain leverage for the negotiations.

Furthermore, the FARC experienced internal divisions and at least two different factions with opposite negotiation stakes. While some inclined towards more political interests and were willing to go on with a peace process, those in zones where drug trafficking and other illegal business were lucrative had a more pragmatical attitude (Ortíz & Vargas, 2013, p. 8). This fracture became more evident as negotiations progressed, with episodes in which the guerrilla representatives in Havana declared unilateral ceasefire periods and the most radical fronts back in Colombia violated the truce (McDermott, 2014; Semana, 2016a).

Beyond the reasons to distrust the insurgent, the political leadership of the security sector in Bogota was also the target of critique for negotiating peace while war kept going. Most detractors affirmed that this was a source of confusion and a low in the troop morale (CSD, 2011, p. 6; El Tiempo, 2012; Rubianogroot, 2012a; Semana, 2012b). During the presidential campaign in which Santos was reelected, the opposition's candidate, Oscar Iván Zuluaga, expressed the same worries: "our servicemen are demotivated because we have a government that is complacent with terrorism (…) and he has not had political leadership to have once again a troop with morale that takes the offensive" (Neira, 2014).

Other voices of concern also pointed out the president's ambivalence in pursuing this endeavour as a flawed strategy. For instance, former deputy defence minister Rafael Guarín referred to a contradiction when Santos appointed Sergio Jaramillo[108] as the high-level presidential advisor for security: "what [minister] Pinzón does is taken away by Sergio Jaramillo, in the face of a passive President Santos (…). On the one hand, they demand more fighting

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[108] Sergio Jaramillo had also served as deputy minister of defence while Santos was at the head of the MDN. After his position as presidential advisor, he was appointed head of the negotiating team in Havana.

against the FARC, but on the other, they grant impunity for the guerrilla (Quedevo & García, 2012). A year later, Guarín would point out again to the executive's equivocal approach to security issues. "The president's lack of leadership for the policy concerning the public force adds to his ambiguous narrative: one day he speaks of more bullets and the next one he endorses peace" (Semana, 2013b).

Another critical issue was the decision to restore and diplomatic and commercial relations with the Venezuelan government, which critics regarded as an impediment in the war against the FARC and the ELN. The neighbouring country had turned into a "source of economic and logistical resources for the Colombian guerrillas, a place of recovery and rest, training its troops, and a transit corridor along the binational border" (CSD, 2011, pp. 11-12). Therefore, with the support of members of the regime in Caracas, the guerrilla had an ideal escape from the military pressure exerted on the Colombian side (Quevedo & García, 2012). Moreover, since the Uribe administration, the Colombian military has contemplated a possible international conflict with Venezuela as plausible (see Bitar, 2016, pp. 153-154; Rojas, 2017)[109].

MDN and EJC strategic documents revealed that officials in the sector shared the appraisal that the military operational environment was highly uncertain. They also provide evidence that this ambiguity was decisive for initiating an adaptation and a long-term transformation plan. For instance, the 2011 sector's strategic planning guide acknowledges that domestic threats were concentrating regionally and that they had been decimated but far from defeated (MDN, 2011a, p. 25). Additional documents argue that, between 2009 and 2011, the steady improvement in terms of security and significant success achieved over the internal threats lost momentum as a consequence of the adaptation strategy of the irregular groups (MDN, 2014b, p. 16; 2015a, p. 11 -19; 2018a, p. 57).

Colombian army officers that participated in the strategic review committees that led to the implemented reform concurred with this assessment[110]. For instance, Gen. Mejía stated that the reason why the strategic review committee took place was precisely the growing and worrisome trend in some indicators related to the FARC and the dynamics of the confrontation

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[109] Although tensions and frictions with the neighbouring country have long been part of the bilateral relation, it has not escalated to an inter-state armed confrontation. Documents and articles published by the military also refer to the possibility of regular warfare and the threats by actors in the neighbouring country.
[110] Besides the other references in these paragraphs, BG Óscar Tobar Soler confirmed during interview with the author that the strategic review encompassed the negotiation as a plausible scenario.

(Mejía, 2017). Then army colonel and chief of planning Correa Consuegra affirmed that the army conducted prospective studies to decrease uncertainty in the military sector, resulting in the army reforms (2015, p. 54).

Likewise, Col. Rojas, then head of the CEDOE, asserted that the new institutional design aimed at reducing incertitude, preparing for upcoming challenges through better structure and training (Rojas, 2015b, p. 48). According to him, the new doctrine should allow the army to be superior "in increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environments" (2016, p. 40). "We understand that the world becomes increasingly competitive and convulsed" (2017a, p. 115), affirmed Col. Rojas in another paper where he explains that this is the best approach to reduce ambiguity and complexity in the battlespace. He also maintained that:

> The emerging operational environment presents a complex range of threats, which requires the Force to operate under a wide variety of conditions. Although such a high degree of uncertainty hinders the formulation of a successful transformation strategy, the methodology developed in the CEDEF reduces both complexity and uncertainty by building gradual, sequenced and scalable development models (Rojas, 2017, p. 113).

Another central actor of this shift is Gen. Valencia, then head of army planning, who also explicitly linked the will to reduce uncertainty stemming from the complex threats' context with the new planning process and the emerging changes in the EJC. "Capability-based planning addresses the fact that future scenarios are increasingly uncertain, complex and volatile, a situation that also affects the operational environment in Colombia" (Valencia, 2016, p. 33). In his view, the threats and challenges that the EJC faces "do not have a uniform and permanent character; the environment is characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. It is necessary for the National Army to […] effectively respond to all those requirements that appear in this broad spectrum" (2016, p.30).

As previously mentioned, the risk of atomisation became more plausible during the peace talks. More importantly, before rumours of secret exploratory dialogues began to rise, the military could anticipate the probability that the FARC shifted from an illegal group to a political movement through a process enabled by the government. Indeed, when adopting capability-based planning, EJC officers recognised that it was likely that the FARC would

demobilise, at the same time that their fissure into smaller criminal gangs was deemed probable (EJC, 2011, p. 9).

Accordingly, denying any relation between the peace and the implemented reforms is more successful in confirming than refuting it. On the one hand, the military had sufficient intelligence information and experience to assess that scenario's probability, which is why they included it in their strategic review even before the talks were made public. On the other, the changes were not drafted in a peace accord, but this does not exclude the army preparing for this and other outcomes of the evolving strategic environment. However, as will be later addressed in this chapter, the shape these reforms took and the moment they were communicated hold a close relation to the implications of the dialogues for the land force.

To this respect, Gen. Mejía, then army commander, referred to the changing threats' environment and the unpredictability this entailed as one of the central findings of the strategic review carried out in 2011, which led to the design of new guidelines:

> the conflict changed much faster than the doctrine, thus generating gaps and uncertainty that affect the development of operations. This breach could be even worse, considering the prospective studies of the defence sector that foresee atomisation of the illegal armed groups and their articulation with international networks. Therefore, the institution must begin to optimise all the processes and procedures associated with the doctrine generation and updating cycle to respond quickly to changes. The Damascus Plan is the Army's response to close the gap in doctrine (Mejía, 2016c, p. 62).

According to internal EJC documents, this rapid evolution of the threats and the need to respond to a high level of unpredictability motivated the doctrine reform, changes in training and education and force structure (DICOE, 2016, p. 1; EJC, 2016b). Additionally, the changing and ambiguous security context and the goal of minimising the impact of that incertitude were emphasised by several army members when asked about the pertinence and drivers of the transformation plan of the EJC (FIP & COTEF, 2018, p.7).

To sum up, in the years surrounding the administration change in Bogota, shifts in the correlation of forces between the army and irregular groups represented substantial sources of uncertainty for the land force. First, the public force had attained operational superiority over the guerrilla, which was diminished in size and scope. Hostilities experienced a drop, while hopes over a military victory or a negotiated demobilisation increased. However, the main threat managed to resurge and continued to pose significant challenges to security. Additionally,

dissidents from former paramilitary and guerrilla groups, now grouped in criminal gangs, added to the complex domestic scenario. These battlefield developments, along with the high probability of peace talks, became a rising source of incertitude for the EJC.

Ambiguity emerging from the threats and strategic context that was the subject of this section was reinforced by a turn in the political context. This interaction of factors accelerated the perception that the status quo was challenged and, ultimately, motivated the changes that are the object of this study. The following lines address this before proceeding with how relevant actors resisted unfavourable variations and decided to adapt by undertaking military change.

5.2. Political Turn and Institutional Ambiguities

Variations in the institutional framework relevant to the army represented an additional factor of instability that, together with a volatile strategic context, caused a military change in Colombia. Although some elements had been slowly evolving in preceding years, a substantial shift in the government's rhetoric and policy agenda and a series of legal decisions reinforced the existing ambiguity and prompted actors to adapt.

Before further delving into the changing political environment and how relevant actors perceived it, it is necessary to explain the role of Acore, the retired military officers' association, and why their communiqués and publications are pertinent for this research. By tradition, training and discipline, active members of the armed forces tend to be very careful of their statements. It belongs to military culture in the country that they restrain from overtly expressing their opinions and rarely distance themselves from the official narrative.

Consequently, in Colombia, where the active members of the armed forces have no political participation rights, the retired military often play the role of spokespeople of active officers. Acore is considered a powerful pressure group both in civilian defence and military organisations. Moreover, it is well known that the executive informally sounds out their opinion on decisions that affect the sector and frequently considers their criticism or approval of policies.

An example of this was the appointment of retired army Gen. Jorge E. Mora[111] as the military representative in the government delegation in Havana. Learning from past experiences when the armed forces felt that civilians excluded them from peace processes, Santos decided to assign a retired army general as one of the plenipotentiary members of the negotiating team. The president gave Acore the prerogative to decide whom he should appoint. Besides being recognised for his vast operational experience, Mora enjoys respect amongst the active and retired military. Indeed, Mora also recognised that he accepted Santos' invitation to be part of the government's negotiating team precisely because the top brass and retired military members had agreed he would best represent them in Cuba (Rueda, 2016).

Another example was the meeting held between the Colombian government and Acore leaders in November 2016 to ratify the new transitional justice model re-negotiated after the plebiscite[112] (Acore, 2016b). A couple of weeks later, Acore publicly shared their discontent with the final agreement, judging that their demands were not taken seriously (El Nuevo Siglo, 2016). Although its members' positions and views do not represent one-to-one the active officers and their point of view –these are, after all, no unitary, monolithic actors– Acore leaders tend to express critical messages that often reflect the generalised sentiment of the Colombian servicepeople. In sum, the retirees' association plays a crucial role as an outlet for widespread views in the troop and officers' corps[113]. Their opinion on political matters is thus highly valuable for the analysis.

In the upcoming subsection, evidence points out how a shifting policy and governmental narrative towards the armed conflict and the possibility of peace dialogues represented a source of instability for service members. Additionally, legal decisions concerning the public force reinforced their perception that the armed forces were not only attacked by illegal adversaries on the battlefield but also that political decisions and lawfare were in place to weaken them.

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[111] Former EJC commander (1998-2002) and military forces' commander (2002-03). He led crucial campaigns against the FARC to regain the iniative and the first years of modernisation parallel to the failed Caguán negotiations (previously discussed in Chapter 3, "The Colombian Army, Modernisation And Shift to The Offensive in the Turn of The Century").

[112] After reaching a comprehensive final accord with the rebel group, in October 2016 a narrow majority of the Colombians who participated in the referendum rejected the content of the agreements. The government rapidly drafted a new proposal according to concerns expressed by diverse pressure groups, re-negoatiated this new draft with the FARC and submitted it to Congress approval in late November 2016. For a thorough account on these events see, for instance, ICG (2017, pp. 3-8).

[113] See González-Bustelo (2014) and Isacson (2015) for further examples of this influence.

A Change of Political Course: Friendly Fire?

Concerning the political turn and the doubts it raised for the armed forces, the first most noticeable move occurred in the government's discourse on the armed conflict and its possible solution. After almost a decade where security was the top priority of the official rhetoric and public policy, the newly elected president expressed a different viewpoint. During the presidential campaign, Santos kept the strict hard-liner tone of his predecessor, but now being at the helm of the state, repeatedly referred to being open to peace talks with the guerrilla. Already in his inaugural speech in August 2010, he affirmed that the door to a peace dialogue was closed, but it was not locked (Semana, 2010). "We have not thrown the key to dialogue into the sea", Santos said later that year in his opening remarks to the annual assembly of the largest business association of Colombia (OACP, 2018a, p. 145).

Furthermore, from the beginning of this new administration, the goal of security was no longer the central pillar around which all other policy objectives converged but one among others, for instance, related to social and economic prosperity. This conception caused the impression that security was gradually losing its prominence in the government's agenda against that of an eventual peace process and other social demands. More importantly, the shift at a speech level was followed by effective decisions that marked a strategic turn at the head of the executive. This caused suspicion in circles close to the armed forces, some of which had been supportive of Santos.

It is worth mentioning that the possibility of peace dialogues was not new in Colombia. Even at the beginning of both of Uribe's terms the executive prorogued the public order law that exists since 1997 to allow for negotiations with illegal armed groups (see Bermúdez, 2019, p. 23). In fact, the AUC demobilised as a result of a pact with representatives of the preceding government[114], and the peace commissioner had unsuccessfully explored dialogues with the ELN and with the FARC before the presidency change.

Nevertheless, the of political framing and communication of peace attempts marked the difference. During Uribe's tenure, the official narrative consistently avoided the term "armed conflict" and portrayed security problems as a terrorist threat to the state. In contrast,

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[114] The so-called "Ralito Pact" was a result of secret negotiations between the government and the AUC in a municipality of northern Colombia that gave the name to the process.

the new head of the executive accepted the former denomination and the existence of structural causes that made it necessary to transform the country to reach sustainably peace (see Parra, 2011; Jaramillo, 2013). This meant a significant ideological deviation that Uribe and other sectors criticised as an attempt to grant belligerency status to the guerrilla (El Espectador, 2011; León, 2011b).

Although the president denied it back then, secret communications and exploratory talks with the FARC had already begun in August 2010 and went on until October 2012, before the official peace dialogues began in Cuba (Bermúdez, 2019, pp. 14-16). Santos had lobbied but failed to reach a consensus amongst leaders in the Organisation of American States (OAS) to invite Cuba to the sixth Summit of the Americas in early 2012. However, he visited the island in March 2012 to meet Raúl Castro and Venezuela's president Hugo Chávez, which led some to speculate that the support for a peace process with the guerrilla was in the bilateral agenda (Montero, 2012). His inaugural statement in the sixth Summit of the Americas held at Cartagena, April 2012, also caused the impression that the new statesman preferred a more progressive line in security challenges and critical matters such as the fight against drug trafficking (Santos, 2012, p.6).

Rumours of existing peace dialogues "behind the country's back" grew, and the drafted agenda to guide the peace talks finally leaked out to former president Uribe, who made it public and from then led the most vigorous opposition against his former minister[115], whom he believed was betraying his legacy (El Espectador, 2012d; Semana, 2012c). Even before the executive acknowledged the ongoing process with the FARC, members of Acore expressed their critical judgment of such a possibility (Centro Colombiano de Pensamiento Político Militar [CCPPM], 2012). Moreover, the retired officers saw the leaked-out agenda as a preliminary accord and regarded with wariness the word choice "abandonment of arms" instead of disarmament (Rubianogroot, 2013, p.21).

As time went by and the delegations in Cuba achieved partial agreements, leaders of the retirees' association expressed their doubts about the secrecy of the dialogues: "Everything [about the negotiation] is very confusing and […], without knowing what has really been agreed, the uncertainty persists (…). We do not really know what can happen" (Ariza, 2015, p. 58).

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[115] For the 2014 presidential campaign, former president Uribe led an opposition movement that reached the second round with candidate Oscar Iván Zuluaga. The new political party entered the legislative and exerted opposition to the government coalition during Santos' second presidential tenure (2014-18).

Other former officers referred to a sort of 'clandestineness' in the peace talks, which posed the risk that the country was being "sold out" or handed over to the guerrilla at the cost of peace (Acore, 2014d; Ariza, 2015, p. 58).

Likewise, the newly formulated public policy was sharply turning away from what it had been for the past eight years of Uribe's democratic security. In contrast, Santos' "democratic prosperity" development plan had different priorities, with economic growth, equal access to social mobility opportunities, and the consolidation of peace and security at the same level (DNP, 2011, pp. 19-22). Moreover, aspects related to security and public order were subsumed under the objective of consolidating peace (DNP, 2011, p. 389). The former had previously been the core, essential goal of the government, on which all other areas depended (Presidencia, 2003)[116]. Closing regional and social gaps was also a transversal topic of the new administration's guidelines and was explicitly linked to the objective of achieving sustainable peace (OACP, 2018a, p. 212).

Overall, other topics of the policy agenda received equal or more attention than the security-related goals. As previously mentioned, Santos appointed a high-level advisor for security affairs, Sergio Jaramillo, who was in charge of the peace agenda and later led the negotiating team in Cuba. This decision led to the perception that the head of the MDN had an institutional competitor (León, 2012a; Quevedo & García, 2012). For the 2014-18 tenure, the shift became more evident, with three pillars –peace, equity and education– supposed to generate a virtuous circle for the country's development and where security was now part of the peacebuilding objective (DNP, 2014a, p. 27). Consequently, in the security guidelines published in 2015, the MDN reproduced the conviction that social and welfare goals were a precondition for a stable peace, along with but not primarily depending on security (2015b, p.5).

The parliamentary agenda also impacted the military's institutional status quo. As the executive in Bogota was willing to change some essential aspects concerning the armed conflict, it gathered the legislative support to materialise this. During most of the studied period, presidential decisions were buttressed by a majoritarian coalition in the Congress built at the

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[116] Security and public order were also the central matter of the democratic security policy and the MDN strategic planning guides between 2005 and 2010.

beginning of the first presidential term. This preponderance provided the necessary backing to pass essential bills that constituted the legislative basis for the transitional justice model.

In September 2010, the president filed a victim's and land restitution law bill to acknowledge the rights to reparation, restitution, and guarantees of non-repetition to the internal armed conflict victims. In June 2011, the law was approved and became the first legal milestone on the road towards the peace process (Bermúdez, 2020). Besides recognising the existence of an internal armed conflict in the law text, the bill stipulated that the state granted economic reparations to victims of the armed conflict since 1985, including actions perpetrated by the armed forces (Ley 1448 de 2011).

This institutional decision posed a severe risk for members of the armed forces. When choosing the mentioned date, the law proponents wanted to cover the 1985 Justice Palace siege victims when the M-19 guerrilla took the building and people inside as hostages (Maya, 2012). The army raid to retake the palace ended up in forced disappearance, torture and murdering of civilians, among them, eleven Supreme Court justices (see Peña, 1988; Carrigan, 1993). The security forces used tanks, machine guns and explosives to assault the building, and, until the present, a series of abuses and extrajudicial killings remain a matter of judicial investigation.

In this regard, two significant cases gained attention during the studied period. First, in 2010, retired Col. Alfonso Plazas Vega –who led the army assault to retake the building from the rebels– and a year later, Gen. Arias Cabrales –commander of the EJC brigade that conducted the rescue operation– were convicted to 30 and 35 years of prison respectively (Evans, 2010; BBC, 2011a). These first rulings related to the case, also the highest sentence under Colombian criminal law, set a precedent that the military could be judged and convicted for orders they gave without having been involved in the material actions. Furthermore, the fact that former army members were judged and condemned by criminal and not military justice was perceived by the officers' corps as an attack of the establishment to them and part of a strategy to discredit them, adding up to the existing legal insecurity (Cortés, 2010).

Another development of relevance occurred in 2011 when several military members were convicted to prison for their participation in the extrajudicial executions that were presented as operational results to attain financial rewards, promotions or even military leave (see cases reported in BBC, 2011b; El Universal, 2011; RTVE, 2011; Semana, 2011c; Vanguardia, 2011a). Although there had already been previous convictions in the past, the new

decisions reinforced the military's perception that political and judicial war was taking place against them. Additionally, this was a hint for members of the armed forces on how criminal justice would continue to process future cases.

Indeed, servicepeople had begun to express they felt depicted as criminals for fulfilling their constitutional task, with no consequences for civilian decision-makers, while the government negotiated an armistice with terrorists (Acore, 2012b, p. 4). To the eyes of former army members, their legal-institutional situation was at stake and their existence was threatened, all of this causing demotivation and demoralisation of the troop (Ruíz Barrera, 2011, p. 6; CCPPM, 2012; Acore, 2013b; Ruíz Barrera, 2014, p. 4).

General Navas, then army commander, worded this apprehension in an interview: "Criminals who committed atrocious crimes are sentenced to 8 years in prison[117] […], while a man who defended democracy in combat, due to a mistake, is convicted to 40 to 60 years" (Orozco, 2012). Similarly, former Gen. Tapias criticised the judicial decisions against those involved in the retake of the palace of justice and cases of extrajudicial killings by saying this was unfair. In his view, those who had committed crimes and were responsible for the siege enjoyed all democratic rights, but those who followed civilians' orders were in jail for defending democracy (Semana, 2013a).

The 2011 victim's and land restitution law also established a National Historical Memory Centre (CNMH, for its acronym in Spanish), tasked with investigating the most significant armed conflict issues and, ultimately, giving input for the highly contested issue of truth and reconciliation. This think tank already had a precedent in the previous administration, as a research group within the commission created for victims and ex-combatants, after the 2005 justice and peace process with the AUC (Ramírez et al., 2016, p. 22). The law gave the CNMH more prominence and official support for its mandate, including elaborating reports on emblematic cases of the war in Colombia, some of which portrayed the security forces as collaborators of illegal paramilitary groups or crime perpetrators.

The military members felt this as an attack from within the establishment. Not only were they being excluded from the truth about the war they had fought for decades, but their role in the historical account of the conflict was being told by others whom they considered biased (Acore, 2013a, p. 3). In the following years, the armed forces decided to establish their

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[117] Referring to the previously existing transitional justice model with the demobilised AUC.

historical memory centre in the War College[118] and actively sought cooperation with civilian universities to publish their material (see, for instance, ESDEGUE, 2016a; 2016b).

Another piece of legislation paving the road towards the peace process that impacted the military's institutional status quo was the judicial framework for peace (Acto Legislativo 1 de 2012). This mechanism created the institutional conditions for transitional justice and a legal frame for negotiating peace with the guerrilla (see OACP, 2018a; Bermúdez, 2019). The approved legislation added a new article to the political constitution, which contemplated that armed groups participating in the conflict would receive "differentiated treatment" in a peace process (Const. art. trans. 66). In short, it was the ultimate evidence of the government's intention to begin such a process with the FARC. For critics and prominent voices in Acore, this decision was a sign of the government's weakness and willingness to grant impunity and political advantages to terrorist groups (Gómez, 2012; López Castaño, 2012, pp. 34-35; Acore, 2012a, p.3).

The specificities of transitional justice still had to be regulated in the statutory law that would follow the peace agreement. However, this new legislation concerned the military, both those implied in investigations for acts in service and those who could potentially be. Not only was the legal instability seen as part of an insurgent strategy with implications in the low operational results, but it also fuelled the fear of many soldiers that they would end up being sacrificed in a negotiation with the FARC (León, 2012b).

For instance, retired army Col. Juan Manuel Padilla[119], defence attaché in Brussels and liaison officer to NATO for the Mission of Colombia to the EU in 2014, voiced this worry in the armed forces' academic journal: "Terrorist groups have infiltrated the Colombian judicial system and use legal institutions and the international law system against the government. They have received support from various social agents and organisations that, intentionally or unintentionally, are serving their interests" (Padilla, 2012, p. 108).

In a similar vein, several Acore communiqués and publications from reserve officers referred during the Santos administration to what the retired military perceive as a discrediting campaign against the martial establishment (Rubianogroot, 2012a; Velasco & Ruíz Barrera,

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[118] Centro de Investigación en Memoria Histórica Militar – CIMHM. See: https://esdegue.edu.co/es/centro-de-investigacion-en-memoria-historica-militar-cimhm
[119] Col. Padilla was at the helm of Indumil from 2015 to 2017, and afterwards served as an advisor to the EJC's doctrine centre.

2012). In November 2012, former Gen. Ruíz Barrera declared before the Congress in a debate on the military *fuero* when claiming for judicial protection for the security forces: "at the present moment we are judged by the enemy, and not by the State institutions that we protect" (Ruíz Barrera, 2012). In the Acore journal, retired Col. Mario López Castaño concurred with the perception that things had changed for worse for the public force during the Santos administration:

> The war that was won in the operational field is at risk of being lost in legal terms. This is due to the absence of a Military Jurisdiction, a legal shield urgently required for operational success [...]. In addition to the government's apathy in protecting the Public Force, it is particularly worrisome to witness the radical change in the government's approach towards terrorists, considering them as groups that want transit to peace. This led, on President Juan Manuel Santos's initiative, to the Legislative Act of June 16, 2012, called the Judicial Framework for Peace (López Castaño, 2012, pp. 31-32).

In this case, not only retired military publicly expressed doubts regarding judicial decisions that affected them. Although not overtly critical against the government, Gen. Navas, then at the helm of the military forces, appealed for support: "we ask not to be convicted before our trial, as it is currently happening (…) The existing legal framework allows different interpretations and the result depends on the those who are responsible for imparting justice" (Orozco, 2012). In 2013 he would refer to this uncertainty in another interview with the national media: "My major concern is the legal instability of servicemen who fulfil their constitutional mission, for whom we hope our government and the justice administrators reach an equilibrium" (Mercado, 2013).

Even years after the final peace accord, issues related to military jurisdiction and legal decisions that affect members of the armed forces continue to be contested in Colombia[120]. Recent research has thoroughly addressed this development during the negotiation process and the armed forces' position towards transitional justice and military *fuero* (see Illera & Ruíz, 2018). Although the present work does not aim at explaining this still ongoing disputed area of decision-making, the analysis includes these events insofar as they were another source of rising institutional instability for the military.

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[120] This is a still disputed area in the Colombian political system. At the time of writing, some of the decisions by criminal justice to which the present text refers to are still being appealed and subject to the JEP.

Indeed, as Chapter 6 will further explain, this was a field of bargaining, pressure and concessions between the civilian and the military that occurred parallel to the development of the implemented restructuring and doctrine renewal, and should therefore not be excluded from the analysis of interests, actors and strategies that influenced the particular shape the reforms took place. Moreover, Chapter 7 will explain how adaptations that seek to enhance the land force's legitimacy stem from the will to counter this alleged discrediting campaign with operational consequences.

Besides the so-called political and legal warfare that affected the army's institutional ground, there were signs that the public opinion was changing its view on the armed forces and that their approval was no longer as strong as in the previous years. The highly favourable figures that the military had enjoyed during the 2000s –with a positive public perception consistently and sometimes significantly above 60 per cent– were gradually lowering in the years of the new administration (see Gallup, 2019, p. 88). Compared with values between 85 and 90 per cent that were usual during the previous decade, after the outset of Santos' presidency, the trend reversed (from 87 to 74 per cent). Since 2012 the favourability figures have been moving towards 70 and 60 per cent.

Moreover, when reviewing the data offered by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), the outlook is not so favourable for the armed forces. This annual poll measures, among other issues, the degree of trust that the Colombians have in their armed forces, which shows a trend between 61 and 68 per cent from 2004 to 2012. During this period, the only exception was a low of 57.2 per cent in 2007, the year when the public opinion got to know about the *falsos positivos*. A second noticeable low figure occurs in 2013 when the degree of trust fell to 53 per cent, the lowest level in 15 years. From then on, the figures have been between 57 in 2014 and 53 per cent in 2018 (Rivera et al., 2019, p. 65).

Early in 2014 –amid the presidential campaign where Santos struggled to be reelected– a national magazine[121] published two consecutive editions unveiling scandals related to intelligence and corruption in the army (see Semana, 2014a; 2014b). The retired corps of generals expressed their discontent: "The relation between these publications and the process

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[121] Alejandro Santos –president Santos' nephew– directed *Semana* between 2000 and 2020. This led on several occasions to doubts about the media's impartiality towards the government. At that moment, critics of the president alleged that the magazine tried to influence the campaign as the scandal implicated the opposition candidate and, indirectly, former president Uribe.

on the island can be easily deduced. Their purpose is clearly to weaken the national army, and silence the military leaders, submit them to what already seems to be their fate" (Rubianogroot, 2014b).

Similarly, the permanent working group of the retired officers' corps issued a joint communiqué. They expressed their rejection against the media campaign discrediting the public force and showed their "support in these moments of uncertainty" for the military and defence sector (Acore, 2014a). In another publication, the issue was addressed as "dark forces [that] seek to demoralise and discredit our public force. [...] A persistent and systematic campaign [...] to discredit one of the most beloved institutions..." (Acore, 2014b).

Another relevant change in politics that raised uncertainty for the security forces was the new framing of relations with Caracas. From the first months of his administration, Santos offered to reconstruct diplomatic relations after the two countries had witnessed severe tensions in the past years. Given that the former minister of defence had been one of the fiercest critics of President Chávez in the past administration, especially regarding the security issues at the border previously mentioned, this was an even more remarkable shift.

Wariness followed the Colombian president's attitude towards his "new best friend", as he called his counterpart (El Tiempo, 2010b). To some analysts and retired officers, this began to be a too permissive relation with the regime in the neighbouring country in detriment of national security, first for the sake of commercial and diplomatic bonds, and then for the peace process (López Castaño, 2011; CSD, 2011; Roa, 2012). When the executive in Bogota announced that Caracas would serve as a guarantor of the negotiation, the relation increased apprehension and critique. Not only had its territory become a refuge for the guerrilla, but it also provided, along with a regional trend towards left-wing governments, a too favourable international environment for the FARC that could offer the platform for an instrumentalisation of the peace talks (Ortíz, 2012).

Indeed, the government's approach to the confrontation and, particularly, the decision to hold peace talks in Cuba while the security forces endured confrontation on the field increased ambiguity for the Colombian army. Moreover, judicial and political outcomes affecting the military's status quo underscored the institutional incertitude for service members. Notwithstanding, as the next subsection will elaborate, additional factors put their future in jeopardy, including their material resources and the type of roles to fulfil in internal security.

Budgetary Pressures and Voices Appealing for Reform in the Security Sector

In addition to the political decisions and legal changes that emerged in the new administration and accelerated the perception of instability, the country's macro-economic reality further threatened extraordinary resources that had enabled modernisation and bolstering capabilities in the preceding years, as depicted in Chapter 3. Deceleration of economic growth, social expectations over a potential peace dividend that allowed shifting resources from warfare to welfare goals, potential inter-service competition and a decrease in local demand for the military industry were all factors for existential concerns that accumulated during the studied period and influenced change in the Colombian army.

Strongly embedded in oil exports, the most recent wave of economic growth in this South American country was enabled by the 2000s commodities boom, which, in turn, supported the steady increase in the security and defence spending at the turn of the century (see Ortíz, 2015a). Although this trend slowed down from 2010 on, it was in 2014 that financial pressures deepened in the light of a progressively devaluating *peso* and plummeting oil prices (El Colombiano, 2014; Martínez, 2016). Additionally, the state-based major oil producer, Ecopetrol, prognosticated a shortage of crude oil reserves in the short-term (El Universal, 2013). This decline in economic growth led to initial forecasts on cuts on the defence expenses and, by the beginning of Santos' second term, the finance minister revealed that the sector would experience a budget freeze (Defensa.com, 2014).

In the following years, the trend went on towards maintaining the resources while expenditures and requirements grew, especially in terms of fixed expenses, such as salaries and pensions, which equal up to 70 per cent of the sector's budget (Ortíz, 2015b), but also procurement, maintenance and investment (DNP, 2014b, p. 24; CGR, 2018b, pp. 5-8). To this respect, the planning department issued a document based on progress in some conflict-related indicators in 2013 and fiscal difficulties for the security sector:

> The budgetary pressures generated by this recent evolution of spending added to the fact that part of the growth has been financed with transitory resources, generates uncertainties regarding financing the expenses required in the coming years. This is particularly relevant given a post-conflict scenario in which the Public Force must take on new challenges to ensure citizens' safety and contain new outbreaks of both violence and crime (DNP, 2014b, p. 12).

On a similar vein, the following excerpt from an official document where the MDN presented its transformation plan for the public force, expresses the connection between budgetary limits and the necessary changes to face this situation:

It seems more realistic to conceive the sector's budgetary challenges facing the transit towards peace, not merely as a reduction process but as a transformation to respond effectively and efficiently to new security needs and the State's renewed strategic interests. In this sense, the question should not focus on the size of the reduction in the Security and Defence budget, but rather on the most efficient way of using resources to respond to future challenges. This does not rule out saving resources. On the contrary, adapting to the new scenario is an opportunity to build a Security and Defence Model that fulfils its functions at a more adjusted cost. However, to achieve this goal it is necessary to redefine the sector's profile, harmoniously integrating strategic requirements and budget limits, making it necessary to optimise the resources available to do more with the same (MDN, 2014b, p. 50).

The uncertain evolution of fiscal conditions did not dissipate in the following years. On the contrary, this still poses an impediment to ultimately achieving many of the intended adaptation goals. "The army is conscious of the budgetary and logistic austerity policies" (EJC, 2016b) can be read in a public document of the Colombian land force when explaining the reasons behind the restructuration and doctrine reform. Likewise, Gen. Mejía stated during an interview that "in financially difficult times, it is necessary to continue the support", retorting to a question on the peace process and military expenses (Hernández Mora, 2016).

Similarly, when presenting the strategic planning guidelines in 2016, deputy minister for defence, Mariana Martínez, asserted that the most significant challenge was to achieve a balance between capabilities and modernisation needs, on the one hand, and on the other, the country's complex macroeconomic condition (MDN, 2016c, p. 10). According to a survey conducted to assess army personnel perceptions on the transformation, a segment of them indicated that the decrease in the resources assigned to the sector was one of the key reasons why the military change took place and, therefore, a sort of "survival strategy" (FIP & COTEF, 2018).

The second factor of monetary incertitude was a growing belief that signing peace would bring not only more domestic and foreign investment but also a redistribution of national expenses from the MDN to other neglected policy areas such as infrastructure, education and development in general (Álvaro, 2012; Martínez, 2015; Dinero, 2015). Since the nineties' decade, successive governments in Bogota had collected additional resources to

strengthen the armed forces. As Chapter 3 addressed, for this purpose, the executive conceived a wealth tax under the name of "peace contribution". Crucial for the fight against internal threats, the specific allocation of these supplementary funds for the defence sector began to be criticised as inconvenient for its inflexibility (González, 2009).

It is also noteworthy that the sector's budget in the country almost doubled during the first decade of the twenty-first century but then stalled. While it boosted from USD 5.7 billion in 2000 to 10.4 in 2010, it only increased by 3 per cent from 2011 to 2018 (see Schipani, 2013; SIPRI, 2020). Except for 2013, when $12.5bn were appropriated for security and defence issues in Colombia, since 2014, the increasing trend has been moderate (MDN, 2018, p. 95). The resources have also experienced budgetary pressures given the growing operational and administrative expenses, which pose challenges to the sector, especially under financial austerity (DNP, 2014b, p. 12; MDN, 2016c, p.10; 2018a, pp. 95–97).

Even if the increasing share of resources for the MDN had already slowed down in Uribe's last year in office, it was during the Santos administration that this trend consolidated (Llorente & McDermontt, 2014, p. 38). Additionally, with a peace process taking form, the idea of shifting resources from the military towards other sectors gained attention both in the media and in the government. "Not only does violence itself cost Colombia between one and two points of GDP, but the end of the conflict with the FARC and the ELN could save as much in military spending", reported the media piece at the outset of the peace talks (Semana, 2012d).

Accordingly, with growing expectations over social investment, the executive began to announce changes in this area, referring to the wealth tax as a contribution to the fight against poverty (Sáenz, 2014). As the ministry of finance and public credit prepared a tributary reform, the DNP stressed the unsustainability of the exponential rise in the military budget (2014b, p. 24). Among others, the education sector received particular attention in this tension between security and development efforts (SENA, 2016; El Heraldo, 2016).

This false dichotomy between investing in defence and security –simplistically dubbed as "money for war"– or in other fiscal areas ostensibly representing peace, crystallised in the highly polarised presidential campaign of 2014 and the proselytist efforts around the 2016 plebiscite. Just like former presidents had appealed for the private sector's and tax contributor's support to improve military capabilities and defeat the guerrilla, they were now the target of a call for engagement in favour of the peace process (El País, 2013; Vanguardia, 2013). This

request became particularly notorious during the re-election campaign in 2014 when the president appeared in public events insisting on a peace dividend (Semana, 2014c).

For considering it manipulative and humiliating, retired military and critics repudiated a controversial television campaign (see, for instance, Nieto, 2014; Ruíz, 2014). Santos, former MDN and now commander-in-chief of the armed forces, now asked urban middle-class parents if they would rather send their children to war or offer them peace and all other benefits that it would bring (Santos, 2014). The peace-war dichotomy in connection with potential economic welfare and other benefits of an armistice became blunter as the signed accords were to be endorsed in a plebiscite in October 2016, and those expressing concerns on the content of the agreement were catalogued as "enemies of peace" (Semana, 2016c; El Heraldo, 2016; Europapress, 2016).

The third financial issue emerged as the significant weakening of internal threats was reflected in a reduction in military operations and, in turn, lower demand for the defence industry. Given the specialised knowledge and contacts that members of the armed forces possess of the sector, many retirees successfully engage in private or state companies that provide equipment, supplies and maintenance, the boards of directors of these businesses, or directly become defence sector contractors (see León, 2014b). Moreover, a former high-ranking officer usually holds the position of deputy minister tasked with designing policy, managing and coordinating the corporate and social organisations that belong to the defence sector. As such, the defence industry is a crucial source of influence and resources representing direct and indirect interests at stake in a changing political and strategic environment.

Beyond the individual or corporate interests of former officers and close acquaintances as defence contractors, the Colombian defence business group generates more than 12,000 jobs; as of 2018, it had an annual budget equivalent to 2.8 billion and assets around 4.2 billion USD (Cuéllar, 2018, p. 76). A report by Indumil on the 2012 sales was made public by national media, where the company stated that the "military product line decreased due to new government policies based on the search for peace. This reflects the budget cut for the Armed Forces, the sector's main client" (Marín, 2013). According to this report, the military had been the main client of the sector's industry between 2003 and 2009, a period in which it doubled its production capacity. From then on, the trend started to revert to the point in which by 2012, only 12.5 per cent of Indumil's income came from the armed forces, and that year, sales of military products plummeted to less than half (Marín, 2013).

Then deputy minister of defence for the business group, Yaneth Giha, affirmed that the cause of the drop in Indumil's figures was not the peace process, as the report suggested, but the wealth tax elimination (Marín, 2013). Nevertheless, Giha's successor, former airforce Gen. José Javier Pérez, affirmed that demand had decreased parallel to the internal conflict's de-escalation, which is why the industry needed to boost its export capabilities (Cuéllar, 2018, p. 76). A year later, the ministry commented on the internationalisation plan projected for the military industry company, naming commercial relations with new US-based clients that began in 2014 (MDN, 2015a, p. 146).

Retired Col. Padilla, then manager of Indumil, also expressed this intention to project the company towards international markets when interviewed in the Eurosatory exhibition in 2016. Concerning the shifting conditions of the domestic confrontation, he stated:

> The Colombian Military Industry has been planning and preparing for the post-conflict for over ten years now. Proof of this is that, at the end of 2015, without losing our ability to produce military equipment, only 11 per cent of our income came from the sale of products for the defence and security sector. In contrast, 89 per cent came from the sale of explosives and accessories and other services provided to the main sectors of the Colombian economy, including mining, construction, road and energy infrastructure, metalworking and laboratory services (Hernández, 2016).

Overall, budget cuts and the changes in the confrontation dynamics led to a reduction in production and sales for the Colombian armed forces (Oliver & Valpolini, 2018; Rubio, 2018). The industry's adaptation in this respect witnessed a stronger emphasis on products that, according to the company's manager in 2016, Col. Padilla, support the country's development, such as explosives for mining and infrastructure projects (The Business Year, 2016). Besides civilian businesses related to mining, tunnels, roads and railroads, the company also has humanitarian demining projects as a target client (Oliver & Valpolini, 2016). As of 2018, "revenues obtained from sales of emulsions and explosives correspond to 86 per cent of Indumil's total annual sales" (MDN, 2018a, pp. 204-205).

Finally, although this topic is rarely addressed, potential inter-service competition between the army and national police should not be underestimated as a source of pressure. First, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the police force was the original recipient of Plan Colombia's resources to fight drug-trafficking in the early 2000s. It was only by linking guerrilla and paramilitary groups to transnational terrorism that budget from this plan allowed to bolster army capabilities.

Additionally, the rise in the so-called criminal bands after the demobilisation of paramilitary groups led to questioning whether the armed forces needed more police-like approaches than military engagement (see, for instance, Isacson, 2015). These new threats do not necessarily aim to undermine the state's legitimacy, but most inherited their predecessors' arms, tactics and ability to dispute territory. In this case, the army has a secondary role supporting the police and, in the view of the EJC top-brass, they lacked the necessary legislative framework to engage in this type of operations (Cámara de Representantes, 2015, p. 66). Finally, concerning international missions with the UN and the EU, compared to the EJC, the police force has had a more active role in triangular cooperation efforts (Tickner, 2016, p. 16).

In addition to this growing importance of the police, in 2013, the government's party proposed a project bill for creating a ministry for public security. Among other consequences, it would separate the civilian force from the defence sector. Congressman Augusto Posada, leader of the bill proposal, which was publicly endorsed by President Santos, expressed the rationale behind the project:

> Colombia is already experiencing a post-conflict phase, not because of what may happen in Havana in the peace process with the FARC, but because in the last ten years, nearly 55,000 members of illegal armed groups have demobilised and 15 per cent of them have returned to illegal activities in criminal gangs, micro-drug-trafficking and common crime (El Espectador, 2013).

The arguments of those in favour of the new ministry were, in sum, that the rise in criminality and the drop in the combats with irregular groups, added to the plausible demobilisation of the FARC, would require more emphasis on internal security through police forces, rather than military engagement to fight crime at a domestic level. For instance, then minister of defence, Luis Carlos Villegas, said during an interview in 2018: "The transition from the armed conflict to urban and rural public security faces difficulties in regions where there are still serious problems of organised crime" (Pardo, 2018, p. 26). He affirmed that the country needed more police than army forces in the future and added:

> The police force has 26,919 more troops than in 2006, while the military forces grew by 2,000 or 3,000 new soldiers. In the future, there should be a massive police presence in the cities, in the countryside where there is no longer conflict, and military forces dedicated to ending public order problems in the four regions that still suffer them (Pardo, 2018, p. 26).

The initiative did not see the light, although it was proposed once again during Santos' second term in office (El Nuevo Siglo, 2015). Additionally, during a visit to Paris in 2015, the Colombian statesman said the country would soon need a rural police corps, using the example of the French gendarmerie to illustrate this (Europapress, 2015; Semana, 2015b). Retired Col. Velásquez (2015) wrote a paper supporting this perspective as a possible transition for the military in peripheral areas.

When announcing the doctrinal and structure reform, Gen. Mejía had also referred to this fact and affirmed that the army would reduce its troop size in the next two decades. Although this was a polemic headline, Mejía was only describing the trend that the organisation was experiencing in the last years. Indeed, the incremental troop growth that occurred in the first decade of the twenty-first century had slowed down in the previous years and stopped in 2013 and began to revert (see Chart 1, Chapter 3). Additionally, while the number of regular soldiers has declined by 33.2 per cent between 2008 and 2017, during the same period, the officer and non-commissioned officer rank in the army increased by 15.5 per cent (CGR, 2018b, p. 2).

Finally, beyond Santos' proselytist pronouncement in the 2014 presidential campaign that compulsory military service would no longer exist if the internal armed conflict ended[122], the executive proposed a law bill to reform military service. This law bill was proposed in 2015 and finally passed in 2017 (Ley 1861 de 2017). Besides reducing compulsory service from 24 to 18 months, the legislation prohibited raids to recruit draft dodgers[123], and the system to avoid conscription through a financial bonus was regulated. Moreover, all public institutions and most private organisations in Colombia required the military card[124] as a mandatory requisite for men to be employed. However, recent legislation on youth employment gave a waiver on this, provided that the obligation is fulfilled within eighteen months (Ley 1780 de 2016, art. 20).

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[122] This was one of the promised decisions by the president-candidate Santos, few days before the second round of the presidential election in June 2014 (Sierra, 2014). In fact, this was also one of president Uribe's campaign proposals in 2002: he claimed this would be possible when a total of 100,000 professional soldiers was achieved.

[123] The number of draft dodgers is estimated around 1.1 million men (El Nuevo Siglo, 2017). The 2017 reform also provided for an "amnesty" for draft dodgers if they voluntarily submit to a military district and pay 15 per cent of the minimum wage (as of this writing equivalent to around 40 USD) for the elaboration of the libreta militar (Ley 1861 de 2017).

[124] The *libreta militar* could also be requested by service members to conduct irregular detention, which led to draft dodgers' recruitment.

Concerning these decisions, former service members expressed their rejection, affirming they would lose resources and relevance with this bureaucratic secession (Ruíz Barrera, 2014; Acore, 2014e). For example, Acore's president, retired Gen. Ruíz Barrera, explicitly referred to the proclaimed reforms as worrisome:

> Modifying compulsory military service, ending the requirement of the military card for access to employment, and eliminating quotas for the incorporation of professional soldiers; all these decisions affect the troop size. Should the Ministry for Public Security[125] be created, it will worsen (Ruíz Barrera, 2015, p. 5).

These instability factors that threatened continuity in size, resources, roles and relative importance for the army played a crucial role in accelerating the will to implement reforms and adapt. Nevertheless, the backdrop of the negotiations definitely offered another source of concern. For one thing, the FARC insisted on reforming the public force in the within the peace talks. Additionally, other experiences in the region were worrisome, for the military corps was significantly reduced in the light of ceasefire agreements with left-wing guerrillas or other transitional processes.

In this respect, the first wary voices emerged in 2012 with the publication of the topics that the government and guerrilla delegations would discuss. One of the agenda items mentioned reforms and institutional arrangements and, consequently, became the evidence for those fearing that the peace process would lead to a restructuration of the security and defence sector (OACP, 2018a, p. 278). Indeed, from the perspective of those who were already wary of negotiating with those they long fought, the door was open to "reducing the public force, changing its doctrine and lessening its budget" (Rubianogroot, 2013, p.21). To this respect, former Col. López Castaño affirmed:

> We should not dismiss the possibility that one of the purposes of the negotiations is the request of the illegal armed groups to reduce the Army to a fourth or fifth of its current troop size, as well as that the Farc be a popular militia with a security role (2012, p. 35).

Retired Col. Hugo Bahamón even stated during a seminar in Bogota's Military Club "People are talking about the demobilisation of the Farc […]. But with a peace agreement we also need to think about the demobilisation of many members of the armed forces" (McColl,

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[125] In Spanish, *Ministerio de Seguridad Ciudadana*, for internal security affairs.

2012). The president of the retired generals and admirals corps similarly expressed: "From now on and with greater emphasis during the post-conflict, many proposals will be presented to reduce the security and defence budget, mistakenly arguing that the threat has disappeared in the domestic level" (Moreno, 2014). Other sources reported a widespread concern in the ranks and officers' corps that social benefits for active and retired service people would be cut as a result of the peace process (see, for instance, León, 2014b; Presidencia, 2015).

In October 2012, guerrilla commander Iván Márquez's speech at the Oslo installation of the negotiations gave substantial evidence arguments to those who thought the FARC requested cuts in the public force. In his statement, the rebel leader repeatedly referred to the alleged necessary transformations to implement in Colombia, which were part of the demands they were bringing into the peace talks agenda: a significant reduction of the military spending, troop size, reconversion of the armed forces in general and to finish with the influence, resources and presence of the US army (NTN24, 2012, 23:03). Márquez also stated: "We come to the negotiating table with proposals and projects to achieve lasting peace, a peace that involves profound demilitarisation of the State and radical socio-economic reforms" (2:37). According to Ortíz-Ayala (2019), the FARC also demanded that military education was civilian-based and that there were no more military radio stations.

Throughout the negotiations, FARC delegates in Cuba repeated their intention to discuss public force transformations. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Marxist guerrilla, FARC leader *alias* Timochenko complained about the minister of defence's declarations that the armed forces would remain untouched and their resources would not be reduced (ANNCOL, 2014). Later in June 2014, one of the guerrilla members negotiating in Havana publicly demanded "a change in military and security and defence doctrine" and affirmed: "We are not requesting that the generals be beheaded, but that the military doctrine in their heads changes" (El Tiempo, 2014).

Moreover, the left-wing mayor of Bogota, Gustavo Petro, a member of the M-19 guerrilla in the eighties, proposed that the demobilised insurgents entered the armed forces' ranks. This suggestion caused significant criticism and protests from the retired military, who emphasised that the terrorist organisation had not defeated the state forces and therefore should refrain from comparing the Colombian case with the Central American experience (Acore, 2014c).

In September 2014, the executive appointed seven active officers to be part of the technical committee to travel to Cuba and advise on the ceasefire details. It also created the *Comando Estratégico de Transición* ("Strategic Transition Command", COET) under the military forces' general staff, responsible for the security issues related to the last steps of the armistice, disarmament and demobilisation process[126]. The guerrilla leaders reacted and announced the creation of a "Guerrilla Normalisation Command", a group of first-rank rebel members who would supposedly study the military force constitutional role (El Espectador, 2014; Lewin, 2015).

One of the guerrilla spokespeople affirmed that their so-called normalisation command demanded that the military was "no longer deployed for irregular warfare in internal public order and that battalions dedicated to the persecution of the political opposition would be dismantled. Additionally, the police forces must demilitarise, eliminating their current counterinsurgency doctrine" (Castrillón, 2015). The guerrilla demands to intervene in the structure, roles and resources of the security sector kept on going almost until the end of the negotiations (see El Espectador, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c).

In conclusion, after more than a decade of upstreaming army capabilities based on extraordinary local and foreign resources, the Colombian ground force began to face financial constraints. These pressures stemmed from a changing macro-economic context, steadily increasing personnel and administrative expenses, and a substantial decrease in demand for the military industry. Additionally, with more criminal gangs that inherited former irregular groups' members, tactics and financial methods, a lack of strategic clarity increased ambiguity in the EJC's operational environment. The police force gained relevance, although military means were still expected for internal roles. Finally, the peace talks' buzz about reforming and cutting the armed forces' troop and budget contributed to the contextual instability.

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[126] In April 2018 the COET was rebranded as *Comando Conjunto Estratégico de Transacción* (CCOET) ("Joint Strategic command For the Transition").

5.3. Summary

The preceding analysis explained how the changing security and political environment caused uncertainty for the land force and, in doing so, prompted the reforms. Although the Colombian military had been gradually adjusting to an unpredictable operational context through capabilities-based planning, several concurring factors at the beginning of the Santos administration accelerated the drive to change. In its threat environment, the EJC faced increasing volatility due to the rebound of the guerrilla after a decade of weakening, the coexistence of new irregular groups and the likelihood of a negotiation with the FARC. In response to this growing ambiguity, the ground force undertook a strategic review to respond to the threat's adaptation and, in the process, evaluated the military organisation itself in view of future scenarios.

As for the institutional context, a series of political decisions with operational consequences affected the army's material and symbolic resources. In the new administration, security issues no longer had the central stage they had enjoyed in the previous decade. At least in terms of policy formulation, security shared the same level of importance as economic prosperity, development-related and peacebuilding goals. Budgetary pressures due to the steady growth of the force in the past years, a shift towards fiscal austerity due to plummeting oil prices, and a government agenda that emphasised other policy demands in the view of a peace process reinforced the risks to the army's material sustainability. The evolution of the theatre of operations in Colombia added a potential risk to the roles and resources that the EJC had until then.

Conducting peace talks with the guerrilla parallel to ongoing warfare also proved ambiguous for active and retired officers, particularly on the backdrop of what they perceived as legal insecurity and lawfare against the military. Moreover, as the next chapter will further elaborate, the fact that the executive was willing to discuss matters related to democracy consolidation and the country's development with the insurgency affected military morale and honour. Judicial decisions and the publication of historical memory documents about episodes that occurred during the armed conflict further jeopardised the army's symbolic role in the Colombian society and state.

In this sense, as the analytical framework suggests, given that institutions have power-distributional effects, political decisions aimed at facilitating a peace process with the guerrillas put the balance of power and interests at stake for the Colombian military. Not only changes in the battlefield but also in the army's institutional environment caused increasing uncertainty and, in doing so, triggered the will to adapt the organisation. As the next chapter will explain, this led decision-makers to accommodate in order to preserve the affected status quo.

In sum, the security and political context in which the EJC operated at the time when it began to plan the reforms risked its institutional stability. The subsequent chapters will elucidate how did relevant actors react to this rising uncertainty, to which type of detrimental changes they exerted opposition and why did they choose the doctrinal and structural reforms to counter the identified challenges.

6. Agents, Interests and Decisions: Adapting to Change

In the explanatory model developed for this case study, actors, beliefs, and motives behind their decisions are essential to understand the link between the structural dimension variables and the organisational factors that influenced military change. For this purpose, the present chapter explores the ideas and goals behind the implemented reforms to understand the means-ends frameworks that guided the decisions to react to uncertain security and political developments and resulted in the outcome that will be the subject of the final part of the analysis (Chapter 7). In doing so, the forthcoming sections test the second partial hypothesis (PH2), according to which *agents interested in preserving the status quo resisted adverse changes and resolved this ambiguity by adapting in favour of the military.*

A couple of important caveats are worth mentioning before proceeding. First, this research considers both military and civilian actors and interests for their relevance in decision making and the reform outcome. Second, as it holds for all organisations, the military is not a monolithic entity. Internal factions or trends usually form around shared beliefs and motives, according to what is perceived as the best strategy when aiming at a particular goal. In this case, independent of voices opposing any type of reforms, pro-change factions in the military and the government preferred implementing them to adapt in an uncertain context. Finally, while not all individuals forming part of each sector share homogeneous views, for analytical purposes, attention will be drawn to salient tendencies in statements by representatives at reform-relevant or influence positions.

The previous chapter showed that operational challenges and a changing institutional environment caused rising uncertainty and potential threats to the army's status quo during the studied period. Both material prerogatives of the military organisation and its symbolic place in the Colombian society and political system were at stake. The sources of this ambiguous context had already surfaced before the Santos administration. However, a series of political decisions, including the peace talks with the FARC, enhanced the perception of risks to the land force's existence.

The following argument addresses the reaction of civilian and military actors to this changing environment with disadvantageous consequences for the EJC. Given that interests and goals are central to this part of the analysis, the subsequent lines deal with the rationale behind decision-making. First, it is possible to observe a partial convergence in the leaders'

assessment of the strategic moment and objectives, but some dissonance in the specific approach and the army's role in it. In this respect, military superiority gained acceptance as an operational-tactic way to achieve a negotiated demobilisation of the rebels and not the adversary's annihilation. Additionally, improving legitimacy and governance were seen as crucial to attain victory at a strategic level.

In this sense, the chapter first provides evidence on how the decision-makers at the time of the reforms defined victory and the means to accomplish it. Relevant leaders displayed their support for an armistice that cannot be achieved exclusively through a military response. Furthermore, they converged around the idea that legitimacy was the centre of gravity of the confrontation. Either for conviction or convenience, these ideas dominated the security sector's narrative at that time. Nevertheless, not all relevant actors in the security sector shared the same vision on how to attain these goals, adding ambiguity to the army's strategic context.

The second section demonstrates that overt opposition to unfavourable changes stemming from the peace process occupied the media campaign and public statements from relevant actors. In this case, retired servicemembers openly expressed their concerns and will to mobilise against any unfavourable decisions emerging from the Havana talks. For its part, the civilian executive engaged in a series of efforts to appease and reassure the military sector that their future was not being discussed in this framework and that no unfavourable changes would come for them. The active army leaders aligned with the official narrative, although some expressed scepticism and mistrust for the potentially harmful consequences of the peace talks.

Finally, the chapter explains how decision-makers mobilised to counter these risks to the land force's material and ideational resources. Conscious of the army's institutional weight and its importance as a stakeholder for the negotiation to succeed, the government resorted to compensation strategies by attending to their interests, displaying approval and granting autonomy in those areas where the army could adapt to the changing environment. In exchange, active officers embraced the civilian narrative regarding peace and supported the ongoing process with the insurgency. Upon civilian backing to mitigate and counter risks to material and symbolic resources, the army implemented and presented the reforms as a sign of their victory over the guerrilla and being fit for new roles in an eventual post-conflict scenario.

6.1. Assessment of the Strategic Moment

In the intersection of tactics and strategy, the notion of victory that army leaders in Bogota had during the reforms is the outset to examine means-ends schemas influencing decision making. As previously mentioned, in the last years of the Uribe administration, Gen. Padilla de León, commander of the military, had an expression to define the ongoing moment: "*el fin del fin*" ("the end of the end"). This saying was supposed to stress that they were close to defeating the criminal, narco-terrorist organisations operating in Colombia. Since the denomination of the confrontation as "armed conflict" was officially banned, he also referred to the forthcoming years as the time when the military would have to "manage the post-victory" (FAC, 2007; El Tiempo, 2010a).

However, even if the Colombian military and government had made significant progress, eliminating illegal armed groups exclusively through military operations had shown its limits. The idea that reducing the guerrilla's capabilities and paving the road for a negotiated demobilisation was more plausible thus gained acceptance. As a document by the RAND Corporation, a highly influential think tank for the defence sector in Bogota, maintained at that time: "no one expects that the government will eradicate the guerrillas any time soon. Rather, the expectation is that the new Colombian strategy and tactics will gradually reduce the scope of the guerrillas' activities and create the conditions for realistic negotiations" (Rabasa et al., 2007, p. 68).

Two members of the armed forces that participated in the negotiation with the FARC in Havana recall that in the years previous to the peace process, "[s]everal analyses were published that were critical of purely military counterinsurgency strategies and advocated the need for political negotiations and economic and social reforms, as well as for increasing the legitimacy of military forces" (Cortés & Millán, 2019, p. 3). Former ARC Capt. Cortés and Lt. Commander Millán refer to the RAND report "How Terrorist Groups End" as another influential material for those preparing the road towards the peace dialogues. After examining terrorist groups between 1968 and 2006, this study concludes that "[m]ilitary force has rarely been the primary reason for the end of terrorist groups (…) [and that] a transition to the political process is the most common way in which terrorist groups ended" (Jones & Libicki, 2008).

Similarly, in his analysis of previous peace processes with the guerrilla, retired Col. Velásquez affirmed that an exclusively military response would not succeed in an irregular conflict like the Colombian (Velásquez, 2011, pp. 38-9). To describe this, he recalls Henry Kissinger's words on asymmetric warfare: "[T]he guerrilla wins if he does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win" (Kissinger, 1969, p. 39).

In June 2012, as rumours intensified that there was an operational downward trend due to low troop morale, the perspective of peace dialogues and judicial insecurity, Santos tried to counter this while addressing the special ops commandos: "Keep it up. Remember, we are winning, but we have not won yet. Perhaps we are now facing the most difficult, yet the final phase" (MDN, 2012b). "This final moment is the most decisive […]. You cannot lower your guard in this moment" (Presidencia, 2014a), said Santos to the troops after being re-elected for his second tenure.

In tune with the president's shift towards a negotiation parallel to warfighting, the EJC top brass began to communicate in those terms. For instance, while still defending the importance of progress on the battleground, army Gen. Navas affirmed that, so far, he had not received an order to lower the guard in the offensive against criminal groups (El Tiempo, 2012). During an intervention before the congress in August 2012, the commander of the military forces added:

> Peace will come one day but only after winning the war on the battlefield. […] [We must] provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for our leaders to use the key to peace […] we must give him the conditions, the broken will of the enemy […] To achieve peace you have to win the war, and the war is won in the jungles of Colombia (El Espectador, 2012c).

A few years later, the country would witness more active and retired servicepeople reproducing this narrative: "irregular conflicts end up at the negotiating table", affirmed Gen. Mejía on an interview in 2015 (Amat, 2015). Moreover, after having reached a final agreement with the FARC, retired Gen. Mora explained this shift in the discourse: "Victory means the achievement of the political objectives and bringing the Farc to the negotiating table was a victory [...]. Ninety-nine per cent of the wars in human history have ended through dialogue. We were no exception" (Rueda, 2016). Similar to Navas' standpoint, retired Gen. Ospina, former EJC and military forces commander (2004-07) wrote:

understanding [that] war is unwinnable on martial terms shifts insurgent strategy to one of survival, normally peace talks. It is this very shift of strategy, albeit [*sic*] the absence of insurgent annihilation, that constitutes the core of military victory for the government (2017, p. 524).

The FARC's higher command agreed with the overall military appraisal of the situation, although they would have never stated that there had been a victory over them. "You are not going to beat us, but neither are we"– were the words of alias Tirofijo to a former peace commissioner in the eighties (Rueda, 2010). In the same line, the group's delegates in Havana stated that the reason why there was a peace process was that they had not been defeated. During an interview in 2013, alias Iván Márquez stated, "we did not come to surrender our weapons to those who have not been able to take them away" (Molano Bravo, 2013), while Pablo Catatumbo said, "the reason we are negotiating is to search for another solution to the conflict because there have been no victors or vanquished" (Delgado, 2015a, p. 849).

However, not all members of the Colombian military shared this perspective. For sceptics, holding peace talks was instead a political victory of the guerrilla who "convinced the media that the state cannot win the conflict and that the only solution is to negotiate" (López Castaño, 2012, p. 36). As other scholars have pointed out, many officers felt that a military defeat of the guerrilla lay within their grasp (Delgado, 2015a, p. 847; Torrijos et al., 2017), and that, through negotiation, the president would "sign away at the peace table the victory that the military has won in the field" (Porch, 2014, p. 708).

To some, this was considered an erroneous change in the executive's strategic goals (Santos Pico, 2016). Moreover, those who overtly claimed that it would have been possible to vanquish the FARC and, consequently, disagreed with the government's approach, aligned with the political opposition (León, 2014b; Illera & Ruíz, 2018, p. 519). Indeed, while the active military could not express this criticism, some EJC members shared this viewpoint (see, for instance, Isacson, 2015).

One of the arguments of those opposing army reforms was that a vanquishing force should remain untouched. For instance, former Acore president, Gen. Salcedo Lora expressed his concerns in the retired members' association yearly publication, stating that "irenic voices" were never satisfied with anything related to the military: "Great military reforms have inevitably involved doctrine changes but, like in great sports, one should never change a

winning team, and the dialogues in Cuba are an immediate consequence of the high quality of the successful military doctrine" (Salcedo, 2014, p. 26).

Responding to questioning voices, the head of state eliminated the contradiction between military victory and peace talks (see Maya, 2012) as a rhetoric move to appease concerns. Throughout his two tenures, Santos' official speeches highlighted the fact that, if the negotiation led to peace, this was a success of the Colombian armed forces and should be depicted as a defeat of the guerrilla: "all your efforts are the finishing line of the quest for peace, for victory" (Presidencia, 2014a). As will be further addressed in the last section of this chapter, just as Gen. Padilla de León aligned with the official discourse that avoided terms as "conflict", "peace", or "post-conflict", the army leaders active during his administration afterwards adopted the president's narrative.

Besides admitting another version of winning the war against the guerrilla than its existential extermination, both civilian and military leaders in Bogota progressively incorporated and transmitted the importance of legitimacy as the centre of gravity for a counterinsurgent army and for the government itself. As previously mentioned, the Colombian army experienced a blow when national media and international organisations revealed extrajudicial killings cases. Civilian and military sources[127] and secondary literature coincide in signalling the 'false positives' scandal as a significant shocking event that brought important reactions and measures to prevent this from happening again (see Pizarro, 2018; Bermúdez, 2019, p. 24).

In this respect, retired Col. Velásquez contends that the coincidence of significant operational results against the FARC with the diffusion of scandals related to extrajudicial killings, illegal wiretapping by intelligence agencies, among others, diminished the strategic advance that the military success would have had (2011). In his view, this checkered past had disastrous consequences on the legitimacy of the armed forces, the political system and ultimately impacted the ability to defeat the rebel groups (Velásquez, 2011, pp. 36-8).

By the time this notion of legitimacy as the centre of gravity was gaining awareness in Bogota's defence sector, the work of Gen. Sir Rupert Smith in "The Utility of Force" (2005) became an iterative reference. The conception of warfare as a population-centric confrontation,

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[127] Interviews with Juanita Goebertus, retired Gen. Eduardo Herrera.

where the frictions of warfighting can have enormous negative outcomes for the parties in conflict, was akin to the MDN's rising interest in introducing guidelines on the precision in the use of force at that moment[128]. Surely, there had been previous manuals and reference material related to human rights, but not in a comprehensive and public way, especially to clarify when and how the military use force.

This acknowledgement led the ministry to issue the sector's first directive on human rights and international humanitarian law, as previously mentioned in Chapter 3 (MDN, 2008a). The mentioned document, drafted under the leadership of the then deputy minister Sergio Jaramillo, quotes Smith when stating:

> In recent years, the Colombian Armed Forces have designated legitimacy as their strategic centre of gravity, an important conceptual advance in the solution of the security problem. To say that legitimacy constitutes the "centre of gravity" is to recognise that more than the defeat of the enemy, operational success is on the side of whoever gains the support of the population. Better said: the achievement of support and the effective protection of the population necessarily implies the enemy's defeat, because from this voluntary support rises the legitimate authority, which is the guarantee of the consolidation of territorial control and the essence of a state that respects and enforces human rights (MDN, 2008a, p.23).

On an interview for the international review of the Red Cross, Jaramillo referred again to this viewpoint: "in many armed conflicts of today's world, it is increasingly unlikely that a soldier will be involved in conventional combat and that, on the contrary, he will find himself operating instead, in Rupert Smith's phrase, 'amongst the people'" (Pfanner et al., 2008, p. 823). Gen. Padilla de León also replicated this message in his editorial to the journal *Fuerzas Armadas* that year: "The regulation of the use of force requires us to act efficiently and always within the law, to gain the population's respect and trust and to demonstrate that operational success is always on the side of those who obtain its support" (2008, p. 5).

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[128] Interview with Juanita Goebertus.

A couple of years later, when introducing the new comprehensive action doctrine, the military commander referred again to the issue of legitimacy, while also pointing to the relevance of considering the material and ideational objectives as a critical feature of contemporary conflicts:

> This doctrine will allow us to win the Colombian population's "hearts and minds" with legality, justice and equity. In this sense, *legitimacy as a strategic centre of gravity* becomes an indispensable element in achieving the confidence and support necessary for victory (CGFM, 2010, p. 5, emphasis in original).

This assumption is no novel concept in worldwide military thinking related to counterinsurgency and can be traced back at least to the seventies (see Palma, 2020, pp. 6-7). However, it is worth underscoring that several army officers were adamant about its importance both in official internal communications and military journals. Some articles by former Gen. Ospina have focused precisely on addressing legitimacy as the centre of gravity in Colombia (see, for instance, Ospina, 2014; 2017). In a paper co-authored with Thomas Marks (National Defense University) the former commander wrote: "[T]he centre of gravity was neither the threat's combatants nor the population per se, rather the relationship between the government and the population, often called 'legitimacy'. Only a whole-of-government approach can be correct in building such a symbiotic relationship" (Ospina & Marks, 2014, p. 356).

On a similar note, when explaining the conceptual stance that influenced the first strategic review committees, Gen. Correa Consuegra (2017a) referred to another RAND publication on counterinsurgency: "Victory has a thousand fathers". According to this comparative case study that the Colombian army took as a guide for its strategic review, experience in asymmetric warfare shows that the strongest contender can win all possible tactical victories. Nevertheless, without respect for ethical frameworks, it may be granting his weakest opponent enormous strategic advantages (Paul et al., 2010). Publications by army officers in the areas of planning, comprehensive action and jointness during the studied period also give attention to the relationship between civilian population, the military and the government (see Sepúlveda, 2015, p. 9; Correa Consuegra, 2017c, p. 15; Benavides, 2018, p. 105; Padilla, 2018).

The fact that military officers and civilian leaders of the sector stressed the importance of legitimacy and the definition of victory at a strategic, not only tactical level might stem from conviction, pragmatism or both. However, its salience means how appropriate this ideal was considered and acknowledging that any adaptation should encompass this issue. Ironically, former army commander Gen. Mario Montoya –currently under the transitional justice system for accusations of false positives and who according to witnesses would have said he wanted to "see blood rivers flowing" as an operational result– published an article in 2007 in which he refers to legitimacy and the government-armed forces-population rapport:

> There is no victory without a symbiotic relationship between the triad of government, armed forces and people. A theory that rules out any of them is unrealistic and useless [...]. The centre of gravity in the development of all operations is legitimacy. Because the Army Units know their reason for being is preserving our people's lives, obtaining their backing, support, trust, faith, and especially their respect [...]. No war is won without obtaining the civilian population's support and trust (Montoya, 2007, p. 18 - 21).

This incongruence shows that some members might only pay lip service to appropriate, predominant beliefs. However, as mentioned before, the diffusion of ideas that can be witnessed through such statements is evidence of what the mainstream accepted vision was at the time. An additional point related to strategy is crucial to understanding the resistance to change that the next section addresses. If legitimacy is the centre of gravity in the armed confrontation, and victory is a political goal beyond operational results, then it is necessary to include measures beyond military presence and control to achieve peace. This is coherent with the government's narrative and policy agenda that included structural issues to transform the conflict. Thus, at least discursively, the civil and military leadership converged in their conception of objectives.

Nevertheless, while there was a coincidence that structural problems are at the root of the armed conflict and linked to the persistence of criminal groups that exert control over territory and population, there was a fundamental disagreement about how to deal with the matter. For one thing, the government intended that the peace talks' agenda included political and socio-economic grievances[129]. This approach was both a way to gain trust and common

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[129] Chapter 3 briefly explained that such factors have been at the root of the armed conflict in Colombia and continue fueling the confrontation. Previous work discusses how the peace process with the FARC was an attempt to address

ground with the FARC during the dialogues and an opportunity to solve these long-lasting problems (see Jaramillo, 2013; 2014).

In contrast, for the military, there was no reason to include the terrorists in decisions or solutions to these problems. Topics related to rural development and political participation, the first two points of the agenda, were seen as direct concessions to the insurgent group. Additionally, in transitional justice matters, the military felt they were losing their rights in a battle they could not fight: the negotiating table. "Either we sit at the table, or we are part of the menu" was the metaphoric way in which many officers expressed why they needed to mobilise to prevent decisions unfavourable to them.

These two opposing views are critical to understanding a fundamental dissent and source of friction in strategic thinking between military and civilian leaders in the studied case, which resulted in resistance and overt criticism. It also indicates one of the reasons why the executive promoted a narrative of "honour", "victory", and "heroes", which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter, to counter the low morale and sentiment of unfairness that emerged. Indeed, given the central place of counterinsurgency war in the Colombian army's formation and identity as a protector of public order against internal threats, there was an underlying perception that the land force risked losing their *raison d'être*.

For this reason, an internal contradiction grew in the sector regarding their approach to ending the war with the guerrilla. On the one hand, the officers active during the Santos government adopted the official narrative that the military handed over a guerrilla defeated on the battlefield for the civilians to negotiate its demobilisation. In this sense, they portrayed themselves as a victorious army. On the other hand, retired military leaders emphasised that there was no reason to negotiate because the military victory had been close but not concluded. As a result, the negotiation was perceived as a surrender. In response, the government decided to equate the negotiation with military success and exalt the army's image as victorious to protect its symbolic status quo. As the upcoming argument explains, this ultimately deviated attention from necessary self-criticism from the more comprehensive defence sector, including civilians at the lead.

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grievances related to political and socio-economic rights that the 1991 Constitution contemplates (see, for instance, Bermúdez, 2018).

In sum, civilians in the executive and the army top-brass accepted legitimacy as the strategic objective to achieve. Additionally, they conceived victory as a political objective that transcends the battlespace. Accordingly, the military task of weakening the guerrilla was an initial step to allow the government to negotiate on a favourable, advantageous position.

Notwithstanding this overall convergence in objectives, there was dissent on how to frame the peace talks and what was to be negotiated. For the military who had fought the insurgency for decades, the peace process should be nothing less than a ceasefire pact and demobilisation of rebels. In contrast, for the political leadership, attending social and other grievances at the negotiating table was a way of gaining leverage to bargain with the guerrilla and, at the same time, building sustainable peace.

This discrepancy has a twofold relevance for the forthcoming analysis. On the one hand, it underscores the ambiguity in the relation between means and ends in security matters that prevailed during the studied period. According to the analytical framework, such ambivalence influenced adopting models for the army reform stemming from organisations deemed successful and oriented towards legitimacy-seeking goals. Chapter 7 will further elaborate this point. On the other hand, the incongruity at a strategic level is a source of frictions and tensions between civilian and military leaders in Colombia, which ultimately hamper envisioned goals.

The forthcoming section addresses how threats to the army's future and its role in the political and social system were the significant changes to which they were averse. Resistance was expressed and exerted to protect the sector's material and ideational interests. The last part of the chapter will show that the government, recognising the importance of having the armed forces on its side for the peace process, resorted to decisions that mitigated this resistance while the army leaders adapted to potentially unfavourable changes.

6.2. Resisting Changes Adverse to the Army

As Chapter 5 maintained, the negotiations with the FARC were a source of tensions, frictions and concerns for the military. It was not the only environmental development affecting their status quo, but it was undoubtedly the focus of apprehensions and resistance. The forthcoming argument will demonstrate how the sector's leaders expressed their fears and exerted pressure against detrimental changes.

Before delving into the evidence, it is worth saying that to acknowledge this opposition is not tantamount to stating that those overtly critical were automatically spoilers of the process. Nor does it deny that officers publicly endorsing the negotiation and the official narrative also shared the overall concerns and exerted pressure for their own sake. However, this research advances the argument that the army's interests and stability were crucial to the civilian executive, who considered them a significant ally for the administration's main and ultimate goal: signing a peace accord with the oldest and largest guerrilla in the country. Indeed, for a president who knew the defence sector from within and invested all his political capital in a peace agreement, the military's clout was of paramount importance.

Accordingly, after the announcement of the peace talks with the FARC, every stakeholder in the process went forth to express support, concerns or the way they believed the government should consider in the dialogues. The military was no exception, as former Gen. Rubianogroot communicated to the retired corps of generals and admirals of the Colombian military forces:

> In the face of this scenario and a new attempt [of a peace process], we all must engage so that the conditions that we currently enjoy within our Military Forces do not change unfavourably […]. It is time to spend our energies, knowledge, experience, and faith to achieve the best future for active and retired servicepeople and prevent our institutional and performance conditions from being affected, and our values and principles from being tarnished (2012b).

When referring to "institutional and performance conditions", Rubianogroot explicitly mentioned troop size, social, economic and housing prerogatives, but also the extensive list of how judicial decisions could affect them. The fact that he called on the retired military corps to align efforts to protect their interests is symptomatic of the sector's significance in the

political system and its role as a pressure group[130]. Similarly, in June 2014, in a letter to former Gen. Mora, retired Gen. Jaime Canal[131] told him that servicepeople trusted him to "defend the interests of the Military and Police Forces (…). We ask you to raise your voice as a man of integrity and loyalty, and, in an act of dignity, to oppose to the Farc (…) who under the auspices of the government are oxygenated to continue in crime" (2014).

As for the head of state, from the outset of his term in office, Santos complied with the army's demands when the sector exerted enough pressure (see León, 2011a; 2011c). Additionally, the most prominent civilian figures in the chain of command acknowledged that the process with the FARC could not be have been successful without the advice, support and participation of the military (see, for instance, Villegas, 2017; Jaramillo, 2018; OACP, 2018a). Moreover, even as critical as he was of the peace process[132], on a last gesture of loyalty to the head of state now sending him as ambassador to Washington, the outgoing minister Pinzón addressed the troop in 2015 saying it was necessary to support the president in his efforts to achieve peace (El Heraldo, 2015).

Consequently, high-ranking military leaders, the executive in Bogota and its peace delegates repeatedly affirmed that the armed forces would remain untouched. "This is a red line" was the phrase they kept echoing when questions arose about how the dialogues with the guerrilla would impact the security and defence sector. Furthermore, the preparatory document where the government representatives drafted the roadmap for the negotiations explicitly stated that the military forces were by no means going to be part of the agenda for the dialogues (OACP, 2018a, p. 219).

However, this did not stop the fears that the army's future was at risk. The FARC constantly bringing the topic back in their public statements fuelled rumours that its size and roles would be discussed in Cuba. The military brass aligned with the government and publicly dismissed such rumours. General Navas stated during an interview: "Our President has emphasised that the Military Forces will not be touched. The insurgents are bluffing; these are strategies of the enemy to deceive" (BluRadio, 2012). When the controversy arose again in

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[130] See also Chapter 3 regarding civil-military relations.
[131] Canal was congressman between 2002-2006 and 2009-2010, and, since his retirement, has been very active in media and politics.
[132] During his first years as minister, Pinzón voiced mistrust and concerns of the military in the government. However, he began to go further as he expressed frontal critique and, when he ran for the presidency (2017-8), the former minister and ambassador used his doubts about the peace process as leverage for the campaign (see, for instance, León, 2014a; Fernández, 2018).

2013, the military commander repeated that no topics related to the public force would be part of the peace talks and that they needed to "close ranks around the president" (Mercado, 2013).

A few days later, during an army promotion ceremony at the Military School of Cadets, President Santos publicly thanked Navas for his loyalty and stressed that subjects related to the security sector were out of the negotiations (Presidencia, 2013, 1:26). This clarification became imperative every time the commander-in-chief addressed the troops. For instance, just after being re-elected for his second tenure, the president confronted critics and rumours once again with the same narrative: "the Military Forces are not a matter of discussion in Havana" (Sierra, 2014). Also, during a speech at the Tolemaida base, he affirmed: "It is not true that the Military Forces, the future of the Army, are being negotiated. […]. In no way will its importance be reduced, nor will it be weakened" (Presidencia, 2014a).

Notwithstanding, as the delegates reached partial agreements, fears grew of an alleged hidden agenda that included the military issue (Salcedo, 2014, p. 26). Former Gen. Canal wrote:

> We need to know the truth. The President claims that military stability and institutions are not being negotiated. However, rumours go in another direction. Between the lines, Timochenko argues that members of the armed forces must be sacrificed for the sake of peace (2014).

Besides, the negotiating teams agreed to leave some challenging topics on standby –dubbed the 'frozen subjects'–, to which the delegations went back in the final phase. This fact led some sectors to speculate that a reform to the security sector or the army's doctrine was part of that list. As a reaction, in April 2015, retired Gen. Mora categorically affirmed that "issues of the military forces and the police are not part of the agreements with the FARC, nor, much less, of the famous exceptions or pending topics" (Reyes, 2015).

By the end of that year, the retired general made a public statement again in response to the several communications that the guerrilla leaders made regarding the armed forces: "The FARC must know that the process we are implementing does not include questioning or redefining the mission and budget of the Military Forces, their size, or their organisation" (Mora, 2015). The former officer did the same in the Acore publication in December that year, adding that any aspiration in this respect would fail (Acore, 2015).

General Mora's advisor in the peace talks, retired Capt. César Castaño, also published an opinion column in which he underscored the pivotal role of the armed forces in an eventual post-conflict phase: "it would be unthinkable to proscribe a sector that for years has fulfilled its constitutional mission" (Castaño, 2015). Similarly, former CGFM chief of staff, Gen. Hugo Acosta, categorically affirmed: "The military forces are not subject to any negotiation. They are absolutely untouchable" (Ariza, 2015, p. 54).

Civilian and military leaders of the land force, especially those leading change, joined these statements as the process entered the homestretch and after the army reforms were announced. In response to a parliamentary enquiry after the declaration of the army doctrine revision, the MDN asserted that, until that moment, it would not entail personnel or recruitment shrinking (Cámara de Representantes, 2015, p. 73). Likewise, Gen. Mejía stressed that the undertaken changes would not imply troop size or resources reduction (El Tiempo, 2015b).

Before the October 2016 plebiscite, Mejía asserted: "the peace dividend does not mean reducing budgets and the size of the forces" (Hernández, 2016). "The size of the force will be maintained, and the institution is not within the issues negotiated in Havana", insisted the EJC commander (Mejía, 2016c, p. 65). Finally, on the relationship between the new doctrine and the peace talks, he retorted: "To claim that this has to do with Cuba, frankly, is ridiculous. It was born from the institution, for the institution. For God's sake!" (Bonilla, 2016).

Nevertheless, beyond these efforts to deny any adverse outcomes for the army coming from the negotiating table, to the eyes of active and retired service members, the process would severely affect their resources and institutional framework. The experiences that the armed forces in other countries of the region underwent during transitions after civil wars or dictatorships began to be a parameter of what could happen to the Colombian military. In the words of a retired army member: "On the FARC's agenda, there has always been, among other aspects, the redefinition of the economic model, the change in military doctrine and, as occurred in El Salvador and Guatemala, the guerrilla will seek in to minimise the number of members of the regular state forces" (López Castaño, 2012, p. 34).

Former Gen. Tapias stated something similar during an interview in April 2013: "Look at the Guatemala case. After the army had fought, they told them they were no longer necessary and reduced the force to nothing" (Semana, 2013a). In a similar line, retired Gen. Gilibert

published in the periodical magazine of Acore an article regarding the armed forces and the future post-conflict: "several states [that negotiated with the insurgency] today recognise errors generated since the negotiation, which had a negative impact in the stability and development of its Armies and Police Forces" (Gilibert, 2016). The DICOE also officially underscored this when communicating the purpose and content of the doctrine and structure reform with service members:

> Does the peace process involve reducing military forces, reducing the budget? The president and the defence minister have made it clear to the country that our size will be untouched, and that the institution is not among the issues negotiated in Havana. The minister has studied previous experiences of conflicts in Central America […]; he witnessed the negative impact of reducing the military on consolidating democracy and security (2016, p. 5).

Besides the drastic reduction in roles and resources, the history of other transitions served to insist on the risk that service members would end up in jail while the enemy enjoyed political rights and amnesties. "The experiences of El Salvador and Guatemala in which governments made concessions [to the insurgency] beyond proportionality leave a bitter taste; this is not an example to follow", affirmed BG Peña in Acore's magazine (2012, p. 28). Former army chief of staff Gen. Ramírez also saw the negotiations as a chance for justice to be used against the military, as part of a vengeance strategy and added: "Like in Argentina, military justice is being discredited in Colombia. While terrorists are protected with all kinds of prerogatives, the military is denied the same right" (2014, p. 20).

Indeed, the perception of an ongoing lawfare against the armed forces, to which Chapter 5 referred, was enhanced by the fact that their long-time adversaries, the ones rising in arms against the state they defended, were being offered better legal alternatives and political rights. In their view, they were disdained and convicted as criminals. In this respect, former director of the Colombian military ombudsman and executive director of military criminal justice, BG Puentes, wrote in the Journal of Military and Strategic Studies:

> As the formal negotiation of the Colombian peace process ended in 2016, some of our best soldiers are facing a new threat, a hostile judicial system. This system does not consider our work as defenders of all national institutions, including the judiciary, during the war (Puentes, 2017, p. 245).

As mentioned beforehand, this analysis does not delve into the details of transitional justice decisions that impacted the military during the studied period. On the one hand, this highly contentious legal issue is still under dispute in Colombia, and recent academic work has thoroughly addressed its implications for the public force (Castañeda, 2017; Cubides et al., 2018; Grillo, 2018; Illera & Ruíz, 2018; Restrepo, 2019). On the other, military justice and the special legal provisions that emerged from the peace accords with the FARC transcend the object of this research, which is the doctrine and structural reform that the army implemented.

Notwithstanding, the subject of justice is relevant to this chapter's analysis for various reasons. First, it has material implications, risking the army's institutional framework and reinforcing the perception of political uncertainty. Secondly, it represents a source of unbalance that affects ideational interests. Indeed, the concessions that the government was willing to grant an illegal armed group, against what the military obtained in judicial matters, affected their honour and pride. Thirdly, such decisions have operational consequences. As Chapter 5 demonstrated, the legal insecurity was perceived as a demotivation source and lower offensive on the battlefield.

Furthermore, the fact that service members perceived that their status quo was threatened also had implications for the organisation's legitimacy in the social and political context to which it belongs. As Chapter 7 will explain, one of the central elements of the studied reforms, namely, comprehensive action, is key to the military efforts to counter the adverse conditions that emerge from what, in their view, belongs to political and lawfare.

Additional issues related to the peace process impacted military honour and pride and, consequently, the army's ideational interests. For instance, their former adversaries, who had illegally confronted the state, were granted an opportunity to influence political decisions and ultimately impose their country vision (see López Castaño, 2012, p. 31-2). In the words of retired BG Peña, the new legal framework would allow terrorists "to occupy positions of government or collegiate bodies, without punishment, without truth and any reparation" (2012, pp. 26-7). Another service member affirmed: "they will strengthen their legal and clandestine political apparatus" (Álvarez Vargas, 2012).

Indeed, the officer corps saw the Havana negotiations as nothing less than a platform for the classic "combination of all forms of struggle" (CCPPM, 2012). As Delgado (2015a) claims, the military "argue[d] that the FARC-EP will not call off their 1982 'Strategic plan for

the seizure of power', given that their Marxist-Leninist creed translates into a belief that the triumph of their revolutionary goals is inevitable" (p. 831). So was Gen. Navas's argumentation when he said in a seminar with other public force members: "They [the Farc] have the objective of winning the national elections in 2018. The presidential elections in 2014 are just a test, and then they will be unstoppable at the ballots if there are no solid political parties" (McColl, 2012).

According to Porch (2014), there was a prevalent stance in the ranks "that a successful disarmament and integration of the FARC into the political process is simply the prelude to rehabilitated guerrillas and their NGO allies stalking the halls of the Colombian congress demanding trials for soldiers accused of human rights violations" (p. 708). Moreover, even for those who gave the executive the benefit of the doubt, the insurgents would take advantage of the moment: "The government may have good intentions, but it is under pressure, while those who negotiate want to take the best share for them" (Rubianogroot, 2014a, p. 35).

As the peace process unfolded, the perception that it was unfair and humiliating for servicepeople became more salient in the military narrative, while the political opposition and retired officers aligned in their criticism against the government. In the 2014 political campaign, some former officers or their families entered Uribe's recently established political party, *Centro Democrático*[133] (León, 2014b; Illera & Ruíz, 2018, p. 519). Moreover, on several occasions, the former head of state voiced what he purported to be the sentiment in the ranks: "Colombia is ruled by someone who has equated our soldiers with terrorists", he said, accusing Santos of not keeping his promises (Caracol Radio, 2013).

In the November 2015 editorial, titled "*Futuro Incierto*" (Uncertain Future), Acore's president expressed the doubts and concerns that the reservist association members had regarding the process. Among them, uncertainty around the accord's content and the confirmation of "excessive concessions to the guerrillas" in political and judicial terms weakened the state institutions (Ruíz Barrera, 2015). In a letter that ended up being public through social media in 2016, former Gen. Canal said he believed that "the Colombian military is being trampled on" while the criminals received seats in congress[134].

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[133] For instance, retired Gen. Leonardo Barrero (military forces commander, 2013-14) was candidate for governor in the Cauca department, where he had long served and was later ousted because of a scandal in which he invited other officers to "organise as the mafia" against prosecutors investigating cases of extrajudicial executions.

[134] The letter was not officially published but circulated on social media in early July 2016. Available on the Facebook site of the Córdova Division, an association of retired army infantry officers: https://www.facebook.com/DIVICOR/posts/1107085979349673/

A remarkable indicator of opposition and feeling of degradation that this process caused in the sector is the stigmatisation of those active and retired officers who in some way participated in the peace talks or the first phase of implementation of accords. Firstly, the executive's decision to appoint a group of high-ranking, active personnel of the armed forces who travelled to Cuba and joined the negotiating team provoked a new escalation in the process's negative appraisal. As some experts close to the military report, given that active officers are subordinated to the president, the fear was that they could easily be instrumentalised when receiving orders of their commander-in-chief and would negotiate following instructions contrary to their will.

In this respect, former director of the think tank "Seguridad & Democracia" and then *Centro Democrático* senator, Alfredo Rangel, said it was a "humiliation" for the military (Semana, 2014d). Similarly, Uribe claimed it was illegal to oblige them to negotiate with terrorists (Semana, 2014d). In response to these comments, minister Pinzón had to clarify that this meant in no way that the active officers had a deliberating role and that they would not negotiate the future of the security forces: "they are advisors to those who are sitting at the table" (W Radio, 2014).

Secondly, informal, off-the-record comments from active and retired military personnel referred to the few generals that overtly supported Santos with derogatory terms. Some were even criticised for their alleged low combating trajectory –dubbed in the Colombian military slang "desk generals" in contrast to the "*troperos*", best known for their boots-on-ground experience. The term "princess" is also used in a sarcastic way to stress the relative favourable socioeconomic background of a minority, contrasting with the sector's trend.

General Mejía was the target of such epithets, to which a couple more added to the list. Just as Santos was accused of being "*castro-chavista*" –that is, sympathiser of the authoritarian socialist leaders– for using Cuba and Venezuela for support in the process, Mejía's ideological views were branded as close to leftist, communist ideas, even alluding to a supposed sympathy of his father with Marxism. Therefore, the most visible leader of the doctrine and structure reform received internal critique from those who saw him as a dangerous maverick. Critics

dubbed him "dolphin" with no operational experience for, in their view, he only achieved the highest rank because his father had made a successful military career[135].

Finally, some of the fiercest, hard-liner generals who enjoyed great respect and admiration in the ranks began to receive judgements and negative appraisals. After being appointed commander of the COET and leading the mechanisms for the disarmament and demobilisation of the former combatants, Gen. Javier Flórez was stigmatised as a traitor, even after decades of delivering crucial operational results (Matiz, 2016; Duzán, 2018, p. 312, 326). Flórez, who was then the CGFM chief of staff and had commanded the JTF Omega, was called a "criminal" for meeting the FARC delegates (Semana, 2015c). The head of the board of retired officers, Gen. Néstor Ramírez, publicly defended Flórez and offered solidarity with him, contrasting with the offensive words he had received (Semana, 2015c). Still, he was defamed for having shaken hands with the guerrilla he long fought (Caracol, 2016).

Even retired Gen. Mora, whom the representatives of Acore had chosen as their best man for the government's delegation in Cuba, did not escape negative judgements. Former General Canal referred to him as an "unhonourable soldier" in a letter that ended up being public. When former army commander and director of the school of NCOs, Gen. Guzmán, sent a letter congratulating and acknowledging Mora's efforts, some stated that the former military commander was "instrumentalised by President Santos to achieve the objective of the FARC, to sacrifice the army and take over the country" (Londoño Hoyos, 2016). Former EJC commander Bedoya added: "General Mora Rangel is one of the political figures chosen by Juan Manuel Santos to achieve the FARC's objective of disintegrating the country and taking power by negotiating a utopian peace, sacrificing the army" (2016).

In light of these statements, beyond the evident material consequences stemming from a potential reduction in budget, footprint, roles and missions, the ideas of what is fair and honourable are relevant to understand the ideational status quo at stake and, in turn, drivers of change linked to legitimacy. An episode that portrays this matter of morale is related to the still contested case of the Palace of Justice siege. Active and retired service members praise retired Col. Plazas Vega[136] as a national hero (see, for instance, Vanguardia, 2011b). In 2012, after

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[135] The first section in Chapter 4 outlined Gen. Mejía's background.
[136] As Chapter 5 mentioned, Plazas Vega was judged for his responsibility in the disappearance of hostages during the operation retake the building.

confirming Plazas Vega's conviction for the assault to retake the building, the high court also demanded that former M-19 guerrilla members and the EJC publicly apologise to the victims (Semana, 2012e). It was in this context that retired Gen. Mora said there was "no possibility that the current or future military will meet that requirement", and Gen. Navas affirmed that "honour impedes actions that the law tolerates" (Orozco, 2012). Three years later, when the country commemorated 30 years of these events, Santos asked for forgiveness in the name of the Colombian state (El Mundo, 2015b), and Plazas Vega was absolved of guilt (León, 2015).

Likewise related to fairness and pride, the exclusion of service people from the official construction of collective truth and historical memory confirmed their perception that critics of the armed forces, and even their enemies, had the upper hand in an eventual post-conflict. "How sad is it that, in the future, our grandchildren, the people who did not know our history, will hate us and be ashamed of having had us in the ranks of the army", declared former Gen. Canal in a radio interview in 2016. Retired Gen. García replicated this sentiment: "One of the saddest things is that the new generations will remember us as if we, the military and the police, had been the great victimizers of the Colombian population" (Ramírez et al., 2016, p. 42).

Consequently, when military personnel were not invited to participate in the CNMH publications in which episodes of the armed conflict were reconstructed, they felt the depiction of the events was biased and incomplete. For instance, in reaction to the *"¡Basta ya!"* report[137], Acore wrote an editorial titled "The enemy's work?". Here, the retiree's association affirmed they were labelled as "big criminals" and the military forces as "a very dangerous institution" (Acore, 2013a, p. 3).

According to former army Col. Velásquez (2015) "in 2013, when the famous *¡Basta ya!* report was published, we did not feel comfortable, especially in the second chapter (The motives and transformations of war). The sources and the way the document was written do not correspond to what we as military have experienced" (Ramírez et al., 2016, p. 22). Retired Gen. Ruíz Barrera also warned of the perils of historical memory in an eventual post-conflict as a vendetta mechanism. To him, it encompassed the "use of research and studies […] as a legal instrument for future processes and trials of responsibility, particularly against the highest

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[137] The document titled *"¡Basta ya! Colombia: Memorias de Guerra y dignidad* ("Enough is enough! Colombia: Memories of War and Dignity" (CNMH, 2013) contains five chapters that aim to portray the history, transformation, actors and victims of the armed conflict in Colombia.

ranks of the Public Force and, especially, against those who have been successful in the fight against terrorism" (2014, p. 5).

This perception that the official narrative at that time portrayed service members as perpetrators led to a counternarrative of the military as victims and their historical memory reconstruction[138]. Indeed, parallel to the peace process with the FARC, the military increased their interest and involvement in building a historical memory from their own perspective and their role as victims (see, for instance, De Mares, 2014).

These risks to the army's institutional image reinforced the already mentioned conviction that they should mobilise and exert pressure at their arms' reach to resist any unfavourable measures that they could avert. The following statement from MoD Villegas discloses that not only the retired but also active members of the armed forces mistrusted the political developments at that time:

> More than two years ago, when I arrived at the Ministry of Defence, I found a scenario of uncertainty in the face of the situation and, naturally, doubts about the future. We were in the middle of a peace process that was making significant progress in various respects, but its essential core, the element of justice, was in the making. There was a certain distance and mistrust in this house, in the Armed Forces, about what was being discussed in Havana (MDN, 2017, p. 8)

However, it was not only the prospect of the agreement with the guerrilla that generated negative expectations and wariness. A recurrent idea amongst retired and active members of the army has been that, beyond an armistice, ending the conflict would need the state's sustained presence to regain legitimacy and political will to solve deeply rooted problems (see, for instance, Bonett, 2014; Delgado, 2016, pp. 279–82; Dufort, 2017, pp. 330–4). Moreover, not a few active and retired military personnel have expressed the need for civilian institutions to assume responsibility in a comprehensive response to security issues (see, for instance, Andrade, 1987; Rodríguez, 1991; Medina, 2000).

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[138] In July 2013, the GCFM created the Centre for Research on Conflict and Military Historical Memory (CICMHM, for its acronym in Spanish) attached to the War College, to research the consequences of armed conflict on the security forces and their members (Directiva Permanente N 082 del 8 de julio de 2013).

Indeed, officers face the shortcomings of civilian agencies in meeting social needs[139]. They have experienced how some of these peacebuilding efforts end up in bureaucratic, politicised programmes that do not impact the population. Consequently, service members often feel that battlefield gains are not always matched with the necessary political will and resources (see Mejía, 2008, p. 3[140]; Correa Consuegra, 2010, pp. 33–35). This impression of being hung out to dry by their civilian superiors was revived by yet another peace process and the ongoing political ambiguity.

The preceding lines evidenced that concerns about likely adverse outcomes of the peace talks for the future of the EJC dominated the public discussion on security forces during the studied period. Even though this was not the only factor potentially affecting the status quo, service members' worries and opposition focused on the negotiations. Accordingly, retirees, active military leaders and defence officials converged around the goal of drawing a red line around the sector's interests.

However, fears about possible decisions negatively impacting the army persisted. Beliefs of how the peace process could affect the military organisation stemmed from other countries' experience and the ongoing institutional developments in Colombia. On the one hand, former officers expressed concerns about drastic reductions in roles, size and resources, along with judicial decisions whereby the enemies were pardoned and the security forces condemned. On the other, the dialogues' agenda contemplated democratic and legal prerogatives that the public force did not enjoy. Additionally, due to the crucial role of counterinsurgency for the army's self-conception, development, and resources, the unfolding events could potentially jeopardise its *raison d'être*. Overall, the changing environment implied potential and effective negative outcomes for the army's material interests and its legitimacy.

In this sense, the opposition to this highly sensitive topic with political implications overshadowed the other identified risks to the land force's operational and institutional status quo. For instance, the fiscal impact of the troop growth and long-term adjustment needs were absent in the debate or were outdone by the rumours of cutting the army's resources as a result of the peace talks. The equally necessary discussion on a strategy and means to fight organised

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[139] Interviews with retired Gen. Fabricio Cabrera, retired marine corps BG Rafael Colón, and ret. MG Juan Pablo Amaya.

[140] Then Col. Mejía wrote in his Strategy Research Project: "political parties ranging from socialist liberals to conservatives tried to achieve peace and stability. However, none of them managed to reach a successful solution to these problems, because of their lack of strategic leadership to bring the country out of failure" (2008, p. 3).

crime and other rising threats also rapidly fell into concerns of reducing the army's roles. To conclude this chapter's analysis, the following section examines the interplay between civilian and military interests on this described backdrop and how did they adapt to the perceived unfavourable changes for the army.

6.3. Civil-Military Coalescence: Adapting to Counter Ambiguity

"Nothing disappears in war; it is transformed, given another purpose", said army Gen. Navas in early 2012, when he addressed the senior officer corps at the opening ceremony of the higher command and staff courses (Fuerzas Militares, 2012a). He thereby presented their new war plan, dubbed Sword of Honour, which resulted from the first strategic review in which most of the event attendants had participated the previous year. This assertion epitomises the core adaptation logic behind the Colombian army's reforms.

As previously observed, resistance emerged against unwanted changes, especially those jeopardising the military's material or symbolic resources. The whole sector was potentially affected, but the land force had exceptionally high stakes due to its intense engagement in the counterinsurgent war that seemed coming to an end, at least with the oldest and biggest guerrilla group. Though Navas expressly referred to the structure of joint military commands when asserting that "nothing disappears in war", this rationale of change by adopting other tasks instead of ceasing to exist is quite similar to the spirit of the EJC reform that was then unfolding.

Not less important for the forthcoming analysis is the symbolism of the war plan's name. First, if the government was to negotiate with the guerrilla, it was up to those who had fought decades against the enemy to strike the final blow, to break the enemy's will to fight (JEMPP, 2017). This was the core objective of the Sword of Honour plan, which encompassed several interagency actions to defeat the insurgency in its tactical elements and countering urban militia, judicial, financial and other environmental factors key to its survival. As Chapter 5 described, the plan also resulted in the army's initial step to formulate new doctrinal and structural tenets, to envision additional roles and missions in an eventual post-conflict phase.

Additionally, beyond delivering results on the battlefield to force a weak counterpart to surrender arms, the institutional moment that the EJC members experienced gave them

reasons to prevent actions deemed unfair or unworthy for the military. According to the previous argumentation, the army's symbolic place and resources were at stake. "We, soldiers, live by the rule that honour comes first", –said Navas when explaining why they would refrain from apologising to the victims of the Justice Palace (Orozco, 2012). The following analysis maintains that the land force aimed to avoid losing resources, their relevance and reputation, which translated into embracing other missions while promoting an image of a successful, victorious, legitimate army.

How, then, did the key players accommodate according to their interests, thereby producing the reform under consideration? Following the formulated hypothesis, actors keen on safeguarding the institutional framework convenient for the army converged around the goal of adapting the land-force in the most favourable possible way. Nevertheless, while this was an ulterior motive for the military, it was a means for further civilian political purposes. In this case, the executive needed to gain leverage for a peace accord and minimise frictions against the process.

Without ignoring tangible divergent positions within both sectors, this research argues that the interests of top decision-makers were akin at that time, which made them align to protect the armed forces' institutional status quo. Indeed, the diversity in high-ranking officers' personal and professional trajectories can influence internal dissonant opinions vis-à-vis a strategic and institutional situation. This discord transcends the misleading and often referred to dichotomies between the beforementioned "*troperos*" and "desk generals" or "doves and hawks", depending on their stance on peace and warfare. Such binaries can be deceptive since active personnel tend to dogmatically subordinate to the commander-in-chief's discourse, and only retired officers speak up their minds in public. Moreover, as other scholars have accurately pointed out (Gilhodés, 1986; Delgado, 2015a), the profound tenets of military thinking in Colombia vary from an exclusive warfighting role for the military to state-building and development missions. Each member might gravitate towards one of the two sides, though not always straightforwardly.

However, beyond the usual amalgam of ideological and partisan loyalties that appear beneath the collective level, there are shared material and ideational interests that can be witnessed, reinforced by the esprit de corps characteristic of martial organisations. Considering this, where the common goal was to defend their institutional resources, concerned actors converged at some point of a spectrum between total resistance to reforms and change as an

adaptation to uncertainty. In the studied case, this played a significant role in forming a relatively mainstream posture and mobilising to protect their interests, thus implementing ostensibly advantageous changes while curbing unwelcome amendments. Consequently, although sharing the fierce opposition to changes that could affect them stemming from the Havana talks with all active and retired service members, the army's top-brass appropriated the government's narrative. The reforms were an outcome of this adaptation.

In exchange for this subordination and alignment, civilian leaders of the defence sector buttressed and enabled the changes that were preferable for the army's future. Interested in gaining support for and mitigating resistance to the peace process, the executive created the institutional space for the reforms, a subject that Chapter 7 will elaborate. Parallel to this, and outside the military-led changes that are the matter of the present work, the civilian government also granted concessions to appease the sector regarding their legal concerns over the peace talks.

Before proceeding further with the argumentation, it is worth mentioning that the transitional justice prerogatives that the executive granted to the armed forces occurred after the October 2016 plebiscite, as the peace accord had to be renegotiated. In this opportunity, after the government delegation formulated the new agreement with the FARC, the military top-brass demanded a wording adjustment concerning command responsibility. Deviating from the provisions of Article 28 of the Rome Statute, the government yielded to pressure from the military leadership and unilaterally granted a special treatment to the security forces that exempts superiors from responsibility for punishable acts (Acto Legislativo 1 de 2017, art. 24)[141].

The forthcoming subsections will explain how the army leaders integrated the government's approach to peace into their communications. Nevertheless, a certain disagreement can be witnessed when the civilian executive emphasises new roles and the military, in contrast, recall the growing irregular threats they still must tackle. Furthermore, the head of state attempted to compensate for the adverse effects of the peace talks regarding service members' morale and reputation by displaying public approval and promising a much better future would come after the accords were signed. Finally, the army embraced the

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[141] The legal implications of this concession to the public force –which differs from the legal framework for the guerrilla– have been discussed by Grillo (2018) and Olasolo and Canosa (2018). A journalistic piece that former government officials qualify as truthful also depicts the bargaining between civilian and military leaders on this specific point on the night before signing the new agreement (Duzán, 2018, pp. 283–308).

perspective of a multiplicity of missions in the eventual post-conflict, becoming a multi-mission force.

A Narrative Alignment Around Change, Dissonance at a Strategic Level

"Either we change, or they change us" is a phrase that became famous in Colombian politics since 1998 when the president of the senate pronounced it to highlight the importance of reforms that would correct protracted problems in the legislative branch. Over two decades later, the EJC commander would use a similar phrase to explain the spirit of the reforms he presented to the country. During an interview in September 2016, in the previous days to the plebiscite on the peace accords, Gen. Mejía stated: "We must go ahead of the changes; if we fall behind, others will change us" (Hernández Mora, 2016). Another general expressed this saying: "When your neighbour's house is on fire, beware of your own. When you notice that things around you are changing, you must adapt"[142], emphasising the need to prepare for detrimental circumstances that could be foreseen.

This intention surfaced in some statements when key figures would insist on no changes coming from outside of the organisation, but that the army would implement necessary modifications "from the institution, for the institution", as Mejía stated (Bonilla, 2016). For instance, after retired Gen. Ruíz Barrera recognised that the military needed to adapt and prepare for a future after the internal conflict, in his same editorial to the Acore magazine, he asserted: "Those who believe that, in a possible post-conflict, our Armed Forces must be restructured in terms of their troop strength and their constitutional role […], and in matters of citizen security and peace, are wrong" (Ruíz Barrera, 2014, p. 4).

By that time, Colombian military journals were increasingly adopting in their editorial line topics related to an eventual post-peace agreement phase and the public force roles in that scenario. For instance, the 231st issue of *Fuerzas Armadas* (2014) addressed post-conflict and new possible missions for the military. In his editorial to this number, the War College director affirmed that thinking about post-war and the future roles of the military was a "national duty", for "the society perceives that the conflict will lower or extinguish in a not too distant future, and because the Colombian society already lives the conditions of a partial post-conflict, given

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[142] Interview with BG Óscar Tobar Soler.

the drop in many violence factors" (Fernández, 2014, p. 4). "In a post-conflict setting, the military will be the institution that faces the most radical missional, organisational and cultural transformations", added retired Gen. Fernández (2014, p. 4). The army also seemed to embrace change towards missions abroad, as its publications addressed transformation to enhance interoperability and conventional warfare as the strategy for the future[143].

While the military top brass emphasised the need and ability to transform to fulfil any future duty, the civilian leaders focused on advertising the benefits that peace would bring to service members, continuously insisting that no changes would be agreed with the guerrilla. Consequently, the Santos administration endeavoured to show the armed forces that their demands were taken seriously and that an armistice with the guerrilla would benefit them. "The issue of the future of our army is neither part of the agenda, nor are we going to negotiate it" –said the president addressing the troops in the Tolemaida base and added: "We are indeed discussing the future of our forces so that we can adapt to these new circumstances and this is going to be positive for all of you" (Presidencia, 2014a).

Additionally, during the radio interview in which he claimed that compulsory military service would no longer exist after achieving a peace accord, Santos added that "plans to adapt [the public force] to the post-conflict situation will be made within the institutions. We will strengthen our army and police; we have to defend our borders; under no circumstances will we weaken them". (Sierra, 2014). Similarly, former CGFM chief of staff, Gen. Hugo Acosta, who also participated as an advisor to the negotiating team in Havana, affirmed: "We are already thinking about what our military forces are going to do by 2030 and 2050, how we are going to organise ourselves and what we are going to do this the post-conflict period" (RCN, 2014). On another interview he went further to accept that "we are aware that we will have to reduce the size of the force in the future, but this is something that we are organising by ourselves" (Ariza, 2015, p. 54).

Moreover, as the peace talks were coming to an end and the EJC reforms were announced, Gen. Mejía lined up communication efforts to clarify that the transformation plan had no external or political interferences. During his keynote speech in the forum *The army of the future: between transformation and doctrine to build peace*, he made several statements in this line

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[143] For instance, the *Revista Ejército* (2015, issue 177, on international military missions, and 179, where new challenges rising from post-conflict were addressed) and the new magazines *Transformación Militar*, first published in 2016, and *Experticia Militar*, released in 2017, with a focus on military doctrine and professionalisation.

that the national and local media echoed. For instance, "these changes are made by us (…) we are the ones who know about these issues" (Canal RCN, 2015) and "no civilian or any other organisation is going to come here and make those changes for us" (El Tiempo, 2015b) show the intention of dissociating the reforms from the process in Cuba.

In the same academic event, retired Gen. Mora also affirmed that the doctrine reform "is not an imposition of the Havana talks" (Canal RCN). Another retired army general, Bonnet, also denied the possibility that the new doctrine would have been drafted in the negotiation with the guerrilla: "I am one hundred per cent sure, I believe almost blindly, in what Mejía said, that this is the work of him, his staff and previous commanders" (El Tiempo, 2015c).

As the doctrine reference documents were issued, Mejía had to respond once again to those who suspected that the new doctrine was a product of the negotiations with the guerrilla (Mejía, 2016c, p. 59). The DICOE correspondingly emphasised that the transformation was "developed by members of the institution and had no interference from external actors or political factors. It is a military plan designed and built by the military" (2016, p. 5). The commander of the Army Education and Doctrine Command, in turn, referred to the doctrine as "made by soldiers and for soldiers" (Fajardo, 2017, p.2).

In some cases, the media mostly reproduced verbatim what the official army communiqués stated on the subject. In this sense, they supported the military high command's efforts to mark a distance between the reforms and the Havana process and echoed the government's discourse. For instance:

> Today it is clear to the vast majority of the troops that this is not a consequence of the peace agreements. It is a necessity that was postponed over the years. As in any change processes, there were moments of uncertainty and resistance. However, the military members are aware that their mission will continue to be fundamental in a future scenario, even without the Farc (Semana, 2016c).

As follows from these quotes, the persistent will to deny any interference of external actors in the new EJC doctrine and structure stems from the political need both by the government and army leaders to dismiss that the FARC or the peace accords had anything to do with it. Certainly, these reforms were not designed at the negotiating table. However, paradoxically, to better justify the implemented changes and counter voices that pointed at the military as spoilers of the process, officers and civilians depicted the reforms as a response to the peace efforts and a supposed upcoming post-conflict.

Consequently, a disarticulation can be witnessed between what the civilian executive wants to portray as the new roles for the post-conflict and what the military identify as the new threats' scenario. "The army needs to transform into a conventional army, but this does not mean that it will be weakened; on the contrary, it will be stronger", claimed Santos in the Tolemaida base (Presidencia, 2014a). Also, during an interview with a local radio station only a few days before his re-election, the president-candidate stated:

> I believe that the Colombian Army is one of the most experienced and effective in guerrilla warfare, which is why as soon as the conflict is over, we have to transform it into a more conventional Army [...] which is no longer to fight an asymmetric war but to defend national sovereignty, guard the borders and be present throughout the national territory (Sierra, 2014).

However, when Gen. Mejía presented the reforms in 2015, he emphasised precisely the need to strengthen joint action with the national police, to face threats arising from illegal armed groups that operate within the Colombian borders and jeopardise the rules of engagement and operational law for their hybrid character (Universidad del Rosario, 2015). "Without knowing if a peace accord will be signed, whether the ELN will enter the process too, or what is going to happen with criminal bands, we must be very wary", he affirmed during an interview in 2016 (León, 2016).

Likewise, the army's internal communication of the reform emphasised the new and persisting asymmetric threats, such as the ELN and the criminal gangs: "in such negotiation processes, there are always dissidents, even more so when the group has links with drug trafficking […]. It is necessary to recognise the FARC is not the only actor present in the conflict" (DICOE, 2016, p. 5). During a control debate in congress, the military forces' commander also justified the army adjustments as a response to mutating internal threats and the possibility of external threats (Cámara de Representantes, 2015, pp. 22–3).

Two main factors contributed to this disarticulation. On the one hand, the existential fear of the military losing roles, resources and legitimacy led them to show that they are necessary and qualified for almost every possible strategic scenario –including the degradation of the internal conflict. In short, the EJC was ready to be "out of area" rather than "out of operation" while also emphasising their heroic victory against the enemy they endured for over five decades. On the other hand, civilians at the helm of the sector needed to gain support from the military and lower their resistance against the peace process. This necessity prompted

them to create the institutional framework and narrative of potential future roles, usually represented as bringing better conditions and emphasising the pride and honour-related rhetoric that equated a peace accord to military victory.

However, somewhere along the way, this narrative had the negative consequence of lessening self-critique and downplaying other urgent and worrisome issues that challenged the security forces, with or without a demobilised FARC, as the military themselves asserted. Overall, it is possible to witness a mismatch between the fact that the army recognised changes in the domestic theatre that required another approach to emerging criminal actors, different from counterguerrilla warfare, and the tendency to cling on to those traditional roles due to the long history of fighting insurgents and the centrality of this task for the army's identity and resources. The two coming subsections in this chapter provide evidence of the interplay of the rhetorical compensation and the alignment between relevant actors of the security sector around the idea of the peace process as a military victory.

"Peace is Your Victory" and "A Better Future Awaits": The Civilian Mantras

The president's constant will to publicly flatter the army during the studied period does not go unnoticed. This is not a minor detail considering that military honour and pride were affected at that time and, as members of the executive recognised, there was low morale and mistrust in the ranks. "You are the best of the best", Santos told the Colombian elite forces during the western hemisphere special ops Olympics at the Tolemaida base, in June 2012, to which he added, "we are in the best hands to win the most difficult part of war" (Fuerzas Militares, 2012b).

Furthermore, as the peace process with the FARC unfolded, the then commander-in-chief would often show appreciation and give compliments to servicepeople by referring to them as victors and presenting peace as a reason for military pride and honour: "It has been a principle in military history that peace for any soldier is victory […]. The Colombian state, our forces, are the victorious forces. You are a victorious army […]. Peace is a victory for our soldiers" (Presidencia, 2014a). A few months later, he repeated:

> Fifty years of war, and we will finally achieve peace. This peace is your victory and it will be sustainable because you will continue to play a fundamental role […]. In many

years, you will be able to tell your children, your grandchildren: I was a protagonist […] when that historic moment came, when, after 50 years of war, we accomplished peace and gave way to the definitive boost of this great country that is Colombia (Presidencia, 2014b).

Santos also used his background as MDN to add more credibility to his worship of the army. When greeting the troops at a base in the southern department of Caquetá, he spoke to service members about his legacy as "the one that has strengthened the military the most" and added that it was a "great pride" for him to know that, because of the prestige he had built in the army, soldiers would later contribute their expertise in transitioning contexts abroad (Presidencia, 2015a). The president assured them once again: "if we achieve peace, it is your victory and nobody else's" (Presidencia, 2015a). He also highlighted this in the army's journal in 2016: "It is time for your victory, soldiers. Remember that peace is victory" (Santos, 2016, p. 6), while then minister Villegas did the same expressing "deep gratitude on behalf of all Colombians" for the "dear soldiers of the nation" (Villegas, 2016, p. 8).

Beyond the triumphalist discourse, the government did not miss the opportunity to communicate the collective and individual benefits of peace to officers and NCOs, especially given the new roles and missions for the land force. In Santos' words, "instead of going to the jungle for three months chasing *guerrilleros*" the army would transform into a "more normal", conventional one, and soldiers would be in "more favourable personal circumstances" (Presidencia, 2014a). "Just as United States missions come to Tolemaida to train you, you will be able to go to other countries, and be much better paid, because you will already have United Nations' salaries", he added (Presidencia, 2014a).

The MDN also supported the president's positive remarks. Indeed, minister Pinzón affirmed: "we dream of modern and strong forces for the future of Colombia, and we are making it come true" (Defensa.com, 2015). Meanwhile, his successor referred to the envisioned changes as having the outcome of "an army prepared for peace or war, strengthened, enthusiastic and transparent" (W Radio, 2016).

Besides offering future missions abroad as a kind of *El Dorado* for an army that had endured war at home, the executive emphasised other domestic roles for the military. As Chapter 5 mentioned, in ministerial planning guides preceding the Santos presidency, issues related to internal security and public order occupied the central stage. While the 2007-2010

strategic planning guide introduced the policy for democratic security consolidation, its focus was precisely to secure and advance the goals of recovering public order, territorial control and the fight against drugs. However, the security and defence sector's strategic objectives for the 2015-2018 period witnessed a marked shift towards stabilisation, peace, and new roles, which now joined the former topics at the same level of priority (MDN, 2015b, p. 6).

During a public speech, the president referred to civilian and development-related roles for the army in zones "where there is no state presence, and there are immense challenges to defend our borders and our environment, and build the country that has yet to be built" (Presidencia, 2015a). Moreover, a year after his assignment as minister of defence, Villegas stressed that the security forces now supported peace, despite the frictions and resistance that emerged in the previous years parallel to political campaigns. "I am pleased to tell the country about the excellent relationship that the defence sector has with peace […]. Today the armed forces perfectly understand […] that peace has benefits for our soldiers and police members, for their families" (Caracol Radio, 2016).

Later, when presenting his report to the congress for the legislative period 2016-2017, minister Villegas explicitly connected the changing situation that stemmed from the peace process, with the army reforms:

> With the active support and hard work of our public force, we managed to put an end to more than 50 years of war with the FARC. This turning point that the country is going through led us to develop an exercise to review our doctrine, strategic planning and innovation that would allow us to have a clear understanding of the challenges that persist in our environment, as well as the new opportunities for our armed forces' future (Villegas, 2017, p. 9).

The preceding lines confirm that the civilian executive resorted to compensation strategies (Croissant et al., 2011) to gain leverage and minimise resistance to the peace talks from the ranks. The public display of approval and insistence on ideas linked to military honour was a means to increase support from the ranks. Besides this logic of appreciation, evidence shows attempts to appease expressed fears and attend the army member's material and symbolic interests. Finally, as Chapter 7 will analyse, the government granted autonomy to implement the studied reforms and paved the way so that the adaptation could take place. The last subsection deals with the way in which the EJC adjusted its narrative to show that it was prepared for a post-war phase.

Muti-Mission Heroes: A Victorious Army Prepared for Peace and War

Parallel to the adamant insistence in no relation between the Havana process and the reforms, EJC leaders were also eager to show that the transformation was the most compelling evidence that they embraced a future post-conflict and were preparing for this scenario[144]. For instance, during an interview with the national press, army commander Gen. Rodríguez asserted that "those who most yearn for peace are the soldiers […]. If peace comes for the prosperity of all Colombians, we welcome it. We, the soldiers, will be the first to value it. Peace means victory" (Amat, 2013). A few weeks before being promoted to military forces' commander, Rodríguez repeated in a national radio interview that, "as the President said, the peace is the victory" and that the army was "absolutely committed" to this goal (Wallace, 2014).

Similarly, as Gen. Mejía became EJC commander, he defined himself as "a war man who wants to be the architect of peace" (Amat, 2015). "Today I want to reaffirm that we are not afraid of peace" was the opening phrase of his keynote to the public event where he announced the doctrine reform (Universidad del Rosario, 2015). He also mentioned that his decision to "carry out a total review of military doctrine" stemmed from the strategic moment that the EJC faced and that safeguarding the peace agreement required stronger military forces (El Tiempo, 2015b). Mejía also emphasised that the reform aimed not only to "guarantee that we have our own, modern and current doctrine, but also that we offer a doctrine coherent with the challenges that the future entails" (Canal RCN, 2015). More colloquially, in another interview, Mejía stated: "We cannot kill a tiger and then be afraid of its hide[145]. Win the war and then be afraid of peace" (León, 2016).

Furthermore, just like the government underscored the army's victorious character, its commander adopted this narrative and incorporated it in communication pieces. "It does not mean losing, or reducing, or lessening the number of soldiers. Transformation is institutional strengthening", Mejía told the national media network, Colprensa (2016). When the government declared that it had reached a final bilateral ceasefire agreement with the guerrilla, the officer at the helm of the land force referred to this as a reason to be proud: "This is not a humiliation. It is an honour to us because the one who takes care of them is the one who won

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[144] Also as a response to claims of the armed forces spoiling the peace process.
[145] In reference to a Latin-American saying which intends to express that, after having achieved something that demands courage, one starts second guessing one's decision.

the war, and the one who keeps the weapons" (Radio Nacional de Colombia, 2016). Similarly, in an interview for the Spanish media *El País*, he asserted: "The National Army is victorious, its sacrifice has been valuable, recognised by the society and the international community" (Hernández Mora, 2016).

Military journals were also a means to replicate the message of a vanquishing and honourable army: "We have achieved the victory […]. The victor will now protect its 52-year-old enemy", wrote Mejía in his editorial to the EJC magazine (2016a, p. 3). Correspondingly, in 2017, the five issues of the *Revista Ejército* were titled *Camino hacia la victoria* ("The road towards victory"). The series offered a historical account of the different conflict phases, adaptation and reforms until the FARC demobilised in 2016.

The representation of a triumphant army coincided with statements conveying the reform plan as necessary and unprecedented. Modern, efficient, necessary, and in tune with the highest standards were some of the qualifying terms used to describe the new doctrine and structure (Bonilla, 2016; DICOE, 2016; Hernández Mora, 2016; Rojas, 2017a, p. 111). "The plan might be the most important structural change in the last century", stressed General Lasprilla, Mejía's predecessor as EJC commander (El Tiempo, 2015b). As the national press replicated army communiqués, it referred to it as "the most profound and radical change of the National Army in its more than 200 years of existence" (Semana, 2016b).

Moreover, when pointing out the need for specialisation, Gen. Mejía compared the organisation's ideal with an orchestra: "I want the army to sound like a symphony orchestra. This implies that everyone plays an instrument and does so under the highest standards" (Universidad de los Andes [Uniandes], 2016). In another interview, while he also used the musical simile, he added the phrase "I do not want a *papayera*[146]" (León, 2016) to underscore the refinement process intended with the reforms. In this sense, the doctrinal reform should "paint the army of one colour", as Mejía stated at a 2012 conference on army transformation for officers and NCOs in the education and doctrine department (Rojas, 2017a, p. 110).

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[146] A *papayera* is a popular folklore band in Colombia, whose origin is actually linked to musical bands in which members of the armed forces participated during national holidays. The term is sometimes used in a pejorative sense to convey the meaning of spontaneous, carnivalesque, inharmonious.

Similar to the government's emphasis on internal roles different from war, on an article published by the national press and the Acore website, Capt. Castaño pointed out the great array of activities in which the military could engage in an eventual post-conflict:

> These activities can facilitate socio-economic development, generating new opportunities for the civilian population and ex-combatants, especially in rural areas, discouraging a return to violence. For example, military engineers would play a vital role in the reconstruction of infrastructure affected by the conflict, participating in the construction of secondary and tertiary roads in remote areas where civilian companies cannot reach because of their difficult access and security problems. Besides, due to their training and experience in the construction of airport runways, aqueducts, deep well drilling, and risk management for the attention and prevention of disasters, they can contribute to the development and eventual solution problems the country faces. Rural development is not possible if the territory is mined. To meet this challenge, military engineers currently have no less than 10,000 men of all ranks working in demining (Castaño, 2015).

In former Gen. Mora's words, the military was the main actor in the "reconstruction of the rural areas and the society" (Canal RCN, 2015). As for Mejía, he described the new army as a "great war and services machine" that "supports the development of the country: the environmental issue, attention to disasters, the humanitarian issue and the participation in international missions (Bonilla, 2016). Similarly, an EJC communiqué explained that its transformation plan stemmed from the defence sector' mission areas, which "contain traditional responsibilities such as public security and national defence, but also present some opportunities such as international cooperation, contribution to the country's development, protection of the environment and natural resources" (Fuerzas Militares, 2017).

The prominence of development-support and civilian tasks as potential new roles and "opportunities" confirms the interest in making the army a useful organisation in any scenario, but above all in a post-conflict and stabilisation context. Mejía summarised this broad spectrum of roles in an interview in 2016:

> We know this premise governs what we do: protecting the territory's sovereignty. However, the government told us that we are not going to do just that, that we will continue to participate at a domestic level until we achieve stable and lasting peace. We must get involved in the country's development and participate in international missions, and we have to be prepared to deal with disaster, environmental and risk management issues. […]. If Colombia had powerful institutions to deal with each of

these issues, there would be no reason for us to be involved. However, we must be realistic (León, 2016).

To sum up, the sector leaders were moving between two sides of the threats' spectrum. One more plausible and short-term, continuing with internal asymmetric warfare and its volatile character. In the long term, the other side promised eventual conventional warfare roles, international missions, and allegedly better conditions for the army of the future. In principle, this is a reasonable approach to the volatile context that the Colombian land force faced.

Nevertheless, this is potentially problematic when civilian leaders overly emphasise the second scenario –and partially, sometimes military too–, for political or rhetorical purposes. This stemmed from the need to convince of the "benefits of peace" for the armed forces and to safeguard material and ideational interests at stake. In other words, it was a goal to show that peace does not threaten the military organisation's existence and, instead, gives their member other and better roles, as victors and peacemakers.

Overall, this highlights the contradiction between the assessment of the strategic moment that the military did –in which the guerrilla was significantly diminished but not defeated– and the way in which leaders of the sector wanted to portray the situation, representing the army as a victorious force. Given the strong influence of counterinsurgency in the Colombian military's identity and transformation throughout half of its history, ending the war with the major internal threat also posed concerns for the army's resources and its role as guardian of public order. Consequently, both civilian and military leaders focused on the conception of the peace process as a victory for the armed forces.

6.4. Summary

This chapter revealed the ideas and trade-offs between civilian and military interests during the studied period. Based on evidence regarding the type of change to which the sector leaders exerted overt opposition, and the interplay of concessions and alignment between decision-makers, the analysis confirmed that these actors adapted to preserve the military's institutional resources.

In order to indicate the central tenets that framed and buttressed decisions, the first section discussed how key actors appraised the strategic moment and views on the nature of warfare that gained attention during the studied period. It is possible to observe a widespread influence of the conception that military victory was not equal to the enemy's annihilation. Instead, the goal was to weaken the guerrilla for the political leaders to end the conflict through negotiation. Either for conviction, for pragmatic reasons, or a combination of both, the military leadership in Colombia adopted the government's peace rhetoric at that time, and it became the official narrative of the evolution of the internal conflict and the armed forces' role in it.

As the analysis showed, there is an underlying contradiction to this, since the army itself presented an assessment of the situation in which the guerrilla had regained key positions in the confrontation and, therefore, instead of being defeated, was trying to resurge. However, for the military's self-representation and symbolic role in the country, it was vital to portray themselves as a victorious army. Another idea that gained momentum and reinforced this notion of victory was the awareness of legitimacy as the centre of gravity for counterinsurgency. These notions permeated the rationale and content of the studied reforms while also playing a role in how they were communicated.

Moreover, there was a dissonance at a strategic level. For the government's representatives in the peace talks, it was crucial to include social and political issues on the agenda. These topics were already part of the existing constitution still to materialise. Nevertheless, they also offered leverage and common ground to negotiate with the insurgents. While stressing that they did not justify resorting to terrorism to fight for any grievances, the government accepted that some structural matters also claimed by the FARC were necessary to achieve sustainable peace.

Military officers have also generally agreed throughout decades with enhancing legitimacy and adopting a whole-of-government perspective that tackles socioeconomic and political shortcomings as a road to strategic victory. Nevertheless, their stance on the solution to the problem differed from that of the civilian leadership at the time. For service members, it was a failure and a sign of disdain to see civilians discuss aspects of the democratic system with the illegal groups that attacked the state for half a century. Consequently, a perception of being undervalued and dishonoured grew in the ranks.

These two opposite visions evidence a fundamental disagreement in the relationship between means and goals in the Colombian approach towards insurgency during the studied period. Moreover, it marks the underlying ambiguity in the strategic assessment in the Santos administration and a substantial source of distrust vis-à-vis the political leadership. Additionally, although several ongoing institutional and operational challenges initiated the army's adaptation, the issues related to the peace process were the focus of critique, resistance and, ultimately, bargaining between civilians at the helm of the security sector and leaders of the land force.

The second section delved into this aversion to potential changes coming from outside of the military, and the pressure and concerns about the army's future, often expressed as overt criticism to government decisions by actors close to the sector. Indeed, scepticism and distrust in attempts to achieve negotiated peace that already prevailed in the country were fuelled by yet another process with the FARC. This was particularly true for those seeing a victorious army against the insurgents; to them, there was nothing to be changed. Moreover, given the central place of counterinsurgency for the Colombian army's identity, the developments during the studied period risked what has been its *raison d'être.*

The civilian delegates in Cuba were also keen on protecting the military institutional framework from reforms stemming from the negotiating table. In a sort of *mantra* that leaders in Bogota and Havana repeated at that time, topics related to the armed forces were a red line in the peace dialogues, and the government itself was eager to inhibit any decision from the talks that could affect the military. Notwithstanding, based on Central America and the Southern Cone's experiences –reinforced by the uncertainty in judicial matters at that time–, servicepeople began to fear they would end up in jail while the enemy was enjoying political rights and amnesties.

Central to the military ethos, honour and pride doubtlessly played a role in this opposition. Indeed, observations voiced by critics of the peace process as unfair, unworthy and harmful for the military –who they believed they would be the losers of any transitional justice arrangement– further reinforced the conviction to mobilise to avert any unfavourable reforms. Finally, the exclusion of service people from the official elaboration of collective truth and historical memory confirmed their understanding that the armed forces' detractors and their long-time adversaries on the battlefield had the upper hand in an eventual post-conflict.

On the backdrop of this willingness to deter outcomes undesirable for the EJC, the government and the military adapted according to their ultimate preferences. In this regard, the last section evidenced the adjustment by actors inclined to defend the status quo convenient for the military, as an intermediate or ulterior motive. "We better change ourselves before others change us" is the core rationale driving this decision, sometimes uttered in this precise way. Consistent with the civil-military configuration in Colombia that was described in Chapters 2 and 3, civilian leaders resorted to compensation strategies (as described by Croissant et al., 2011). These are weak mechanisms of civilian control, for they depend on the resources available at the moment and not on systemic changes.

Specifically, the government attempted to show that it considered and protected military interests regarding resources by promising not to reduce the army's budget, size or institutional relevance and generating a special transitional justice for service members. Secondly, the president and other civilians at the top of the security sector responded to the feeling of disdain and discredit amongst the ranks by showing public approval, emphasising honour and pride to upheave the troop morale. Finally, they conceded the top brass autonomy and created the conditions to implement reforms to preserve resources and institutional relevance. The link between these goals of acquiring or maintaining material and ideational interests and the chosen models for the reform will be the subject of Chapter 7.

Consequently, those in positions to choose how to counter adverse consequences for the army advanced reforms to show a successful land-force prepared for any potential scenario. The name of "multi-mission heroes" given to the publicity campaign that accompanied the reform's announcement seeks to embody this message. Avid for stability in a challenging institutional and strategic context, instead of drastically resisting any change, the sector leaders opted for a type of reform that portrayed the army as suitable for a new and broad spectrum of roles. Civilian interests akin to those of the military, in turn, enabled this through an institutional framework that will be further analysed in the next chapter when addressing factors that shaped the reform.

Overall, the discussion agenda about the army's future got caught up in a highly sensitive topic with political implications, namely, the peace talks. Given the high level of aversion to detrimental changes that could arise from a negotiation with the guerrilla, the actors' attention excessively focused on denying that the military organisation would be subject to reforms due to the peace process. Understanding that the military's material and ideational

interests were at stake and that it was a key stakeholder to advance on the negotiations, the civilian leadership was willing to compensate and grant concessions to the armed corps.

However, with the aim of countering the risks that the peace talks represented for the army, both the government and the top brass devoted public communications to show that the ongoing reforms had nothing to do with the Havana talks. As will be further explained in Chapter 7, the EJC was indeed already adapting to a changing environment and other relevant risks that were addressed in Chapter 5. Notwithstanding, the high sensitivities raised by the negotiations with the FARC led to an excessive emphasis on the latter, while other also relevant issues were partially neglected or not given enough political and budgetary backing.

This part of the hypothesis-testing concludes that the combination of ambiguous goals and roles for the army in the conduction of warfare and pressure to protect material and ideational resources on the backdrop of an uncertain future led decision-makers to look for blueprints conveying success and legitimacy, and which can ensure access to bolstering capabilities. Although these are essential steps in the Colombian army's modernisation process, this kind of implemented change deviated the attention from additional relevant, profound reforms.

As it will be discussed, the symbiotic civil-military relations configuration in the country, the fears that comprehensive reforms would be understood as a result of a negotiation with insurgents, and scarce self-criticism, curbed any initiative to carry out structural changes in the security sector.

7. Pressures and Legitimacy-Seeking Goals Shape the Army Reform

As observed in Chapter 4, the outcome of the Colombian army's proactive step towards reforms is an eclectic combination of new doctrine and education tenets along with structure and force deployment adjustments. Some changes correspond to a wide range of tasks, mostly in future scenarios far from the ongoing security environment. These novelties coincide with previously existing, restructured or reinforced elements of the EJC, such as the comprehensive action component. The Colombian military's land branch seems willing to prepare for almost any possible, even still unlikely, scenario. For an army that was and is still struggling with irregular domestic threats, the objective of transforming into a multi-purpose force that also serves for conventional war, peace, development, and crisis management at home and abroad proves far-reaching and ambiguous.

According to the research objective examining causes of military change, the work has focused on the EJC reform's triggers and the agents' calculus that led to it. To this end, Chapter 5 dealt with the political and operational dynamics influencing the institutional context of the land force. Subsequently, Chapter 6 observed the civil-military interplay of interests and goals, producing resistance to adverse change, alignment to preserve the army's status quo, and the decision to adopt preferred reforms before an unfavourable army revision prevails. The evidence confirms the causal relation between upward uncertainty in the Colombian army's strategic and institutional environment and the response of decision-makers to this volatile context: adapting to protect the military's material and ideational interests.

To conclude the analysis, the issue of why the reform leaders chose particular models will be addressed. That is, what were the factors that shaped the reform? Why were those elements selected at that time? To this purpose, the forthcoming lines test the third and last partial hypothesis (PH3), according to which the Colombian army adapted by *emulating organisations that provide material and symbolic resources*. Following the literature on organisational isomorphism and the role of the diffusion of ideas in military change examined in the analytical framework, the present chapter asserts that professional networks spanning across organisations, reinforced through cooperation, occupational and academic mobility, facilitated access to the standards and content used by those who led the reforms within the EJC.

Indeed, it is not uncommon for armies to emulate patterns of their peers in other latitudes. Nevertheless, for various reasons, this does not suffice to explain why in that

particular moment, the army integrated specific ideas or formats. Firstly, as observed in Chapter 4, the elements new to the army's doctrine and structure are no innovations when considering international trends. The organisations after which the EJC modelled itself had already been implementing such approaches for years or even decades. Second, cooperation for mobility, military assistance, advice, and training have been the rule rather than the exception, between, for instance, the Colombian and the US and Chilean armies[147]. The same holds for the tendency of high-ranking EJC officers pursuing studies or being commissioned in those partner institutions. Finally, as in other fields, moving towards military professionalisation increases homogeneity across organisations[148].

However, if these are constant, trending rather than disruptive elements in the studied case, it is essential to explore other factors that shaped the reform. Specifically, what led the decision-makers to implement the adopted principles and communicate them the way they did. Why are these reforms preferred to counter the negative type of changes to which they opposed resistance?

As argued in Chapter 2, when an organisation is highly dependent on another to access resources, it will likely integrate the standards expected by the latter. Consequently, upon rising constraints on capabilities and pressures from the social and political system within which they operate, security forces are inclined to adopt institutional arrangements demanded by those upon which it depends on or responding to rising environmental expectations. These can relate to material and symbolic interests. In the studied case, where the army resources were at stake, it is plausible that the EJC adopted standards from current or potential sources that strengthen capabilities and integrated patterns following a logic of appropriateness.

Moreover, the previous chapters have shown the increasing uncertainty in the Colombian army's context and ambiguity at a strategic level during the studied period. Indeed, military and civilians at the top of the sector agreed on legitimacy as warfighting's centre of gravity and military victory as a means, not an ultimate goal, to achieve the political objective of peace. Notwithstanding, the specific way to attain this goal and the army's role in it was not straightforward. On the one hand, to the armed forces' concern, the government accepted a negotiation with the insurgents where issues beyond mere disarmament and demobilisation

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[147] As Chapter 3 detailed, the initial professionalisation steps in the EJC are closely linked to the advice of Chilean missions. The mid-twentieth century saw the strengthening of cooperation ties with its US peer.
[148] This argument developed by DiMaggio & Powell (1983) holds true for military organisations as well, especially regarding military education and assistance.

were at stake. On the other, the EJC emphasised preparing for mutating domestic and potential foreign threats in a post-FARC era, whereas the executive was bullish on advertising a positive future with peacekeeping and stabilisation missions.

Following the third partial hypothesis, an ambiguous relation between means and goals such as the one explained inclines organisations to emulate formats already implemented by organisations that it deems successful or a parameter of excellency. Indeed, as the analytical framework pointed out, when the link between adopted innovations and strategic needs is not manifest, the particular configuration preferred for reforms may be closer to symbolic, legitimacy-seeking rather than performance-related objectives.

Consequently, this final step of the case study shows how both the determination to access new or additional resources –or protect the existing ones– and the need to enhance social and political legitimacy at home and abroad determined the templates chosen for the reforms. Although these categorical distinctions are seldom separable at the empirical level, for the purpose of the argument, the argument is organised according to the suggested causal relations. Therefore, the forthcoming section addresses the link between the need to secure resources and the emulated models, and the last one delves into the elements of the reform that aim to improve the organisation's legitimacy.

7.1. Organisational Expectations and Constraints: Long-Time Allies, New Partnerships

The argument until here advanced has demonstrated that rising uncertainty and aversion to changes unfavourable to the army prompted civilian and military actors to coalesce, adapting to confront this volatile context. As these challenging battlespace and political developments unfolded, Bogota's defence sector leaders engaged in two parallel, closely related pathways that allowed proactive accommodation to counter undesired changes. First, the shift towards capability-based planning and, second, a growing emphasis on defence diplomacy to bolster access to resources laid the foundation for adopting standards, structures and principles that frame the EJC reform. These decisions demanded introducing new organisational parameters and facilitated access to specific guidelines to follow, which shaped the army's new doctrine and force structure.

As occurred in other military organisations in the post-Cold War period[149], replacing the threats- for capability-based planning responded to the need to hinder resource scarcity and counter ambiguity in Colombia's strategic scenario. However, although initially brought to the EJC by a US military commission in the mid-2000s, as Chapter 4 mentioned, it would take some years to reach the upper MDN level. In 2010, Washington and Bogota signed a technical cooperation agreement whereby US officials closely worked with Colombian entities to assist in necessary reforms to optimise resource management, which formally enabled the shift (MDN, 2018d, pp. 10-11). The MDN additionally looked up to the experience of the Canadian, Chilean, Spanish and British armed forces for this adjustment (MDN, 2014a, p. 131; 2016b, pp. 70–7). However, the Defence Institute Reform Initiative (DIRI)[150] set the basis to incorporate the capability-planning and development model in Colombia's military, emphasising professional military education (MDN, 2018d, pp. 13-18).

According to a ministry's report to the congress, this step was part of a development in the bilateral relationship with the US towards engagement in triangular cooperation and the Colombian security forces' participation in international scenarios (MDN, 2015a, p. 123). This willingness to diversify and broaden the partnership's spectrum already existed during the period when Santos was at the helm of the security sector. While Gen. Padilla de León spoke of the "end of the end" and an alleged "post-victory" just around the corner[151], the then defence minister was adamant about offering the armed forces and their accomplishments in irregular warfare as the country's next best product to be exported. After a year leading the MDN, he published an article in the NATO Review outlining lessons learned from the South American country's experience in fighting terrorism, underscoring the potential of using national personnel and know-how for stabilisation contexts (Santos, 2007).

This vision began to crystallise in the last years of the Uribe administration. In 2008, Santos expressed the will to support NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan with boots on the ground. "We must think about the post-conflict and the role that Colombian troops can play in peace missions around the world", he stated when announcing the potential international mission (El Espectador, 2008). Padilla de León also

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[149] This methodology is not an innovation and had already been introduced in the nineties by NATO, the US and other military organisations. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom were also forerunners in implementing this model. Terriff (2002) addresses this issue when explaining NATO's military change in the nineties. See also Young (2006) and Davis (2010, p. 13).

[150] This initiative focuses on ministry-to-ministry engagement to foster more effective, accountable and transparent defence sector institutions, as well as professional military education.

[151] See Chapter 5, "The Light at the End of the Tunnel?".

affirmed that the country would offer expertise in demining, counter-narcotics and other issues to the multinational military force (Serrano & Montero, 2019, p. 98).

To this purpose, Bogota began to explore its engagement as part of a Spanish Provincial Reconstruction Team, which the NATO-led mission welcomed (Martínez de Rituerto & González, 2008). As a cable from the US embassy in Bogota reported, the Andean government intended first to send planning, demining and engineering personnel, with the perspective of later deploying a special forces contingent. However, even if Colombian officers were to join Spanish troops, the US military would have to provide logistical, training and equipment support (US Embassy Bogota, 2009). Despite this eagerness to participate with army personnel abroad, the absence of formal provisions for such a decision hindered the deployment of an EJC contingent in Afghanistan.

Around the same time, Bogota and Washington discussed a new agreement aimed at deepening security and defence cooperation between the two nations and, in particular, authorising access by US personnel to military facilities in the South American country. The pact also emphasised interoperability, jointness, interdiction and the fight against drug trafficking as goals of the enhanced on-site assistance and training to advance common regional security goals (Semana, 2009). After three years of consultations, the two countries signed the Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) in October 2009 (US Department of State [DOD], 2009). Due to fears of the topic becoming extremely polemic and arguing that it was only a prolongation of the existing bilateral legal framework, MDN officials deliberately by-passed the necessary step of submitting the DCA for parliamentary debate and approval in Bogota (Rodríguez-Ferrand, 2010; Bitar, 2016, p. 119-ss.).

Far from this hope, the agreement was the target of controversy at home and abroad. Most of the DCA's provisions allowed SOUTHCOM officers to use army facilities, air force, and naval bases, which the Andean neighbours criticised. On the one hand, Ecuador had refused to renew the Manta airbase lease on the Pacific coast for US military purposes[152] (Beittel & Seelke, 2009, p.1). On the other, Venezuela perceived this as yet another attempt of Colombia to threaten Caracas and "serve imperial interests" (Carroll & MacAskill, 2009). Finally, the constitutional court in Bogota ruled against the accord in early 2010 upon domestic

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[152] Ecuador had leased the Manta airbase to the US air force since 1999.

opposition on the DCA and lack of legislative approval for an agreement that would have entailed new obligations.

The elected president Santos did not insist on a new draft after taking office that same year, and the agreement did not officially enter into force. It is worth noting that the controversial DCA was drafted on the backdrop of highly tense relations between Bogota and Caracas. At the time, the agreement also sought to serve as a deterring measure against President Chávez. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Colombian military lacks the necessary strategic equipment to repel Venezuela's threats, such as anti-aircraft defence systems[153]. However, the new administration reframed bilateral relations with Venezuela[154] while maintaining the trend of intense military-to-military cooperation with Washington (Bitar, 2016, p. 153[155]; Jiménez Herrera, 2018)[156].

Therefore, other mechanisms served the identified goal of bolstering military capabilities and counter uncertainty by deepening and broadening cooperation horizons. According to the final partial hypothesis, this section demonstrates that when confronted with pressures and constraints regarding material and symbolic resources, the army opted for a change reflecting the standards and expectations of those organisations on which it actually or potentially depended. Although the national budget finances the army's operational and personnel costs, investments have rested on extraordinary resources, either domestic or foreign. This chapter's final subsection addresses how the Colombian army boosted inland roles to counter possible budgetary cuts. As for military aid coming from abroad, the forthcoming evidence shows that the demands of the leading partner organisation of the EJC substantially influenced the content and areas in which the reforms took place.

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[153] This issue was addressed again during 2018 and 2019 as border tensions escalated between both countries (see, for instance, El Tiempo, 2018; Seligman, 2019).

[154] See Chapter 5, "A Change of Political Course: Friendly Fire?".

[155] As the work of Bitar (2016) reveals, the case of the failed DCA highlights the coexistence of formal and informal ways through which states concede use of military facilities to other countries or strengthen cooperation bonds in defence affairs through training of local security forces.

[156] US military sites in Colombia were at their highest in 2011, with 51 own buildings (air force) and 24 leased installations (army) that totalled a calculated cost of $29.9 US million (DOD, 2012, p. 80). However, the figures have dropped since then. In 2017, the DOD owned one building of a calculated cost of $0.8 US million (DOD, 2018, p. 74).

"Do More with the Same or Less": Adapting to a Changing Environment

Propped up by a new head of state close to the sector, the incoming MDN boldly declared that the country no longer was a recipient of international cooperation (2011b, p. 54). In the minister's words, Colombia was instead a "provider of assistance, offering successful experiences at a regional and global level" (p. 54). Consequently, for the objective of becoming "a credible, integrated and interoperable system of deterrent capabilities" (MDN, 2011b, p. 54) diplomacy for security and defence gained more relevance as a series of decisions followed in this direction.

The US-Colombia Action Plan on Regional Security Cooperation (USCAP) was launched in the 2012 Summit of the Americas to foster joint security cooperation activities. This plan stipulates that Colombian armed forces train security personnel in Central America and the Caribbean to fight against transnational organised crime (Diálogo, 2013; DOD, 2014; Congressional Research Service, 2019, p. 25). With this decision to broaden the strategic partnership between the two countries, the possibility of offering military expertise on irregular warfare and counter-narcotics as part of the foreign and defence policy gained pace in Bogota (Tickner, 2014; MDN, 2014a, p. 124). After the initial 34 actions during the plan's first year, as of 2020, a total of 2,059 activities had been executed, with 23,874 trained personnel (MDN, 2020, p. 23)[157].

At the close of Santos' first tenure, in the face of a possible ceasefire with the FARC and changing threats, the MDN underscored the need to introduce mid and long-term planning models that allow the force to face budgetary restraints and operational challenges (2014a, pp. 136-7). As the sector's guidelines for transformation bluntly phrased, this entailed "doing more with the same or less" (MDN, 2014b, p. 50). The emphasis on triangular cooperation grew, intending to train other security forces in counter-narcotics, interdiction, and fight against organised crime.

In this scenario, the national police, air and naval forces had significant participation in Central America and Africa (see DOD, 2015; DOS, 2015). The Colombian army also had a share in these activities, though significantly less than other branches (MDN, 2013b, pp. 121,

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[157] It is worth noting that only a third of these were executed in cooperation with the Southern Command. The rest were in cooperation with the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL).

124-5). Therefore, a shift in the cooperation agenda between the EJC and the organisation that supported its boost in capabilities for over two decades was unfolding.

For its part, Washington showed support for the peace talks in Havana, underscoring that Colombia "has much to offer the world on security matters" (Biden, 2014). In a letter addressed to the re-elected Colombian president in September 2014, then US Vice President Joe Biden phrased rising hopes and chances for cooperation. He suggested that,

> as the conflict winds down and Colombia moves toward a more sustainable security strategy, organisations like the United Nations and the NATO would benefit from [its] increased involvement in peacekeeping operations. Today's security challenges require multilateral responses, and *we need allies and partners like Colombia to lead through the force of their example*. [Colombia is] already bringing significant expertise to bear in Central America and the Caribbean through our Action Plan on Regional Security, as well as [the] 2013 information sharing agreement with NATO, but *we need Colombia's involvement in more places*. (…) We look forward to seeing Colombia meet and exceed its own goals and continue to serve as an example of how a country can rise up from even the most difficult set of circumstances (Biden, 2014, emphasis added).

This narrative highlights where Washington's expectations stemmed from and how the Colombian army could find another position to attain resources through cooperation. After decades of aid and exchange, the Colombian forces were to serve as a blueprint for other countries' militaries cooperating with the US, primarily through the light-footprint strategy to build partner capacity to provide local and regional security with less presence in the host country (US House of Representatives, 2015; Delgado, 2017; Marra & Bennet, 2020). As the DOD has stated, the trend in military operations in territories with insurgent groups and terrorist threats now focuses on developing the local or other foreign security forces capabilities (Feickert, 2020). Therefore, its longstanding hemispheric partner should now be able to instruct and multiply acquired lessons in other regions of the world, just as it was happening in Central America, depicted as a hotspot of instability (Diálogo, 2011).

In a similar vein, retired Gen. David Petraeus, former head of the CIA and commander of the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, had previously referred to the Colombian case. To him, the Andean country's military fight against insurgency and drug-trafficking was a "success story" and a "model for hope" emerging amid worrisome developments in the world (O'Hanlon & Petraeus, 2013). In an article co-authored with Brookings' senior fellow Michael

O'Hanlon, they argued that the country "has a great deal to offer states in the region, perhaps most of all in crime-ridden Central America […] much more efficiently and economically than we can" (2013).

In this sense of mutual interest, the DOD –and the SOUTHCOM for the army in particular– played a significant role in buttressing and shaping Bogota's reforms. Indeed, as the MDN advanced its rhetoric of exporting stability and security, Washington supported Colombia's participation in multilateral organisations (MDN, 2015a, p. 23; Colombian Embassy to the US, 2015; Pinzón, 2016). Moreover, with the commemoration of 15 years of Plan Colombia and the launching of its successor, the Peace Colombia Plan[158] in 2016, the shifting focus on foreign military assistance with the country's most important partner was confirmed (The White House, 2016; Beittel, 2016b). According to the Center for International Policy's Security Assistance Monitor, Washington's defence and security cooperation resources in the Andean country had a significant increasing trend in the early 2000s: between 2001 and 2007, they increased sixfold (2020). However, from 2008 onwards, resources declined significantly, especially in grants and loans for US defence equipment and services (Security Assistance Monitor, 2020)[159].

The following subsections further delve into how the Colombian army responded to the need to "do more with the same or less" resources, first, in cooperation with the SOUTHCOM and, subsequently, on the road towards a partnership with NATO.

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[158] "Peace Colombia will focus future U.S. assistance under three pillars: 1) consolidating and expanding progress on security and counternarcotics while reintegrating the FARC into society; 2) Expanding state presence and institutions to strengthen the rule of law and rural economies, especially in former conflict areas; and 3) Promoting justice and other essential services for conflict victims" (The White House, 2016).

[159] From 2012 until 2020 the values of overall assistance have remained at around US 240 million, similar to the levels at the beginning of the new millennium. While International Military Education and Training (IMET) resources have maintained relatively constant throughout 2000-2020, the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement figures -the largest item in the entire budget- and additional resources for Counter-Drug Assistance halved (the latter had no allocated resources since 2018) (Security Assistance Monitor, 2020).

Spreading a 'Divine Spark' Throughout the Hemisphere: Emulate Allies, Become the Model to Follow

In the abovementioned context, the army had to secure traditional allies and find potential new international partners, embracing new roles and forms of assistance. Not only could the EJC access new resources through triangular cooperation and include joint missions within multilateral organisations in its organisational framework (Revista Ejército, 2015, pp. 4-6; Gómez, 2017). It could also offer its expertise to those who had formerly been their referents, envisioning future roles (DIRIE, 2017; Trujillo, 2017, p. 33). This readiness can be witnessed in the MFE -01- reference document as follows:

> the army's exceptional experience in counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, special operations, comprehensive action, intelligence, demining, aviation missions and combating transnational threats (drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping and environmental crimes, among others) is Colombia's main contribution to international cooperation (with equipment, training and personnel) and as part of the mission areas of the defence sector (CEDOE, 2016b, p. 4).

To this end, the US, European and African countries gained importance for the land force, which underscored the need to foster military-to-military cooperation in other regions of the world (Gómez, 2017, p. 46). For the US army, this also represented an opportunity to multiply the impact of its military aid in Colombia, for instance, through training of trainers that would allow a lower profile of North American officers in countries that are more cautious of their presence (Tickner, 2016). This increasing emphasis on joint, unified actions and training activities at an international level accentuated the need to adopt standardised tenets, concepts and structures compatible with potential new partners or sorts of collaboration (Karan & Niño, 2018).

In this respect, a series of formal and informal steps began to pave the way for this change. For instance, the technical assistance and exchange between the two armies increasingly focused on civic-military operations, comprehensive action and territorial consolidation. Concretely, the EJC and the SOUTHCOM initiated a series of joint exercises to position the EJC's comprehensive action in the region, share lessons learned with other militaries, and provide respective doctrinal guidelines (MDN, 2014a, p. 30). Additionally, the ESMAI has continuously offered training in civilian affairs, comprehensive action and

development to the US army and air force officers during the last decade (Petosky, 2011; Ortega, 2019).

Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter 4, unified action and the comprehensive approach have been enhanced with the reforms and this type of engagement was given a higher rank in the organisational hierarchy. The last part of this chapter explains how it gained a central role in the doctrinal developments related to population-centric warfare and interagency coordination and in response to expectations in Colombia.

Moreover, in 2014 the EJC reached an agreement with its northern ally, whereby the latter supported institutional reforms, the introduction of combined arms manoeuvring, and improved interoperability (Judice & Weidner, 2015). Later, during the US-Colombia bilateral army staff talks in 2015, the US South commanding general and the EJC's deputy commander signed a bilateral engagement plan that encompassed military education mobility, assistance in training and joint operations in the following years. In the view of the Colombian army's chief of staff, Gen. Maldonado, this plan set the framework to streamline and expand the doctrine, to continue working on force transformation and better tackle regional and challenges that would come in the future (Tesfaye, 2015, p. 8).

Military training and assistance linked to procurement also influenced the need for enhanced interoperability. For instance, equipment standardisation has been central to improve and optimise joint operations between the EJC and the SOUTHCOM, as explained by the US army mission chief and his deputy in Colombia[160] (Judice & Weidner, 2015, p. 38). In their article published by *Revista Ejército*, Lt. Col. Judice and Major Weidner underscored that the most cost-effective, long-term path in procurement for their organisation is the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) with its "total package approach" (2015). With this model implemented in the Andean nation, besides purchasing equipment, the partner nation acquires "training, maintenance, and expertise required to sustain the new capability" (2015, p. 39). As will be further addressed in the next section, Colombia's participation in NATO's codification system seeks to optimise this standardisation level in the interest of procurement, sales and logistics.

The structural reform of the land branch of the military in Colombia also received support from US specialists on army transformation and capability-planning (Hernández, 2015b). Among other organisational aspects, upon the advice of these experts, the newly

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[160] Lt. Col. Douglas Judice and Major Keith Weidner.

created CEDEF compared the command and general staff of the Colombian army with the force structure of the US army and other NATO members, especially in terms of organisational efficiency but also on joint and combined arms operations (Pérez Laiseca, 2016, p. 14).

In this adaptation process, the US Combined Arms Centre (CAC) further facilitated cooperation with NATO's Allied Transformation Command (Padilla, 2017, p. 27). Following these organisations' force-structure patterns, the CEDEF projected that by 2022 the Colombian army should be deployed throughout the national territory in military forts and cantonments for a more permanent presence in the territory (Velasco, 2018, p. 39). Moreover, in the view of hypothetical post-conflict and regular warfare scenarios, the EJC should gradually include combat teams instead of focusing on task forces, which are more contingent units (Rojas, 2014, pp. 64-5).

Precisely, in terms of force deployment, the new military fort in La Guajira and the FUTAM play a pivotal role in enhancing interoperability and applying the new principles of the Colombian army doctrine related to new missions. According to BG Correa Consuegra, the units attached to Fort Buenavista are primarily conceived for national defence and foreign operations, "allowing the army to participate in global scenarios with equipment and doctrine that is interoperable with international standards such as NATO and the UN" (2015, p. 56).

Moreover, the FUTAM has been organised based on the US stryker brigade combat teams, which are infantry forces equipped with medium weight, light armoured vehicles (Petraeus & Reynolds, 2017; Dávila, 2019). This type of unit is conceived for rapid deployment, with capabilities that allow combined-arms, joint, multinational, and interagency operability, ideal for counterinsurgency campaigns (Vick et al., 2002; Gonzales et al., 2005). Indeed, Col. Carlos Castro, FUTAM commander, explained that the stryker brigades' experience in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq served as a referent for the EJC when creating this first light-armoured tactical unit (2019, pp. 30-1).

After the activation of this task force in La Guajira, a US technical assistance field team advised the EJC on planning and training, among others, in order to develop the integration of the recently purchased LAV III (Defensa.com, 2015; El Espectador, 2015d). Until now, the FUTAM has served as a training and capability-development unit. Moreover, the strategic position of Fort Buenavista aims to serve an eventual confrontation with Venezuela (Castro,

2019, pp. 32-3[161]). However, despite threats from both sides and military exercises in the border, an armed conflict between both countries or even a US-led military intervention have proven unlikely (see Pastrana, 2010; Romero-Castillo, 2019; Werz, 2019).

Instead, the unit's main tasks so far have been related to comprehensive action and humanitarian support. For instance, in March 2020, the US Joint Task Force-Bravo (JTF-B) and the EJC led the international Exercise Vita in La Guajira. The participants conducted training to improve interoperability, focusing on humanitarian and civic-action operations (Downey, 2020). Besides the JTF-B, several governmental organisations tasked with migration, wellbeing, health services and civil defence participated in the interagency exercise (CGFM, 2020a). Indeed, until now Fort Buenavista has been a hub for comprehensive action, rather than the forefront for international combat.

Cooperation networks between both armies, mutual interests and the strategic relationship between the two hemispheric partners were the platform upon which the US army supported its southern counterpart in reform efforts and participation in multinational scenarios, such as the transatlantic Alliance (MDN, 2015a, p. 123). As two of the advisors of this process depicted for the *Experticia Militar* review, their ideal or "perfect world" is that the EJC "adopts the norms of symbolism of NATO (joint NATO symbolism, PfP-6) and of the US forces (Defense Department Military Standard 2525)" (Benn & Soto, 2017, p. 31). Thus, the US army served both as a standard that guided reforms for interoperability in the EJC and as a facilitator for the global strategic partnership with NATO. While it was not the only military organisation the EJC looked up to in this process[162], it has the most significant participation and influence, especially in the doctrinal change and restructuring (Rojas, 2017a, p. 102).

Specifically, the Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate (CADD) and the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) played a pivotal role in preparing the Damasco reference documents (see, for instance, US Army Combined Arms Center, 2017a; 2017b). Since September 2015, these US army units assisted the Colombian CEDOE in elaborating the EJC manuals and, particularly, integrating the ULO concept and related tenets of the updated

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[161] In this article, Col. Castro, commander of the FUTAM, affirms that Venezuela's intention to adhere territory in the northern theatre, also through the native Wayúu population, was considered as the new unit was created. Already in 2008, as Hugo Chávez protested for the possibility of the US having an airbase in La Guajira, the Venezuelan president threatened to claim sovereignty over the peninsular region.

[162] Spain and Britain were also consulted for guidance on the army's transformation, as reported Rocío Pachón, Cl. Pedro Rojas and retired BG William Pérez Laiseca in background interviews.

AirLand Battle doctrine into its operational guidelines (Jiménez, 2018; Rojas, 2017a, p. 102). Between 2015 and 2018, the deputy director, CADD, and an expert in terminology travelled on several occasions yearly to Colombia in order to support the Damasco project (Benn & Soto, 2017, p. 29). Translating, adapting and explaining concepts initially conceived for other operational contexts (US Army, 2011; Benson, 2012), the CADD personnel was responsible for guiding the EJC in the standardisation and streamlining of its doctrine (Stenson, 2018).

In fact, the names of the EJC fundamental manuals published in 2016 are one-to-one correspondent to the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) doctrine reference documents, except for Colombia's reference manual MFE 6-27, Operational Law, for which the Chilean army was the referent. The advisors emphasised interoperable language, systematic terminology, and hierarchy of the different manuals to facilitate communication and joint missions with NATO allies and partner countries (Benn & Soto, 2017, p. 31; Stenson, 2018). Nevertheless, the EJC officers adapted specific contents and the type of information included in the Damasco manuals[163].

From this standpoint, Lt. Col. Bastos, Head of Management, Standardisation and Diffusion of Doctrine, CEDOE, explained that the introduction of ULO in the EJC is in the interest of improving coordination of the force with other local and foreign military and civilian organisations (Bastos, 2017, p. 8). Incorporating this operational concept should enable more efficient joint operations with allied forces and regional security partners in a broad spectrum of tasks (Espíndola, 2016, p. 19; Díaz & Amador, 2017, p. 164).

An example of how the Colombian and US armies are applying NATO's protocols in their joint training was seen at the beginning of 2020 when 75 paratroopers of each force participated in the airborne exercise at Tolemaida airbase in Colombia (SOUTHCOM, 2020; Méndez, 2020). During a press conference before travelling to Bogota, US Navy Admiral Faller, Head of SOUTHCOM, referred to the importance of the bilateral partnership to fight regional threats and sources of instability, such as Venezuela as a "haven" of terrorist groups (Woody,

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[163] See for instance, US Army Doctrine Publication ADP 1, The Army, which in three chapters condenses the raison d'etre of this land force, its main operational, command and strategic guidelines, and its mission and vision for the future. In comparison, the EJC MFE 1.0 depicts in a much more extensive manner the principles of the Colombian land branch of the military, focusing on principles and values, military honour and ethics in two of five chapters, while also introducing jointness, operational adaptability, and professionalisation among challenges for the future. See US Army (2019) and CEDOE (2016b).

2020). "We are honoured to train with Colombia — a close friend of the US and Global Partner to NATO", affirmed Admiral Faller.

Indeed, not only has the EJC seen this transformation and adaptation process as beneficial. In the eyes of the hemispheric partner, the guidance provided to its closest ally strengthens bilateral military cooperation and the potential to continue the diffusion of standards in the region and other latitudes. As depicted by the DOS in response to a House of Representatives' inquiry on foreign military assistance: "Each dollar invested in Colombia over the past two decades is now paying dividends as Colombia exports its valuable expertise and best practices throughout the region" (DOS, 2015).

Similarly, when pondering his assignment in Bogota, retired Lt. Col. Benn, CADD deputy director, referred to the cooperation in similar terms: "it is a sizeable investment in resources […]. By fostering those relationships, we gain an exponential return on the investment." (Stenson, 2018). Retired Lt. Col. Soto, CADD terminologist, mentioned that a "divine spark" was "starting to spread", to portray the multiplying influence of the doctrinal development in Colombia (idem). In his view, through the example of the EJC, other armies in the region are beginning to give attention to this matter and want to pursue similar reforms (idem).

The preceding lines provided evidence on how pressures on the army's resources and expectations, and demands emerging from traditional and potential new sources to enhance capabilities were a strong material drive behind the adopted models. Consequently, the Colombian land force adapted to counter resource scarcity and a shift in cooperation with its longstanding partner. In this scenario, interoperability and facilitating joint operations gained importance for the EJC. The adopted concepts, type of deployment structures and common language, among others, respond to expectations and demands in terms of accessing resources and cooperation from the main ally of the Colombian army. Moreover, it was in the US army's interest to support its southern partner in a more formal collaboration with NATO. The following sub-section depicts how the defence sector leaders reached a series of agreements with the transatlantic Alliance, paving the way for eventual cooperation in this sense. It also explains to what extent this arose from identified needs to bolster military capabilities through other partnerships while also serving legitimacy-seeking goals.

New Cooperation Horizons: "On a Par With the Best in the World"

While the executive in Bogota identified the possible future scenario in which the traditional military assistance coming from Washington would experience a variation, other forms of engagement and potential partners in the globe gained interest. Indeed, this was the spirit of what the then minister Santos had meant when saying that the country needed to think of future military roles if the internal armed conflict was to end. In this sense, cooperating with the transatlantic Alliance resulted appealing for the Colombian military in the first place.

Notwithstanding, this section maintains that beyond facilitating access to potential new sources of military-to-military cooperation, NATO offered a valuable asset in terms of appropriateness and legitimation. Indeed, the defence sector leaders portrayed a partnership with this organisation as a possibility to offer and strengthen capabilities and as a sign of recognition of the high quality, professional and modern standards of the Colombian armed forces. In this sense, besides the material drive shaping the reforms, having a relationship with the military Alliance was also instrumental in the symbolic realm.

The NATO Strategic Concept that resulted from the 2010 Lisbon Summit underscored the relevance of building partnerships through flexible formats beyond existing frameworks (NATO, 2010). To this end, countries that, for geopolitical reasons, cannot be Allies but offer opportunities for enhancing international stability through cooperative security join the Alliance's partners worldwide. Profiting from this new form of collaboration and building on the initial rapprochement in previous years, Bogota's incoming administration spotted a window of opportunity to materialise the will to diversify the security and foreign policy agenda.

After the failed attempts to deploy Colombian personnel within the ISAF operation, in June 2013, Bogota and Brussels signed a tailored security information exchange agreement[164]. Framed as the first step for future cooperation with Bogota's defence and security sector, then NATO's Deputy Secretary-General, Alexander Vershbow, emphasised that from then on, activities with the South American country would proceed on a case-by-case basis (NATO, 2013a).

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[164] Acuerdo entre la República de Colombia y la Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte sobre Cooperación y Seguridad de Información, 25 de junio de 2013. http://apw.cancilleria.gov.co/tratados/AdjuntosTratados/78f8d_OTAN_B-ACUERDOCOOPSEGURIDADYINFORMACION2013-TEXTO.pdf

Although the document's provisions only encompassed security protocols for shared information, this formal declaration of cooperation led once again to significant pushback in Latin America and the Caribbean. Heads of state in Nicaragua, Bolivia and Venezuela depicted it as a threat to the region (Benítez, 2013; Sánchez, 2014). Notwithstanding, the agreement was submitted to debate and approved by the Colombian congress four years later (Ley 1839 de 2017). Additionally, it was only until December 2018 that the Constitutional Court declared it enforceable.

Meanwhile, Bogota continued to pursue its interest in exploring potential new collaboration opportunities through a series of accords and activities in the meantime. Among other activities, Colombia participated in NATO's Chiefs of Transformation Conference 2014 (Norfolk) and the Ammunition Safety Group yearly meeting (MDN, 2015a, p. 139). Already during the negotiations for the information exchange agreement, the MDN sent a representative to the bi-annual Building Integrity (BI) Conference that took place in Monterey in early 2013 and, in October that year, the ministry began to participate in the Alliance's BI programme (MDN, 2014a, p. 91).

This programme encompassed self-assessment and peer review processes in anti-corruption, transparency and accountability during the next two years (NATO, 2016; Transparency International, 2016, pp. 20-27). After submitting the assessment result, in August 2016, the ministry received a series of recommendations and a best practices' plan to carry out within the BI initiative (MDN, 2018a, p. 184-185). In May 2017, the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program (IPCP) was approved, with which Colombia officially joined NATO's global partners (MDN, 2018a, p.164; Garay et al., 2019, pp. 67-68).

Such an initial framework allowed the country to begin a cooperation agenda with the Alliance. Defence officials and military members carried out training courses in European and US academies concerning corruption risk management in the security sector (MDN, 2017, pp. 69-70). Colombian servicepeople have since then taken part in courses at the Counter Improvised Explosive Devices Centre of Excellence (C-IED COE) (CEIM) in Spain, at NATO's Defence College in Rome, Italy, and NATO's School in Oberammergau, Germany (Padilla, 2017). Courses with Allied countries' instructors also began at the War College in Bogota, cooperating with the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom and the Peace Support Operations Training Centre of Bosnia and Herzegovina (MDN, 2018a, p. 184-185). Moreover, within the BI programme and following the recommendations on transparency and anti-

corruption best practices in the sector, over 15,300 defence officials have participated in training activities; almost half of them have been EJC officers (MDN, 2018e, p. 4).

Finally, upon Spain's invitation, Colombian observers participated in the Trident Juncture 2015 exercise "in the interest of promoting transparency", along with other 17 non-member nations (NATO, 2015). Indeed, Spain has supported the Colombian path towards standardisation according to NATO protocols, with the perspective of possible deployment of the South American security forces in international operations in which the Iberic partner also takes part (MDN, 2015a, p. 128; Padilla, 2017, p. 23; Rojas, 2016a, p. 39).

Besides training in senior defence leadership, general staff and transparency, the courses that Colombian officers have regularly visited as a result of the NATO partnership include crisis management, peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and civil-military cooperation (MDN, 2018a, pp. 164-165). Furthermore, the successive administration gave significant attention to the inclusion of the Colombian CIDES into NATO's PTEC in March 2019, as the country's experience in humanitarian demining was highlighted (NATO, 2019).

How were these steps portrayed by those at the front of the military land branch in Bogota? In general, the process of conforming to NATO standards was described by officials and high-ranking army staff as a way to strengthen the capabilities of the military forces, raising their professional and operational level, and advancing in modernisation goals (MDN, 2013b, p. 124; Bonilla, 2016; FIP & COTEF, 2018, p. 12). At the end of Santos' first presidential term, the MDN referred to the relationship with NATO as a way "to increase military capabilities and to serve as a platform for offering cooperation in security and assistance to nations facing similar challenges" (2014a, pp. 131-2).

Additionally, when reviewing the sector's achievements at the end of the administration, the ministry highlighted Colombia's partnership with the Alliance as a means to access cooperation and resources and a sign of recognition of Colombia's military experience and professionalism (MDN, 2018a, p. 164). Similarly, a War College publication dedicated to the topic depicted it as a unique opportunity for the military to export capabilities, going hand in hand with transformation and modernisation processes (Lara & Jiménez, 2019, p. 45). Here, too, the strengthening of material resources enabled by the formal agreement is closely related

to positioning the military as global leaders, acquiring a special status that opens doors to cooperation with other states (Garay et al., 2019, pp. 78-79).

Beyond fostering army capabilities, the possibility of new business horizons for the military industry, of which the army is a key stakeholder, also shaped the sector's decision to conform to NATO standards, especially in the light of budgetary pressures and impacts of the changing strategic environment at home (Schipani, 2013)[165]. Indeed, as lower local demand followed conflict de-escalation, enabling internationalisation caught the security industry's interest (MDN, 2015a, p. 146; Cuéllar, 2018, p. 76-77). At the World Codification Forum in November 2013, Colombia signed a sponsorship agreement with the transatlantic Alliance, considered a bridge to defence logistics at a global level (NATO, 2013b).

As a result, with its Spanish counterpart's advice, the defence sector in Bogota made progress in implementing NATO's codification system (NCS)[166] (Salamanca, 2015, p. 7). Consequently, Indumil was qualified to produce and supply equipment to countries whose defence procurement, maintenance and supply processes aligned with such standards (MDN, 2017, p. 38[167]; Padilla, 2017, p. 26). In June 2019, the Allied Committee granted Colombia the TIER 2 category, thus certifying the country as fully compliant with the NCS procedures[168].

In this respect, civilian leaders of the defence industry in Bogota publicly announced they were "embarking on the conquest of foreign markets" in response to the lower local demand due to the peace accords (Cuéllar, A., 2018, p. 76). Former Col. Padilla, then general manager of Indumil, also highlighted the potential of countering resource scarcity, making efficient defence investments and strengthening capabilities (Padilla, 2017, p. 27). The retiree's association also welcomed this decision to open the door to new clients for the national military and civilian companies in the defence sector, highlighting that NATO members constitute half of the global GDP (Acore, 2019).

In addition to facilitating access to new business opportunities for the Colombian defence sector and offering the potential to develop new roles still to be fulfilled, the

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[165] As Chapter 5 explained, being the Colombian army its main client until then, the manufacture and local sale of arms, equipment and ammunition by the state-owned company that holds the monopoly on this business also declined considerably in the past decade. In addition, fiscal pressures and little flexibility in spending make seeking alternative sources of resources and diversifying the market for the country's military industry important objectives.

[166] Chile began to implement this codification in 2004.

[167] The process should conclude in 2022.

[168] Brazil is the other Latin American country certified as Tier 2, which a two-way data exchange and participation in technical NCS management. Chile and Peru are in Tier 1, a one-way, basic level of sponsorship. See NATO (2021).

transatlantic Alliance's global partnership was of symbolic relevance for the EJC and the armed forces in general. Specifically, while incorporating certain doctrinal concepts, structures, and frameworks that stemmed from the need to access and protect material resources, the collaboration was communicated as a praiseworthy relation. The adjectives and expressions used when referring to the partnership stress this: "We are on a par with the best worldwide" and "in tune with modern times" (EJC, 2015c); "a privileged status […] to participate in the sophisticated scenarios in the world" (Chica, 2018); "a step forth towards being a developed country" (Pardo, 2018); "a transition to a higher level" (Leal, 2018a, p. 93). In the words of President Santos, the country's armed forces should now "think big" and be "the best, not only in the region but in the world" (El Nuevo Siglo, 2013).

As was thoroughly addressed in Chapter 6, as part of compensation strategy, the executive needed to put the army in the spotlight of possible new missions abroad connected with an eventual forthcoming post-conflict. In this sense, the new cooperation horizon through the NATO partnership offered symbolic advantages. "If we can achieve peace, the army will be in a place where it will be able to distinguish itself internationally as well", he affirmed (MercoPress, 2013). At the end of his term in office, he also highlighted that the achieved partnership with the Alliance positioned the national armed forces on the global stage and improved Colombia's image (Dinero, 2018).

Participating in exercises to enhance interoperability was also communicated as a sign that the army is at the level of the "most respected military in the world" (MDN, 2015a, p. 164) and a "recognition of the professionalism of servicemen and women of our public force" (MDN, 2015a, p. 139). Former liaison officer to NATO, Gen. Padilla, stressed that this "prestigious alliance" would bolster local military institutions at an international level (2015). In this respect, then minister Pinzón asserted that the national security forces were now "stronger, more modern and capable" of interoperating on international standards and peacekeeping missions (El Espectador, 2015d).

Additionally, former minister and ambassador in Washington, Gabriel Silva Luján, accentuated the partnership's legitimation effect when he wrote that, in the past, the Colombian military "was seen in Europe and the United States as a machine of systematic human rights violations. This mistaken view is corrected by the country's entry to NATO, as a recognition and validation of the integrity of our forces" (2018, p. 15). Retired BG Pérez Laiseca also stressed the fact that through these reforms, the Colombian army could now shed the

international bad reputation and look towards foreign cooperation projects[169]. In this sense, entering this cooperation network brought distinction, a quality seal to the armed forces.

Similarly, published material by civilian and military officials that designed the EJC reforms renders this sense of appropriateness when referring to the fact that the army studied the structure and doctrine of NATO Allies as a benchmark to follow. Members of the army notably emphasised that the origin of the guidelines after which they conducted the reforms were the best and most modern armies in the world (Colprensa, 2016; Rojas, 2017a, pp. 114-6; Pérez Laiseca, 2016, pp. 14-15; Velasco, 2018, p. 39). The COTEF advisors also emphasised that they compared the army command and general staff structure with "advanced military structures" to adjust it to "international standards that will enable the army to fulfil its mission successfully" (MDN, 2016a, p. 22).

In a similar vein, former army Gen. Pérez-Laiseca alluded to the twofold advantage of the country's status as a global partner of the Alliance. In his view, besides strengthening capabilities and international support to the Colombian armed forces, the partnership underscored the organisation's level of transparency (2018, p. 9). He added that the collaboration fosters operational excellence in the force, mainly because it follows the world's most successful military jointness models (p. 9). Gen. Gómez Nieto, then army commander and Mejía's successor, also affirmed that "joining NATO denotes becoming part of the world's military best practices club, an exclusivity that will force us to improve" (2018, p. 32). Overall, the global partnership with the transatlantic organisation represented a sign that the Colombian military was projected as the most modern and best trained in the world, reaching excellency and acknowledgement (MDN, 2018a, p.164).

Overall, defence officials and service members were keen on communicating that entering a cooperation programme with the transatlantic Alliance was a seal of approval for the Colombian army. Therefore, not only did it serve the purpose of exploring alternative sources of military assistance and ways to enhance capabilities but also a means to underscore correctness and compliance with high-quality standards. In this sense, when naming the partnership with the Alliance, the security sector representatives in Bogota emphasised its reputational value.

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[169] Interview with author.

The evidence in this section served to advance the argument according to which, in response to growing constraints, the army adopted templates from organisations that provide material and symbolic resources. Concretely, it confirmed that, under rising uncertainty and pressures on the army's institutional status quo, it integrated the standards and expectations of those organisations it relies on or through which it seeks to access new resources. In the studied case, both material and ideational interests shaped core elements of the army's doctrine, education and structural reform.

On the one hand, doctrine and structure principles that the EJC incorporated followed from the need to conform to its main international ally expectations. In a rapidly changing environment, the need to reach out to new forms of cooperation with the US land branch strongly influenced this choice. On the other, seeking alternative horizons for military-to-military cooperation, the road towards a NATO global partnership determined the inclusion of this organisation's standards. In both cases, the decade-long close relation between the Colombian army and its hemispheric partner served as a platform that facilitated access to the incorporated doctrine and structure patterns.

However, beyond the vision of improving capabilities by eventually being deployed in international missions within multinational forces, the Colombian army favoured the Alliance's symbolic power. Therefore, when communicating the reforms, military officers and defence sector leaders often stressed the partnership's appropriateness for the EJC's image. In this sense, the transatlantic partnership had the twofold role of serving material and ideational interests, providing a paragon of excellence and a potential cooperation source.

The final proposition that the analytical framework developed to approach the question of why the army chose particular models for its reform deals with the issue of strategic ambiguity. The previous chapters evidenced that the EJC faced a volatile and uncertain operational and political context and began to embrace a series of roles and missions that went from irregular warfare through peacekeeping and development-support at home and abroad, and possible inter-state conflict. Moreover, the civilian executive pursued negotiations with the guerrilla. While the army was to deliver a debilitated counterpart, the government included critical issues of the insurgent's demands into the dialogues' agenda.

As Chapter 6 explained, in this setting, a certain disarticulation at the strategic level surfaced. For political reasons and to gain leverage for the peace process, the civilians at the

helm of the sector were more interested in emphasising a positive future for the army if the post-conflict scenario materialised. The latter aligned with this governmental narrative while keeping its focus on countering domestic threats and preparing for other civilian-related roles. This ambiguity had a substantial influence on the reform. To conclude the analysis, the forthcoming section deals with the assumption that, when the organisation's means and ends have an uncertain relation, it will likely adopt patterns from those peers it deems successful and standards that convey legitimacy.

7.2. When in Doubt, Turn to Successful Models

In the years preceding and during the formulation of the reforms, the EJC faced a complex, volatile institutional and strategic context. One of the most notable features of this situation was the threats' development in the domestic realm while a massive demobilisation of the FARC became increasingly probable. On this backdrop, the Colombian army had to keep on waging war against the organisations it had traditionally fought and prepare for peace or, most likely, a combination of ongoing irregular war and peacebuilding efforts. Moreover, army officers perceived Venezuela's influence in the guerrilla groups as worrisome, adding to the existing tensions at the border zone. To top it all, service members confronted what they viewed as legal and political warfare against them in a series of institutional decisions affecting the army's resources and goodwill.

With such an ambiguous, complicated and broad range of issues to respond to, the EJC designed its doctrine, education and structural reform. In this sense, the Colombian land force decided to change horses in midstream, adapting to warfare variations while also preparing for combat and non-combat roles at home and abroad. Following the propositions of sociological isomorphism, military change in the studied case was not only based on external restraints as the previous section explained but also integrating standards that the army considered successful and conveying legitimacy.

In this case, too, professional networks made elements and ideas available for decision-makers. However, the army chose these principles for the reform from those organisations it deemed had prevailed in similar circumstances as those that the EJC faced at the time or, in general, favoured the organisation's legitimacy. The upcoming sections will analyse the specific

elements adopted in the light of how army officers and relevant actors of the reform portrayed them.

Emulating a Traditional Regional Partner, Catching Up With Conventional Warfare

For Colombia's topographic conditions and theatre, the creation of combat units conceived for armoured warfare can be somewhat puzzling, even more so when the equipment available to the ground force is mostly light, given the speed and flexibility required in counterinsurgency. However, the creation of Fort Buenavista and the activation of training and operational units for combined arms, including armoured components, respond to the will of being up to date with the modern militaries in the world. For this purpose, the EJC turned to another traditional partner it considers the paragon of military transformation in the region. Following the formulated third partial hypothesis, this section provides evidence underpinning the proposition that under circumstances of growing uncertainty and strategic ambiguity, the land force adopted models from organisations it deems successful. In this case, the Chilean army served as a benchmark for its Andean partner in implementing reforms in the light of institutional transition and the need to regain conventional military roles.

United by a longstanding history of cooperation, exchange and decisive institutional milestones linked to Chilean missions in Bogota in the early twentieth century, the Colombian land arm maintains regular and dynamic relations with its southern counterpart. Just as visiting US academies is an underwritten rule of those aspiring to the top brass in Bogota, EJC high-ranking officers often pursue studies in military and civilian universities in Santiago or serve as attachés there before being promoted to general staff ranks. However, for reasons that are partly different from those that guided Southcom influence, the Chilean army's transformation served as a blueprint on integrating regular warfare, armoured doctrine and concepts stemming from inter-state combat.

According to Col. Rojas, the EJC lag behind the doctrinal and structural developments of world-leading armies. Decades of fighting in an internal armed conflict and countering irregular threats made the Colombian land force unfit for another type of operational context, including national defence (Rojas, 2014, p. 23). In his view, this update inspired by the Chilean army's transformation "is suitable for scenarios where there is an external threat involving state-

of-the-art warfare material" (2017a, p. 105). Before further explaining the rationale behind this emulation, it is worthwhile to examine the setting and central aspects of the recent Chilean military reform. This context serves to understand why it is considered successful in the regional context and why the EJC deemed it advantageous for the institutional context it faced at the time.

Although the seventeen-year military dictatorship in Chile officially ended in 1990, it was only until 2010 that a substantial reform established civilian command chain, planning and strategy (see, for instance, Malamud, 2007[170]; Dreisbach, 2015)[171]. Parallel to this democratic transition, and still enjoying a high level of autonomy, the security forces began to conceive their reforms with regards to modernisation and professionalisation; the shift towards classic defence tasks allowed for curbing the military clout in internal affairs (Hunter, 2005, pp. 29-31; Dammert, 2008). An off-budget system that allocated 10 per cent of copper export[172] revenues to military procurement and equipment maintenance enabled the Chilean armed forces to boost their capabilities in the mid-2000s (Bonnefoy, 2009; Kouyoumdjian, 2011; Lopes da Silva & Tian, 2019).

The Chilean army's preponderant role in Pinochet's government had staggered its development. However, by the end of the century, it decided to implement a transformation programme to bolster military capabilities, investing in technology and reducing troop, towards a more voluntary, less conscript force. As of 2010, around 35,000 active service members formed the land force (IISS, 2010, p. 72), while, in the mid-nineties, it had the double personnel size (The Economist, 2008). Even during times of national economic crisis, the Chilean army was able to use the budget ballooned by skyrocketing copper prices to engage in a multiyear plan to replace existing equipment and better electronics, also buying, among other, 131 second-hand Leopard 2-A4 tanks from Germany (Bromley & Guevara, 2009).

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[170] The process of modernisation of state institutions encompassed "consolidating political command' means, in specific terms, managing Defence from the executive power, with the Minister's cooperation, while affording the armed forces with a more or less technical and consultancy-related role" (Malamud, 2007, p. 2).
[171] Including constitutional reforms and decisions towards decreasing the military clout in the whole political system. In 1997 civilian and military officials cooperated to issue the first white book of national defence, an important effort in rapprochements between two sectors that were still holding grudges.
[172] The Chilean economy heavily relies on copper, representing 54 per cent of the country's exports and which multiplied by 10 between 1990 and 2011 (Meller, 2013).

This growth raised concerns amongst Peru, Argentina and Bolivia, neighbouring countries seen as potential though relatively unlikely threats (Duarte & Viggiano, 2012). After a long history of heavy armoured vehicles and arms, and with a first approximation to the corresponding doctrine by officers sent to US Army schools in Fort Benning and Fort Knox (Farias, 2017), the Chilean land force created four armoured brigades between 2007 and 2009 (Ejército de Chile, 2009; Steinmeyer, 2016, p. 16). These brigades, established in the desertic, border zones at the northern of the country[173], were also pivotal for interoperability and capability building efforts projected for the decade to come (Sievers, 2012; Cook, 2019).

Therefore, by 2010, as the EJC began its strategic review and conceiving a plan for the future, its counterpart in the Southern Cone was ending a transformation phase parallel to a democratic transition, embracing new roles and preserving certain prerogatives. The Chilean army reforms extensively focused on regular, inter-state conflict, armoured equipment and professionalisation. Moreover, following the post-Cold War trend of military organisations that focused on flexibility, mobility and rapidness as a response to a volatile strategic context (Monsalve, 2004), Chile was then seen as the strongest and most modern in the region (Borrero, 2008; Bonnefoy, 2009; García & Montes, 2009).

In the words of Col. Rojas, the reforms conducted by the Chilean land branch of the military "enabled it to be a frontrunner in the region" (2015c). A further point in which the EJC found a slightly similar context is that, just as Chile installed armoured brigades in the northern frontier with Peru, the FUTAM was to be created in La Guajira, also desertic and troubled by bilateral tensions in the past[174]. On this backdrop, the Colombian army turned to its southern ally as an organisation offering a successful path towards modernising doctrine and structure amidst a transitioning context.

In 2011, the two partners signed a framework cooperation agreement that granted advice to the EJC to adapt its armoured doctrine to the Colombian context (Rojas, 2017a, p. 102). After conceiving the doctrinal and structural reforms at home and subsequently implementing the new concepts as commander of land operations, then commander of

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[173] The northern border is the limit with Peru, country with which an inter-state conflict marked the 19th and 20th century history of both armies, although the risk of an incursion in that zone is low.
[174] To this respect, Col. Rojas emphasises the uncertainty of the future of the armed forces in the light of potential external threats linked to international terrorism (Rojas, 2014, p. 56).

education and doctrine of the Chilean Army, Gen. Guillermo Ramírez Chovar acted as leading advisor for this assistance programme for three years (Rojas, 2017a, p. 103). To advance on the doctrinal adaptation, five EJC officers travelled to Santiago. They worked on-site in 2014 with their counterparts to adapt dozens of manuals and reference documents to the Damasco project (Rojas, 2014, p. 21; Castro, 2019, p. 30). These officers received training in topics such as armoured brigade and infantry battalions, mechanised and motorised infantry battalions, anti-tank missile, exploration and reconnaissance units, as well as administrative and logistics units (Rojas, 2014, pp. 21-2).

In that same year, a high-ranking officer from the Chilean doctrine division advised a team of eight officers from the CEMIL in Bogota. As a result, a total of 87 reference documents were adapted (Rojas, 2014, p. 22). Additionally, the Chilean operational law manual was a baseline for the EJC version, the MFE 6-27, which is subject to humanitarian law and human rights law international standards, including matters of superior responsibility (see CEDOE, 2016c, pp. 12 − 6)[175]. Furthermore, since the COTEF was established in Bogota in 2016, a foreign liaison officer[176] from Chile was appointed to assist and monitor the bilateral cooperation for the Colombian land force doctrine and structure transformation (Müller, 2017, p. 39)[177]. Furthermore, the EJC created the new lessons learned directorate (DILEA) based on the referent of its counterpart in Chile (Cabrera, 2016, p. 38).

The armoured doctrine tenets that the EJC adopted based on the Chilean experience were central to organising combined arms elements and the new mobility and land manoeuvre approach in the Colombian army. These, in turn, are based on the lessons of the German manoeuvre warfare and the US interventions in the Middle East, which emphasise speed, firepower and the need for mission-type command and intensive use of tanks and other armoured vehicles (Sievers, 2012; Rojas, 2017a, pp. 103-5). In this sense, just as it happened at the turn of the twentieth century with the Prussian military, the Chilean army provided once

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[175] In fact, as Olasolo and Canosa (2018) argue, the EJC's operational law reference document is closest to international law standards than the transitional justice legislation provision on superior responsibility than the transitional justice model in Colombia. Contravening the spirit of article 28 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the legislation piece that resulted from the 2016 peace accord exempts public force superiors from their responsibility depending on "effective control of the respective conduct", their access to information and the "means within its power to prevent the commission or further commission of the punishable conduct" (Acto Legislativo 01 de 2017, art. 24).

[176] Also from the US and the Brazilian armies.

[177] Col. Fernando Farias, former director of the Chilean Army Military Academy, was appointed as liaison officer. In 2019, Colonel Ricardo Olivos, deputy military attaché in Bogota, assumed this advisory role.

again for the EJC the possibility to access precepts it deemed as successful and appropriate for its reforms.

EJC officers also saw the emphasis on professionalisation that characterised the transition of the Chilean army towards a smaller, less conscript force as a path worth following[178]. Indeed, although such a statement is least welcome in the ranks, the Colombian land force has gradually reduced its size, especially as the scale in the confrontation slacked and recruitment rates lowered. The army's composition also shows a slow yet marked trend whereby the officers and NCOs numbers grow at a higher rate than conscripts. These developments suggest, at least initially, a transition towards a more modern force.

This road to modernisation goes hand in hand with the focus on education and specialisation in the army's past decade of reform. In the view of Gen. Mejía, the "army of the future" should be an orchestrated, synchronised, and specialised force, aspiring to the ideal of professionalism" (Uniandes, 2016). It was in this sense that he pointed out, on a rather bold simile, that "[j]ust like when Chile was under a dictatorship and sent its army boys to Chicago to study, we did something similar, sending our army boys to be trained and acquire knowledge abroad, to be a transforming influence within the army" (León, 2016). Besides the striking reference to how Chile imported neoliberalism in the 1970s and 1980s, Mejía's explanation recognises staff mobility as a driver to introduce change ideas from other latitudes.

It is worth mentioning a couple of caveats regarding this type of transformation. Military modernisation might be desirable, but the operational context and strategic goals must be considered when pursuing such changes. Not only is the theatre in Chile distinct from that of its Andean partner, but it also paralleled the troop reduction with a substantial investment in technology and equipment[179]. In this sense, while the Colombian army officers regarded the Chilean road as an example worth following for military transformation, a deeper examination of the particularities of each case would reveal that the operational conditions, resources, and theatres are dissimilar. In other words, from an objective perspective, it is far from being a role

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[178] Interviews with Armando Borrero, MG Francisco Cruz Ricci, Juan Pablo Gómez, Mikel Ibarra, and Erik Rojas.
[179] It is also worth noting that, in the Latin American region, there are no other cases of armies whose manpower has been reduced in a similar way (i.e. reducing recruitment and troop size, and increasing technology). The cases of Costa Rica —which in 1948 disbanded its army to create a civil guard— and Panama —whose military forces were dismantled by the US Armed Forces after the 1989 invasion— are not comparable.

model for the EJC, but it was seen as such by the officers who championed these reforms. Additionally, broad and public discussions about the army's troop size and resources should be fostered in Colombia. However, due to the topic's high sensitivity, such issues have moved from total secrecy to polarisation, as explained in the previous chapter.

Another field of advice that the Chilean army provided to their Colombian partners was their experience of including peacekeeping missions and other international roles beyond combat. In the first years of the transition, it was reticent to assuming other roles than strictly conventional defence features (Hunter, 2005, p. 32). Nevertheless, the Chilean army gradually engaged in development-related, disaster relief and peacekeeping tasks which are nowadays part of its core roles for which it has stood out (García & Montes, 2009; Ministerio de Defensa Nacional de Chile, 2017, pp. 133-143; 203-4; Ramírez Chovar, 2018). Moreover, according to Chilean army Colonel Pablo Müller, who was Defence, Military and Air Attaché in Bogota, the Southern Cone nation is committed through cooperation agreements to assist the EJC in peace efforts at home and in their effort to participate in multilateral organisations (Müller, 2017, p. 40).

To the eyes of civilian officials and servicepeople in Bogota, the Chilean road of military transformation is a paragon of success. This is especially true compared to other transitional processes in the Southern Cone and Central America, where the military lost most of their prerogatives and their roles were extensively reduced[180]. Three central elements influenced the choice of elements for the reform from the southern counterpart: a century-long tradition of cooperation; the reputation that the Chilean army enjoyed as an ideal of modernisation; and the fact that it also acts as a proxy for doctrinal and force-structure aspects deemed crucial for interoperability with the US army. In sum, through the combination of a strong emphasis on defence tasks and incorporating domestic missions, the Chilean army has been strengthened in the past decades.

In this sense, the Colombian officers who designed the new concept of missions for the army adopted a multi-role force model. The broad spectrum of tasks was a response to both the rising pressures on resources and the need to demonstrate suitability in a wide array

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[180] Even if the Colombian case differs significantly from these other references in the region's recent history, as Chapter 6 showed, the fate of the military organisations in these countries served as a mirror in which fears and resistance to externally led change were reflected.

of future scenarios, through which the army can maintain prerogatives and roles. The drivers behind the decision to emulate the Southern Cone partner confirm that, under strategic ambiguity and uncertainty conditions, military organisations prefer to imitate peers they consider successful in such transformations. The subsequent subsection further elaborates this argument regarding the introduction of missions beyond combat, such as international peacekeeping and stabilisation-related roles at the domestic level.

Fit for All Purposes: Multi-Mission Heroes at Home and Abroad

Soon after announcing the EJC reforms, the recently created communications directorate, DICOE, launched the "Multi-Mission Heroes"[181] campaign. Publicity pieces displayed servicepeople building roads, repairing bridges, assisting the elderly and children in rural zones (EJC, 2016c). "Our mission is Colombia", read the slogan of the campaign that portrayed an army helping those in need in the aftermath of a war from which they victoriously rose (CEDOE, 2017). A national media story also referred to the DICOE as an inhouse publicity agency, in which army communications served to "say that [this is] an innovative army, more sophisticated, better prepared academically, with all the capabilities to satisfy any Colombian citizen" (Ríos, 2017). Colonel Sandra García, director of this unit also added that:

> For 200 years, until recently, the priority for Colombia was peace, to guarantee that Colombia would reach peace agreements, but now, when the environment changes, the army has plenty of capabilities, built up over time, which it now puts at the service of the community (Ríos, 2017).

Coincidentally, in April 2017, a massive mudslide that followed the overflow of rivers near Mocoa, Amazon region, left significant parts of the southern city destroyed, with hundreds injured and dead. Military personnel were deployed alongside the civilian defence, in a zone also heavily impacted by the armed conflict, former FARC influence and internal displacement. In this scenario, the army stood out by putting its capabilities at the service of emergency response, not only with short term disaster-relief action but also through infrastructure projects (Sanidad FFMM, 2017; EJC, 2017b, 2017c). Their intervention, depicted as the task of multi-mission heroes, was also reproduced through local and national media (Castillo, 2017; Mi

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[181] *Héroes Multimisión* in Spanish.

Putumayo, 2017; Rojas, 2017c). The coordination of humanitarian action and the subsequent reconstruction efforts were named "Operation Angel" by the EJC Brigade on-site, stressing their saviour role (Fuerzas Militares, 2018).

Though the land force had previous experience in such non-combatting contexts, the communication and branding of these actions as appropriate for the new multi-role army illustrate what the EJC aimed to portray at that time. Besides being a troop-morale and recruitment campaign, the target of the multi-mission heroes strategy was public opinion, intended to show that the army can also provide welfare to the country it serves (Military Engineers Command, 2017). In the words of Col. García, a way of making the soldier's sacrifice visible to the Colombian population (2017).

Indeed, army communications received a significant boost with the reforms, creating the DICOE and a new arm for this combat-support area. According to Mejía, the goal of communications is to "support faith in the cause, the road towards transformation, influence our men so that they know what we are fighting for and putting us in the hearts of Colombian people" (Ríos, 2017). Military media served as a platform to advertise what the army would become in the light of the implemented reforms and an eventual post-conflict context (for instance, EJC, 2016d; EJC, 2017d, 2017e). The core message expressed by the force commander was: "I envision an army (…) capable of fulfilling various responsibilities, roles and missions. An army prepared for the consolidation of peace and the country's development. An army that is strong in the fight against traditional and emerging threats" (EJC, 2017d, p. 3).

The increased emphasis in communications goes hand in hand with the perceived expectations rising from the society in which the army operates. For example, a study that inquired over the drivers behind the reforms revealed that EJC officers insisted on "their interest in generating greater rapprochement with civil society and expressed a high appreciation of the recognition of their legitimacy" (FIP & COTEF, 2018, p. 13). Portraying the EJC as a vital, necessary organisation for a wide range of domestic roles, including but transcending irregular warfare, unfolded parallel to the growing perspective of international missions described above.

The following two subsections argue that the upward prominence of peacebuilding, development-oriented roles for the army, with more civilian and non-combatant tasks, stems from two parallel factors. On the one hand, the awareness that these multiple missions at home and abroad can counteract possible voices inclined to reduce its resources and size drastically. In this regard, other armies in the region, such as Chile, served as a model. On the other hand, the recognition that what the Colombian military has done for decades in comprehensive action fits in ideally with the shift towards network-centred approaches to warfighting. In this respect, legitimacy-seeking goals and the US army's influence and expectations were pivotal.

Exporting Peace and Stability

In 2017, an article in the EJC journal *Transformación Militar* warned of the potential harm of drastic reductions in armed forces. The author underscored the regional trend in Latin America to counter budget and troop size reduction, mainly through civilian-related and UN-peacekeeping or stabilisation tasks (Kruijt, 2017, p. 52). Indeed, in the past decades and parallel to post-conflict transitions and democratisation, the region has gradually become a provider of military and police forces' personnel to support multilateral humanitarian and peace missions (Sotomayor, 2016, p. 324). For instance, the Latin American Association of Peacekeeping Training Centres –ALCOPAZ–, was created in 2007 by countries contributing troops to such missions. The Colombian CENCOPAZ, which began to offer courses in 2015, is a member of both the regional and international associations of educational centres[182].

In January 2015, Minister Pinzón and the then UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, signed a framework agreement for Colombian personnel deployment under the mandate of the multilateral organisation. The accord barely set overall conditions for eventual contributions of military and police (Ley 1794 de 2016). However, this happened on the backdrop of a series of meetings of the minister in Washington, where he aimed to present the progress made at home in modernising and reforming the Colombian security forces, including human rights (W Radio, 2015). Among others, Pinzón met then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Congress, DOD and DOS officials; and Samantha Power, US ambassador to the UN (El Mundo, 2015a). The visit took place when the

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[182] Note that the CENCOPAZ was originally created by the marine corps (navy infantry). See: http://www.alcopaz.com/colombia-cencopaz.html

Obama administration intensively lobbied pledging for more substantial participation in peacekeeping operations from other countries (The Guardian, 2015).

During his intervention at the UN leaders' summit in September that year, President Santos made a more concrete commitment, right when Gen. Mejía announced the army's doctrine and structural reform (Presidencia, 2015b). He affirmed that the country was ready to deploy troops in peacekeeping missions, with a goal of up to 5,000 personnel by 2019 (Presidencia, 2015b). As of 2017, 78 Colombian troops were trained to participate in UN-led peace operations, cooperating with Germany, Brazil, and Canada academies (Trujillo, 2017, p. 30), far from the envisioned goal. This gap is due to ongoing internal challenges and a still long road to go in terms of education and resources for such a contingent. Moreover, it has been police personnel who, until now, has represented Colombia in recent peacekeeping missions, not military forces (MDN, 2018f, pp. 100-1[183]).

The same holds for the 2014 framework agreement that the MDN signed with the European Union (EU) to allow Colombia to engage in crisis management operations within the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (European External Action Service, 2014). The MDN also portrayed the pact as a sign of trust in the Colombian military (2014, p. 133). On the basis of this accord, the naval force has been the branch that has until now materialised cooperation activities, with a collaboration in the EU counter-piracy operation Atalanta, in the coast of Somalia alongside the Spanish navy (EUNAVFOR, 2015)[184].

Notwithstanding, the government depicted its response to the UN pledge as part of the military reform strategy, a sign of its observance of international law and a way to ensure capabilities in the future (Presidencia, 2015c). Here, too, the bilateral relationship with the US played a role due to the financial resources it invests in the multilateral organism. "This agreement is a recognition of the Armed Forces as the main peacebuilders, and their legitimacy in human rights and international humanitarian law standards", stated Pinzón in January 2015 (RCN, 2015).

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[183] As of 2018, 244 members of the national police had been trained to be deployed in UN peacekeeping missions, which until now have focused on the praxis on police reform and justice. At that time, 39 personnel of this branch were deployed in Haiti (MINUSTAH), 2 in Guinea Bissau (UNIOGBIS); and 14 in Guatemala (CICIG).
[184] It was only until July 2018 that the agreement was approved by Congress in Bogota (Ley 1925 de 2018).

When presenting the bill to pass the agreement in Congress, the defence and foreign ministers' joint explanatory statement framed it as part of the public force transformation (Ley 1794 de 2016). In this document, the cooperation with the multilateral organisation is portrayed as a milestone of paramount importance for the armed forces' future, bolstering their capabilities and elevating their professional standards. Thus, the recognition-related goals and logic of appropriateness seemed to be at the forefront of this commitment, which is still to be seen more cautiously, especially in the view of stabilisation efforts at home and ongoing threats (Chinchilla & Vargas, 2016; Fernández-Osorio, 2017; Vásquez & Arroyave, 2017, p. 203).

For the Colombian army, the Chilean counterpart also offered an essential referent on how shifting towards a polyvalent force and engaging in international peace missions may pay dividends in professionalisation and legitimacy. Moreover, the southern partner was the only country in the region that holds such a cooperation agreement in crisis management operations with the EU. Additionally, exchange with other forces in the hemisphere reinforced the perception that this type of missions abroad can be useful for military reform and professionalisation in transitional contexts. In this respect, the Canadian government cooperated with the Colombian armed forces in new roles and peace operations (MDN, 2014a, pp. 128-129; 2016a, p. 76).

Although not with the same intensity and scope as Washington's role in the defence diplomacy strategy of the MDN, since 2012, Canada has been involved in triangular cooperation activities with Colombia aimed at training and assisting security forces in Central America, in topics such as the fight against drug trafficking and military specialisation (MDN, 2015a, p. 116; 2018a, p. 159). This collaboration stems from the northern country's interest in regional security and stability. Moreover, through its Global Peace and Security Fund, the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs financed a project to advise the COTEF on future roles and missions of the land force (Government of Canada, 2017). This exercise, which comprised best practices exchange, workshops, dialogue and research, was made based on the experience of other armies in Latin America, emphasising what other cases in the region have done in order to adapt their forces (RESDAL, 2018b).

In this sense, the inclusion of international missions in the EJC doctrinal, educational, and structural parameters stems from expectations that the land force could be deployed for

peacekeeping abroad in an eventual post-conflict or transitional context. Once again, organisational networks facilitate access to emulated models. However, the driver behind the decision to incorporate these is linked to prevailing uncertainty and ambiguity.

At the time, the executive's rhetoric was decisive for this, although it failed to deliver related resources to achieve readiness and sustainability. As explained in Chapter 6, with the Havana talks' progress towards a final agreement, the Santos administration resorted to a narrative of a better future after the FARC demobilised, linked to options in stabilisation and peacekeeping operations. However, both the ongoing evolution of domestic threats and lack of resources needed to materialise such commitment have left this in abstract terms. In turn, this situation stresses the political, legitimacy-seeking purposes of including these roles in the army's framework[185].

Indeed, stabilisation missions abroad are still not a concrete mission of the EJC. Nevertheless, in the view of some officers of the land force, this stance was relevant for the theatre in the South American country, also connected to the US cooperation and the army's long tradition of civil-military action, in recent decades called comprehensive action. The last subsection addresses how this issue stems from expectations and constraints outside and inside the Colombian society.

Comprehensive Action: Revamping a Successful Local Model

As a result of the implemented doctrine and structural reform in the EJC, the comprehensive action elements received a boost that, in turn, responded to rising expectations abroad and at home in terms of the land force's roles and resources. A series of reinforcing factors influenced this choice. First, this type of joint, interagency engagement beyond combat offers a broad scope of actions through which the army can remain fit for domestic tasks and stand out as a provider of expertise abroad. Second, this approach is closely related to legitimacy-seeking goals that also impact material interests. A development-oriented,

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[185] Additionally, in the new administration's MDN reports, the NATO-related reforms and agreements are still regarded as prioritary, while there is no mention of the other multilateral agreements or even bilateral partners that were mentioned before.

humanitarian military force is more likely to be socially, politically, and ultimately financially supported in case of decreasing threats or economic limitations.

Additionally, in the view of army officers, comprehensive action allows countering the political and legal warfare they experienced in the years previous to and during the reform. Indeed, as explained before, service members prepared to fight in frontal combat against the insurgency but also against their other forms of struggle through political and judicial actions, which affected the army's institutional legitimacy and resources. Finally, the army revamped this counterinsurgency component in tune with the recent Colombian experience in consolidation and the US perspective on stabilisation and population-centric warfare.

According to rising expectations on Colombian security forces to conduct military training and assistance for the US, land force leaders in both countries saw this theatre as an ideal scenario to implement or further develop the latest counterinsurgency and operational design perspectives. In this context, the 2010 Colombian military guidelines on comprehensive action justified this approach while aligning it with the SOUTHCOM Strategy 2016 (CGFM, 2010, p. 10). Indeed, the framework for hemispheric security and stability emphasised "combined, joint, and interagency efforts" as key to enhancing stability in the region (SOUTHCOM, 2007, p. 12). This fitted in with the Colombian military sector's endeavour to implement actions in coordination with government agencies and civil society organisations as part of the consolidation efforts under way at the time.

For this matter, the educational background of some leading actors that designed the reform influenced the CRE-i and the subsequent changes that emerged from this exercise. These officers championed a network-centric view of warfare, especially after the US army experience in other irregular operational contexts. Two of them were Gen. Mejía and BG Correa Consuegra, who fostered the inclusion of some ideas that were mainstream at the northern ally's war colleges.

For instance, when pursuing his master of strategic studies at the USAWC, then Col. Mejía wrote his research project on Colombia's counterinsurgency experience. In the published paper, Mejía recommended understanding terrorist organisations such as the FARC as active organisms, complex systems of interdependent, diverse sub-systems (Mejía, 2008, p. 7). "These

systems have different degrees of power, influence and capabilities, and operate at different speeds [that] interact, support and affect each other", he claimed (pp. 7-8). Almost a decade after, when inducted to the USAWC International Fellows Hall of Fame, he told the audience that this research provided a methodological basis for the CRE-i and, ultimately, the doctrine and structure reform (Martin, 2017). He also invited other US graduates to participate in the strategic review where the army shifted its focus towards the system's units instead of regarding the guerrilla as a whole.

Since the mid-2000s, a shift in military epistemology unfolded in US armed forces' schools, especially in SAMS[186], related to design thinking borrowed from theories of complex systems to conceive problems and corresponding solutions differently (Banach & Ryan, 2009). The US army's engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan led to include more of the non-kinetic components of irregular warfare in its planning; above all, to understand both the enemy and the own organisation as a network of intertwined elements, where decentralised, horizontal decision-making is crucial (McChrystal, 2011). This complex adaptative systems method was used, among others, for reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and to confront drug-trafficking as a complex system (Green, 2011), including examples from Colombia's experience (Ryan, 2016)[187]. During the years when officers like Mejía and Correa Consuegra studied in Carlisle and Fort Leavenworth, these ideas gained acceptance.

This approach did not come as drastically new to an army focused on irregular warfare for over half a century. Moreover, including operations other than strictly military in planning and understanding social, cultural, political and economic factors fuelling terrorist organisations was in tune with the executive's consolidation plan described in Chapter 3. Thus, the Colombian generation of army members with high-ranking planning and advisory positions welcomed this idea in the road to the EJC's reform throughout the 2010s (Rojas, 2016b; Correa Consuegra, 2017b; EJC, 2018a). Indeed, BG Correa Consuegra also reported that the CRE-i methodology was based on SAMS operational design guidelines, which provided the systemic and structural analysis method to understand the EJC and its threats as a complex network of interconnected nodes (2017a).

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[186] Initially developed by Australian defence advisors that later worked at SAMS (see Grisogono & Ryan, 2003).
[187] Among other practical examples, SAMS students used a case on "South American narco-terrorists" to apply in systemic operational design practicum.

Something similar happened with the decision to adopt stabilisation operations for the land force's new doctrine. Before the strategic review began, then Lt. Col. Correa Consuegra published his monograph when graduating from the command and general staff college at SAMS (2011). In this work, the army officer argued that the "hold" phase of the consolidation strategy in Colombia, that is, actions following the military-intensive phase to regain territorial control, needed more formal guidance and precepts.

Additionally, Correa Consuegra suggested that stability operations should be included in the army doctrine to avoid friction in the ever-growing interagency and joint operations with other public and non-governmental organisations in Colombia (2010, p. 6). He acknowledged that this framework was initially conceived for operations abroad. However, he contended that the U.S. Army Field Manual 3-07 "should be the basis for the Colombian military definition because it represents the *latest doctrine in stability operations of one of the most experienced military forces in these operations*, the U.S. Military (2010, p. 4, emphasis added). Overall, this work equates a future post-conflict scenario in Colombia with those countries where the stabilisation, interagency model is applied (p. 39).

Evidently, the professional networks between the two armies played a role in disseminating these ideas. Additionally, and in tune with the abovementioned light-footprint approach, the North American partner was interested in applying this network-centric perspective that it had tested elsewhere without engaging directly[188]. Nevertheless, the image of success and excellence that these guidelines conveyed was central for the EJC leaders who included them in the reform.

Indeed, these ideas were not radically new to those of the Colombian military, but here, too, the US doctrine is referred to "as the best to follow" (Correa Consuegra, 2010, p. 36). Moreover, officers that championed the reforms expressed a certain admiration and intellectual accord for the US army's performance in military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan (Díaz & Amador, 2017, p. 164). In sum, the growing emphasis on jointness –which already influenced past structure changes in Colombia and took a new form in the combined arms brigades– can

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[188] Dempsey affirmed during his visit to Latin America: "We learned how to defeat al-Qaida by attacking the network along its entire length. Now in that case we did most, if not all, of the heavy lifting. The question here (in South America) would be, can we take the same paradigm in how to attack a network -but not do it ourselves?" (Fox News, 2012).

be witnessed in military thought of those leading the new doctrine and structure of the EJC (Rojas, 2015d[189]; Castro, 2019).

Beyond the expressed admiration, the EJC portrayed the visit of US officers who participated in those campaigns as a sign of endorsement. Early 2012, Gen. Martin Dempsey, then Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited the joint task force in Tibú, a municipality in the problematic area of Catatumbo, bordering Venezuela and territory in dispute with various illegal armed groups (Garamone, 2012a). The also former Commanding General, Multi-National Security Transition Command in Baghdad, mentioned that personnel with operational experience in Iraq and Afghanistan would be in Bogota in the following weeks to share their knowledge with their Colombian peers (Richani, 2012).

Dempsey referred, among others, to retired US army Generals Petraeus, then CIA director, and Stanley McChrystal, whom the MDN invited to provide advice on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. Additionally, in an interview with a national media, McChrystal, who preceded Petraeus as Commander, ISAF, praised the Colombian security forces' strategy, referred to the importance of jointness and coordinated civil-military efforts to win against insurgent threats, as well as the importance of the relationship with the population (Amat, 2012).

It is noteworthy that, beyond the relevance of knowledge and experience exchange, what Gen. McChrystal affirmed is far from different from what Colombian army officers have already known and expressed during their long experience countering guerrilla warfare. Even phrases like "whoever wins the war is the one who has the support of the population"; "my job was to win the war or give the politicians a chance to win it" (Amat, 2012) show a narrative alignment with what EJC officers have stated over decades. In fact, as the US entered the unconventional warfare scenarios of Afghanistan and Iraq, its officers lacked the background on this type of operations, which led them to publish the 2007 counterinsurgency field manual (US Army, 2007). Moreover, McChrystal himself stated that he was positively surprised by the Sword of Honour plan and recommended its full implementation as conceived by the EJC (Garamone, 2012b).

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[189] For instance, Col. Rojas (2015d) compares Operation Iraqi Freedom and Colombia's joint military strategy.

Therefore, at least for the Colombian army, having such prominent figures as advisors seems to serve more to validation and symbolic goals than to an enlightening one. Indeed, these references were already present in the comprehensive action guidelines issued by the Colombian General Military Forces command in 2010: "Gen. David Petraeus in Iraq and Gen. Stanley McChrystal in Afghanistan have stated that non-military factors such as poverty, security, winning the support of the population, reconciliation, efficient local governments, information management must be considered" (CGFM, 2010, p. 10).

Similarly, the communiqué replicated by national media to report the new strategy underscores the active participation and support of the US (Semana, 2012a). Later, when giving the account on how the CRE-i led to this and other adjustments, the participants of this exercise also alluded to the influence of renowned U.S. officials in the design of the new strategy (Rojas, 2015d, p. 620; Correa Consuegra, 2017a; Martin, 2017). In sum, even though the EJC members did not seem to be learning radically new aspects of warfare from its hemispheric partner, it is evident that references to the US army serve a symbolic purpose and to legitimising the reforms.

Besides international referents of alleged success, domestic expectations and needs reinforced the importance of this multidimensional, extensive approach to military action in the reforms. As described in Chapter 4, the EJC activated the department for comprehensive action and development (CEDE9), a command for operations under this area, the CAAID, and a corresponding training school, the ESMAI. Additionally, it created the new arm of *acción integral* to promote this specialisation in the military land branch. Finally, the Damasco doctrine included unified action for synchronisation, coordination and integration between governmental, non-governmental and military activities. In this respect, the doctrine reference document MFE 1-0 Army states that:

> While winning battles is crucial, doing so in isolation is insufficient to achieve a longstanding change in the conditions that generate conflict. Supporting the civilian population and authorities before, during and after all phases of a campaign is decisive for the success or failure of ground operations (CEDOE, 2016b, p. 4).

This definition follows from the more central role of legitimacy in warfare that the EJC recognised in the years that led to the reform. According to retired Gen. Cabrera, Director of

the CAEM and the national defence course, the multi-mission army model is intertwined with a comprehensive view of security, in which the land force has a pivotal, unique role compared to other government institutions (2016). In his words, "the army has played a decisive role in state-building, especially in the hinterlands, where on many occasions the only state presence has been the figure of the soldier" (Cabrera, 2016, p. 146).

However, some of the parameters, units and programmes that fall under the comprehensive action perspective denote ambiguity. On the one hand, they stress the army's role as coordinator and catalyser of development and stability. On the other, the specific activities that belong to it fall short of expectations, as they mostly focus on reputation, communication and, ultimately, what is known as psychological operations.

Several reasons make a case for a cautionary tale regarding this ambiguous standpoint regarding comprehensive action. First, while the latter is crucial for counterinsurgency, there is a peril in distorting the announced inclusive role in peacebuilding and development, reducing it to psychological operations. Second, legitimacy as a whole-of-government approach risks being confused with the force's legitimation in the sense of reputation. Third, when concerns about the army's image are strongly related to the growing emphasis on non-kinetic actions, comprehensive action can be reduced to a tactic against attacks on the land force's institutional framework, having less impact on the expectations it raises vis-à-vis the civilian population. Ultimately, the confusion on means and ends in this sense can be counterproductive.

For instance, as explained in Chapter 6, to some officers, it was necessary to mobilise resources against the legal and political infiltration of the state that the insurgency had undertaken as part of their "combination of all forms of struggle". To the former director of the Colombian military ombudsman and executive director of military criminal justice, comprehensive action is a key instrument to counter political and judicial warfare:

> The Integrated Action doctrine is the operational design that we created to counteract and neutralise the insurgent political warfare. This doctrine seeks to protect the state's own CoG[190], which General Ospina Ovalle defined as legitimacy as commander of the Armed Forces. […] It is our tool to confront the adversaries who enter into the institutions of the State in order to harm us from within. […]. Raising Integrated Action

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[190] Centre of Gravity.

principles to the level of operational doctrine makes it imperative to include social development, human security and local governments in the planning and execution of military and development operations (Puentes, 2017, p. 252).

Additionally, the new joint comprehensive action handbook explains that this area "aims to turn the military into dynamic agents of the country's growth, helping to promote social and economic development and investment, aligned with the protection of the environment and natural resources" (CGFM, 2017, pp. 6-7). Then the document continues stating that comprehensive action

> is of great importance for stabilisation and consolidation, since it favours institutional control of the territory, essential to strengthening the social rule of law. (…). The indicators of success do not refer exclusively to military operations; it is also a "war of legitimacy", of which the theatre of operations is working with society.

Here, the aim is to enhance legitimacy through a broad spectrum of actions that transcend the traditional exclusive combat operations. However, when examining the objectives of joint comprehensive action, the aim of developing communication campaigns to raise awareness about the role of the Colombian armed forces at a regional level acquires a preponderant place (CGFM, 2017, pp. 38). Indeed, this is the first and by far the most detailed and elaborated objective included in the handbook.

The text focuses on the need to "publicise", "exalt military virtues", "gain the support, affection and trust of the Colombian people", "increase the positive image of the institution", among others (pp. 38-9). The remaining five general objectives refer to cooperation and coordination with state institutions and private, non-governmental and academic organisations for the sake of the country's socio-economic development (p. 39). Thus, beyond the civil-military cooperation tasks, particular emphasis is placed on the reputational aspect of comprehensive action.

This duality also prevails when observing the army's role in the joint comprehensive action activities. The list of capabilities for supporting comprehensive action mentions stability operations, support for civil defence and psychological operations. Nevertheless, when described in more specific terms, they fall into communications-related categories. For

example, printing and publications, audio-visuals, reproduction machines for printed material, peripheral equipment, radio broadcasting stations, vehicles for awareness-raising activities and the military circus (CGFM, 2017, pp. 73-5).

Similarly, the CEDE9 describes its role as that of "promoting inter-institutional action" to foster constant contact with the community (EJC, n.d.). It aims to coordinate and provide security for productive projects and the social initiatives organised for the civilian population. Notwithstanding, when moving towards more specific objectives, the unit refers to general activities, mostly related to increasing visibility and improving the army's image vis-à-vis stakeholders (idem).

As for the CAAID, the mission of this command is to "conduct defence support of civil authorities and stability operations, supporting army units in coordination with State and Government institutions, in order to generate the conditions to promote the social recovery of the territory, on the way to consolidation" (CAAID, n.d.-a). Moreover, by giving a historical account of the achievements of *acción integral*, the command's page states that it stresses the army's role in building internal order. This aim is allegedly achieved "through activities that generate employment, welfare and contribute to building peace and legitimacy, becoming a bridge for interaction between the institution and society" (CAAID, n.d.-b). However, the unit executes its activities by distributing leaflets, advertising through vehicle speakers, recreational days, conferences, and special days dedicated to business rounds, peasant markets, humanitarian assistance and environmental protection (CAAID, n.d.-c)[191].

The "Faith in Colombia" Programme is attached to the CCAID and aims to coordinate inter-institutional action for stabilisation operations. Its first premise is formulated as "paving the way with social language", thus conceiving the army as the state institution that articulates efforts for legitimacy and the consolidation of state presence (CCAID, n.d.-d). It also draws on a definition of multi-dimensional or "comprehensive security" as "framing human, legal, social and economic aspects of all risks that can affect all vulnerable populations in the national territory" (idem).

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[191] Indeed, until now, the army's comprehensive action element has remained a means for human intelligence (Interviews with Henry Cancelado and Juan Pablo Gómez).

Concretely, through this programme, the army should identify, manage and articulate public services, private and international cooperation assistance available in vulnerable zones that can benefit the communities in those areas[192]. At the same time, it aims at building confidence between the land force and the population through sport, entertainment, tourism and environmental events. The wide array of tasks, which can also be witnessed in the reports published on the CCAID's website, underscores that development, stabilisation and peacebuilding are still linked to almost any activity that includes the civilian population.

Two other cases that fall into the comprehensive action approach underscore the width of the spectrum of activities in this area. One of them is the so-called military circus. For almost three decades, the army has had groups of soldiers who organise and participate in a circus as jugglers, illusionists and acrobats (Cruz, 2019). These circuses belong to psychological operations and the CCAID, attached to different brigades throughout the territory. Consequently, the CGFM describes these as activities to "generate confidence in the population, win their affection and seek to bring them closer to the military institution" (2017, pp.74-5). However, the army affirms that it is through such actions that they "show commitment not only to the security of the civilian population but also to the social recovery of the territory and its contribution to community development" (EJC, 2018b).

Another example of how old elements now receive a renewed image and greater prominence as development-related missions is military engineers' work. As mentioned before, when describing the army's role in disaster or emergency-relief[193], the EJC officers were adamant in showing that a victorious military was also crucial to reconstruct and provide better conditions in the hinterlands in an eventual post-conflict. Former director of the War School and chief of stabilisation of the CCOET, MG Francisco Cruz Ricci –who commanded the division with jurisdiction in Mocoa at the time of the natural disaster– praised the work of the multi-mission heroes from the CCAID who supported the community in the aftermath of the mudslide in Mocoa. Cruz described how servicemen "set their combat equipment aside to plunge into turbulent waters" in "heroic first-response action" (2017).

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[192] Interviews with MG Francisco Cruz Ricci and Rocío Pinzón.
[193] There has also been previous experience of disaster-relief support by the military, including the army, for instance, in the response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti (CGFM, 2017, pp. 20-21).

Military engineers is the oldest arm of the EJC[194]. However, this area has received more attention in the past decade due to this branch's pivotal role in integrating hinterlands into the national infrastructure. On an anecdotal note in this sense, retired MG Amaya[195] reported that a former FARC combatant affirmed "the guerrilla loses ground right there where a paved road begins". Consequently, the army identified this area as critical for post-conflict, potential stabilisation tasks. As described in Chapter 4, in 2014, the army created the engineers' command (COING). With the 2016 reform, it received the additional tasks of humanitarian demining, countering explosive threats, and antiterrorist analysis, and became part of the JEMGF[196]. According to the command, a member of this arm "is a catalyst for progress, an architect of the country's development" and a "synonym of the country's economic reactivation and progress" (COING, 2017).

In short, the army's renewed emphasis on comprehensive action corresponds to material and symbolic needs. This type of engagement allows it to preserve relevance, projecting itself as the organisation that articulates and catalyses the state action in the field, particularly in regions where institutional presence has been weak. Besides, it is a way to counteract the adverse impact of the so-called political and lawfare against the public force. Finally, it aligns with the population-centric focus of irregular warfighting that has prevailed in the last decades of counterinsurgency.

The previous section showed how certain aspects of the army reform stem from patterns that the force members perceive as successful. In the case of the armoured warfare elements, the Chilean counterpart served as a referent, providing insights on combined arms manoeuvre, in line with US expectations of future joint actions. As for the multirole army model, a series of factors intervened to shape the change. First, including international missions responded to the expressed government expectations and the belief that, under transitional and ambiguous contexts, engaging in peacekeeping missions is a way of safeguarding particular interests of the military. Second, the more central role given to comprehensive action in line with the net-centric warfare approach endorsed by the US partner, in addition to its potential broad scope of civil-military cooperation tasks in the domestic sphere.

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[194] Considering the military engineers university was created early in the nineteenth century, almost a hundred years before the national army was founded.
[195] Interview with the author.
[196] The department of military engineers (CEDE10) was also created with the 2016 restructuring, attached to the JEMPP.

However, in this case, when observing the praxis of comprehensive action and development, activities tend to remain in terms of visibility, communication and reputational goals. Moreover, beyond a structured plan for consolidation and stability, the focus is instead on psychological operations, thus giving the impression of a new name for old practices. Overall, the intentions of contributing to welfare and peace remain short-sighted, not far from the worn-out hearts-and-minds stance.

7.3. Summary

This chapter addressed the third and final partial hypothesis, whereby the EJC adopted standards that potentially provide material or symbolic resources. In this case, emulated patterns were available through existing organisational networks. Indeed, partners with which the Colombian army enjoys a long cooperation tradition influenced some central elements of the reform. Military-to-military cooperation and defence diplomacy promoted by the MDN facilitated access to protocols and principles adopted in the new EJC doctrine and force structure. Additionally, army personnel mobility enabled those who designed the reforms in the EJC access to specific notions.

These elements were necessary, albeit not sufficient, to provide an exhaustive explanation of the case. As the chapter showed, the choice of the particular elements of the Colombian army reform stemmed from the need to adopt standards that facilitate interoperability in new missions, thus potentially strengthening capabilities, and which convey ideals of excellence, appropriateness and success. The decisive driver for choosing a pattern for the reform was to facilitate financing sources and convey the idea of success.

Although often entwined at the empirical level, the preceding sections identified two major groups of factors that determined the emulation of elements from other organisations and, ultimately, the rationale behind the selected type of change. On the one hand, expectations rising from partner organisations and the society in which the army operates played a significant role in shaping the reforms. The pressure to improve capabilities determined the need to adopt guidelines that allow for cooperation and access to potential new sources of military assistance or investments.

As the first section argued, being the Colombian army's main ally, the US army's expectations regarding military assistance and interoperability for joint missions significantly influenced the implemented changes in doctrine and force structure. Moreover, in the quest for potential new cooperation horizons, the road towards a partnership with NATO marked the introduction of standards and operational concepts that facilitate potential international deployment. Finally, uncertainty on how the local context would impact resource allocation for the sector led to more emphasis on roles beyond combat, such as development, stabilisation and other domestic tasks that support maintaining size and budget in an eventual shift of internal security roles.

On the other hand, the ambiguous institutional and strategic environment also influenced the reforms. In response to growing ambivalence in the strategic context, the EJC emulated aspects from organisations that it sees as a paragon of excellence. As expected, this choice holds a close relation to legitimacy-seeking goals. For instance, in the case of NATO-related changes, the process of standardisation and adoption of principles emulated from other military organisations is used to increase the potential to access resources and gain legitimation at an international and local level. In other words, the narrative of achieving superiority and being on a par with the best armies in the world serves representational purposes, which, in turn, support existential, material goals.

Additionally, the Chilean ground force served as a benchmark for the expressed goal of catching up with conventional warfare principles and armoured doctrine. Indeed, considering it an ideal of transformation in the region, the EJC looked for its southern partner's assistance in the doctrinal and structural reform. The introduction of armoured warfare concepts in the reference documents and training followed from the premise that the Chilean army underwent a successful transition towards a modern force in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Moreover, the shift to a corps smaller in size and with emphasis on technology caught the interest of Colombian officers at the time of the reforms. However, this element still remains far from the operational reality of the EJC.

Finally, the changes implemented by the EJC promoted comprehensive action in the counterinsurgency strategy and new force units. Here, army officers saw the US network-centric and stabilisation approach to warfare in other theatres as a successful model of fighting terrorist organisations. They found similarities between these and the consolidation efforts that the Colombian institutions have carried out since the late-2000s. Moreover, the centrality of

legitimacy influenced the enhancement of comprehensive action in the EJC reform. However, although portrayed as part of the multi-mission army, in which the land force fosters the development and social wellbeing, *acción integral* remains often at the level of psychological operations.

In sum, this chapter confirmed that upward pressures on the Colombian army's institutional framework were the central driver of the reforms. The outcome is a wide-ranging spectrum of an army facing constraints and ambiguity. The underlying power distribution to which the analytical chapter referred to was at stake due to the growing uncertainty identified in previous chapters. This led actors to mobilise to prevent further risks to the military status quo and preserve material and symbolic resources.

8. Conclusions

This research sought to contribute to the scholarship of military change by testing a theory-guided hypothesis on the case of the Colombian army's most recent doctrine, education and structural reform. For this purpose, the study developed a framework that encompasses multiple intervening factors in three analytical dimensions: the security and political environment, the interplay between civilian and military agents, and the organisational networks, pressures and expectations shaping the outcome of the reforms. Evidence confirmed the hypothesis leading this empirical study in showing that an increasingly uncertain institutional and operational context prompted the land force's leaders to advance changes that mitigated or prevented adverse, external reforms. On this backdrop, the civil-military interplay aimed to favour the army's interests. Ultimately, the *Ejército Nacional de Colombia* responded to rising pressures and expectations by emulating organisations that confer material and ideational resources.

An initial step in answering the questions that guided this work was to depict what kind of adjustment the Colombian ground force implemented during the studied period. As discussed in Chapter 4, these changes went beyond the rhetorical level to the extent that they were incorporated into the army's education system, impacted the structure of the organisation and its deployment, and had consequences for the roles and missions of the EJC. Following the definition presented in the analytical part, this falls into the consensus of what is military change.

Notwithstanding the reforms' transcendence to levels with operational consequences, it is worth noting that these changes are yet to be assessed against long-term effects. Besides time, such adjustments require continuity in political engagement and financial commitment. Indeed, implementation progress has been hindered in a context of austerity such as the one Colombia endures due to macro-economic factors, now aggravated by the consequences of the pandemic. Additionally, dissidents from demobilised guerrilla and paramilitary groups and the lasting guerrilla movement, ELN, still operate with irregular tactics at the domestic level to control territory and population for their illegal goals. Indeed, the country witnesses the atomisation of criminal actors that inherited the arms and tactics of insurgency to advance their participation in drug-trafficking and other illegal economies. The last section of this chapter will return to the implications of this evolving scenario for the security forces.

Even though the changes studied here are recent, it is worth highlighting aspects that set a reasonable transformation trend and others that deserve some caution. First, it should not go unnoticed that, with this reform, army leaders aimed for more openness towards the civilian public. Both the publication and dissemination of the doctrinal manuals and the conscious decision to present them at events together with non-military academic organisations demonstrate an intention to build bridges with the Colombian civil society. Furthermore, during the years in which the reforms were designed, high-ranking officers reached out to and involved researchers and civilian organisations with which there had been little or no dialogue in the past.

Such actions are essential to moving towards greater transparency and democratic oversight of the armed forces. However, as mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4, the executive and legislative branches can and should be much more active in monitoring and reporting what happens in Colombia's military institutions. Involving relevant civilian agencies and actors to participate in the security sectors' management and debate should not be left to the discretion and background of the officers in charge but rather be a constant policy.

In recent years, once again, the media has exposed worrisome practices such as illegal surveillance by army intelligence –targeting, amongst others, journalists and members of the government– and the revival of guidelines to boost operational results that remind of those that have incentivised human rights abuses. This fact underscores the need for much more progress in the democratic control and education of service members. Besides affecting the military organisation's image abroad, such events severely impact its perception within the Colombian society. Indeed, after a series of scandals surfaced during the first two years of the new administration, in June 2020, the military forces' approval dropped to its lowest in 20 years: 48 per cent.

Following the contemporary theory of civil-military relations, a more professional army favours democratic control and the subordination of service members. However, as other scholars have pointed out, the evidence shows that this is not necessarily the case in a context of high threats to domestic security. The Colombian system, where civilians have decided to grant the armed forces a relatively high level of autonomy in public order management, confirms this trend. This even goes beyond granting autonomy for, in some cases, Colombian rulers have washed their hands giving the security forces the responsibility to solve of problems that require a response beyond the military and police.

In fact, as of writing these lines, Colombia witnesses a spiral of unrest and violence as a result of cumulative unmet social grievances. Although this discontent is rooted in structural problems that go back in decades and were deepened by the pandemic, social protests that began in 2019 have now rapidly escalated, among others, due to the current government's excessive policing response and incommensurate use of force to respond to demonstrations. In yet another example of Colombian civilian's preference for solving social and public order issues *manu militari*, after a month of a general strike and feeble dialogue attempts, in May 2021 the president issued a decree to deploy military forces to remove protestors in roadblocks.

This is all the more reason why, beyond the civilian's responsibility, decisions to improve professionalisation and education standards are crucial. Putting issues of doctrine and education at the centre of the reform, adding combat-support areas for commissioned officers' specialisation, and the possibility of pursuing a degree parallel to the study of military sciences for NCOs speak well of the path towards a more modern army. They also reinforce the army's efforts to exchange more with the civilian sphere and giving its members perspectives beyond military operations.

Regarding changes in organisational structure, while it is too early to see an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of command and control, the separation of operations, force-generation and planning areas is undoubtedly a step in that direction. In this sense, although there was no proper peacetime or interwar period, this study shows that a decline in the hostilities prompted and allowed officers to reflect on their organisation and envision how to adapt to the changing environment and an ambiguous future. As officers interviewed for this research coincided, for the first time in decades of war, the army leaders had the chance to carry out an institutional revision beyond operational adjustments. In this sense, they continued waging war while preparing both for a possible armistice and future missions.

Besides leading to a division of tasks at the higher command level, the structure reform encompassed new strategic deployment forces and modular brigades to allow for agility in response to emerging threats, tactical units enabling combined arms and joint operations with international forces, and a shift towards a system of military forts and cantonments over the territory that should enable a more permanent presence in the territory. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the combined-arms unit in Fort Buenavista, in La Guajira, has progressed in training, joint exercises and non-kinetic actions. Its role in border control and deterrence concerning the Colombo-Venezuelan frontier in the northern region is also relevant,

although capabilities are still to be developed to fulfil this task in case of border tensions escalating.

The broader range of roles and missions adopted is also worth assessing. Projecting the land force as a multi-mission army, fit for all purposes in war and peacetime, is at the centre of the reforms. This scope of tasks includes enhancing the EJC's role in comprehensive action, where its members not only participate in non-kinetic actions and socio-economic projects in rural areas but also serve to identify and coordinate the civilian services available or necessary to improve the population's livelihood. With such a projection, the army seeks to assume a development-related and human security approach to its domestic role.

Although in principle a laudable mission, it deserves a couple of cautionary comments. The army's knowledge of the field and logistic capabilities can certainly contribute to civilian state programmes in stabilisation efforts. For instance, the engineers' command has supported infrastructure projects in the country's hinterlands for decades. Nevertheless, there is a risk that the military component prevails while other agencies fail to assume their responsibility, as has occurred in past experiences.

Additionally, without sustained civilian leadership and clarity of the objectives of such programmes, these efforts can easily fall into psychological operations or human intelligence, as Chapter 7 pointed out. Such a warning is not tantamount to saying the army must do without actions beyond combat for irregular warfare. Nevertheless, the peril lies in confusing the latter tactics with the necessary state response to structural, politically-rooted issues, besides the possible backfiring of such actions if the population, including children, end up being instrumentalised amid hostilities by the state forces. Finally, without the necessary political and financial commitment, these programmes tend to augment unfulfilled promises and mistrust among the civilian population vis-à-vis the state.

The objective of purportedly exporting peace and stability should also be assessed against the local reality. Indeed, preparing service members for peacekeeping, stabilisation and crisis-management missions abroad can be a positive path to incorporate high training standards, including improvement of human rights and democratic values in the military corps. However, translating this objective into concrete action will largely depend on the evolution of the domestic security environment. The corresponding investment to allow training and deployment is also a requisite to honour such pledges. Otherwise, the risk is not only to affect

the country's international credibility but also to deliver an army contemplating all types of engagement but lacking the capabilities to fulfil these new roles. All this with the undesirable potential of neglecting core missions that are still paramount for security.

Before discussing the results of this study on the backdrop of theories of institutionalism and strategic studies, it is worth commenting on the impact of emulating benchmarks for transformation and reforming after international standards. These, too, can have seemingly positive repercussions on military modernisation but should not deviate the attention from important technical and political debates about the transformation of security forces. The tendency to procure more technology-based capabilities parallel to reducing recruitment and downsize personnel helps illustrate this point. Although not overtly discussed, some high-ranking officers have been interested in pursuing this modernisation path during the past decade. Through exchanges and events with peers in other countries that have undergone this type of transformation, EJC leaders and civilian defence officials see an opportunity in adopting this transition model from a personnel-intensive force to more emphasis on equipment and technology.

Nevertheless, this modernisation trend –as is the case of all reform paths– is not necessarily functional to all strategic objectives and depends on what the theatre demands. In the Colombian case, technology and equipment streamlining played a significant role in military superiority over the insurgents in the 2000s. However, this does not replace territorial control, which, with the topographic and threats' conditions of the country, still requires a strong troop presence. Moreover, as previously mentioned, budgetary constraints pose severe limits to the necessary investments in procurement and maintenance that it would entail. In this sense, the specific local way of implementing military transformation and modernisation should go along with a broader debate and civilian leadership to adjust goals to strategic needs.

A final remark on the adoption of international standards required by cooperation partners must be made. Doubtlessly, raising transparency in military organisations, professionalisation, and other principles based upon worldwide leading organisations are desirable goals. The case of vetting introduced by foreign military aid donors illustrates this. Indeed, such measures have worked in the past in Colombia, as Chapter 3 recalled when explaining how the US Congress played a role in Bogota's response to counter human rights abuses in the military in the late 2000s.

Notwithstanding the positive potential of military cooperation in improving formal guidelines by which armed forces operate, the perils of excessively internationally-driven modernisation and control should not be overlooked. The most obvious of these risks is creating a dynamic of incentives by which international vetting has more weight than local civilian actors in exerting pressure and oversight. On an anecdotal note in this sense, during an academic event in Colombia in 2002, a civilian expert and former diplomat affirmed that the country's civilian control over the military sat in Washington. Furthermore, the adoption of international standards in a manner of quality seal or proof of a high level of a democratic, transparent military sector can be instrumentalised to downplay other measures still necessary to consolidate these same goals.

<p align="center">***</p>

After these observations on the content of the EJC reforms, the second part of this concluding chapter will focus on the case study findings regarding explanations of military change and based on the integrative framework developed in Chapter 2. These observations hold close relation with the three partial hypotheses and analytical dimensions and are organised around three core issues that guided the research: the graduality of change and how (un)certainty influences institutional continuity or disruption; the role of power in change and stability; and a salient strategic ambiguity that leads to legitimacy-seeking goals.

The graduality of change and the role of (un)certainty in institutional continuity and reforms

As previously mentioned, the army's decision to carry out a doctrinal and structural reform seemed puzzling in a context where irregular threats have not ceased and the top brass had a leading role in designing and implementing these adjustments. To some extent, the Colombian land force took a risk in choosing new models during a highly volatile period and ongoing warfare. What led the officers that championed the reforms to change horses in midstream?

In line with the propositions introduced in the analytical part, the first partial hypothesis predicted that *changes in the security and political environment affected the balance of power for the military and, by leading to uncertainty, triggered an institutional change*. Consequently, Chapter 5 showed that the sources of this military change had been progressively emerging in the years previous to the strategic review that led to the army reforms, particularly those related to professionalisation

and a shift towards capabilities-based planning. However, issues related to the operational and political context accelerated and motivated the adjustments revealed in 2015.

Indeed, steps towards reforms were already under way at the beginning of the Santos administration, as endogenous processes in the army's institutional context. For instance, the exponential growth that the land force experienced in the 2000s had left a significantly robust military apparatus that difficulted command and control, especially in a highly vertical structure that concentrated all tasks on the high command level. This shortcoming, which Borrero (2006) denominated the Colombian military's "growing pains", was one of the initially identified needs for structural reform.

Additionally, the decade in which the army gained military superiority was not exempt from "friction in war" –the term that officers borrowed from Clausewitz to label the emerging scandals mentioned in Chapter 3. The cases of extrajudicial killings had severely impacted the army's image at home and abroad, stressing the need for better operational law standards, personnel training and oversight. However, as Chapters 5 and 6 showed, they also raised the feeling among the officer corps that their adversaries were resorting to political and legal means to undermine their legitimacy.

Another example is the identified need to enhance professionalisation. Before the administration changed, as Santos was minister of defence, the MDN had launched an education reform to improve training and allow better career chances within the force and for service members that did not continue in the military and thus needed integration into the civilian job market. Additionally, the EJC had already begun to include capability-based planning in response to its cooperation partners' expectations and in view of a plausible scenario where the guerrilla would either mutate or cease to be the main threat. Within this perspective, personnel education and doctrine received more attention as a key capability for the land force.

However, exogenous factors exacerbated these developments, prompting actors to accelerate change and design specific reforms. The most visible of these shifts, as Chapter 5 argued, was the new policy emphasis and approach towards security. Not only did the new administration acknowledge the existence of an internal armed conflict to include and repair victims' rights, but it also issued a development plan in which social and economic goals were at the same level as advancing in public order matters. This deviation from the previous

presidency –which denied the conflict and reduced it to a terrorist threat and located security at the top priority of all other policy objectives– was followed by legal decisions to enable a peace process, the announcement of a negotiation with the guerrilla, and the development of the dialogues and their potential consequences for the military.

Local and foreign financial sources also experienced a variation. Plummeting oil prices heavily impacted the national economy, the government shifted to an austerity policy, and the extraordinary taxes that had bolstered military capabilities in the last decades were subject to possible reallocation to meet social welfare and infrastructure goals. Additionally, the US, the EJC's traditional cooperation partner, changed the type and scope of military aid with the Andean country.

Indeed, previous scholarship dealing with the object of this study assumed the peace process as a trigger for the reforms. The application of a broader framework encompassing alternative variables allowed for a more comprehensive account of the process and the interplay of interests that led to it. In this respect, the study confirms that military change does not necessarily stem from an abrupt, sole factor: cumulative, staggering steps can also lead to reforms where innovation joins –or even serves to– continuity at different levels. This finding stresses the relevance of considering multiple variables and analytical dimensions, as will be further stressed in this final chapter. Additionally, the research approach here applied builds a case for embedding the study of military change in the political and institutional conditions at the domestic level.

Central to the hypothesis that guided this work, it is worth recalling the role of certainty and its absence regarding institutional arrangements and military change. As the theoretical propositions in Chapter 2 suggested, institutions provide actors with a certain degree of predictability as to what to expect in terms of roles, resources and decision-making outcomes. This feature is what explains continuity and change aversion in a social and political system. Embedded in this context and being a highly bureaucratic organisation, the military is likewise expected to avoid, in principle, modifications that impact its guidelines and structures.

Nevertheless, environmental uncertainty can trigger reforms if actors decide to innovate in order to mitigate or counter the impact of institutional instability. Indeed, when an organisation's status quo is at stake, concerned actors may not only choose to resist undesirable changes but also mobilise to reestablish balance or minimise the detrimental effects of

uncertainty through alternative arrangements. These dynamics behind institutional change and continuity were witnessed throughout the analysis, as the following lines will recapitulate.

First, the strategic review committees that led to the studied reforms acknowledged the volatility of the security environment that the army faced. In this assessment, the army identified plausible scenarios that included a demobilisation of the FARC. Indeed, in the years before and during the period under study, there was a significant drop in the intensity and scale of the armed confrontation in Colombia. The main threat's capabilities had been curtailed. However, the guerrilla's rapid adaptability was evident, resulting in an upturn in its actions after years of steady decay. It was during this army's evaluation exercise that the EJC command decided to rearrange its strategic stance to counter the FARC's so-called rebirth plan and consider far-reaching reforms for the future.

As Chapter 6 argued, the government's revelation of a peace process with the insurgent group confirmed this scenario and raised concerns over eventual unfavourable outcomes for the military stemming from the negotiating table. Rumours and demands from the rebels suggested that the delegations in Havana would reform the armed forces, reducing their resources and size, and changing military doctrine. Moreover, issues related to transitional justice had potentially disadvantageous consequences for those who had long fought the insurgents, who now were receiving amnesty. Finally, to the view of active and retired service members, the prevailing historical memory narrative depicted them as criminals and harnessed their reputation in the present and vis-à-vis future generations.

Notwithstanding, as previously mentioned, the EJC already experienced pressures beyond the development of the peace talks with their longstanding adversary, which meant operational incertitude and instability for their status quo. Criminal gangs were on the rise and, although initially were mainly a police-force target, their irregular tactics, arms and scope of action demanded a military response. These and the existing guerrilla groups found a rearguard in neighbouring countries and an ideal path for drug-trafficking corridors.

Additionally, the increasing size of the army corps implied budgetary constraints due to personnel expenses and social and economic benefits for retired members. The need for a more efficient structure joined fiscal issues amidst an unfavourable macro-economic situation, the decay in additional resources and a changing political agenda. Furthermore, according to public opinion polls, the armed forces' social acceptance and popularity were no longer as high as in

the previous years. Overall, the army's institutional and operational future was uncertain, and its interests were jeopardised, particularly regarding resources and social legitimacy.

In summary, chapters 5 and 6 depicted how rising incertitude in the threats' environment and the army's institutional context generated the initial drive to resist negative consequences of externally-led change but was at the same time the motivation to accommodate and mitigate these negative impacts for the military status quo. Furthermore, civilian and military decision-makers selected blueprints for change based on the belief that these would help them counter ambiguity, as Chapter 7 detailed. The following section summarises how did actors react to the increasing uncertainty.

Before moving forward with these concluding remarks, it is worth stressing that the peace process with the FARC between 2012 and 2016 was not the scenario where the EJC reforms were discussed, nor did it cause the military reform. However, the plausibility of an armistice and the changing institutional and strategic context that it entailed for the army did influence the decision to adapt. Paradoxically, while insisting that these changes had nothing to do with the Havana dialogues, the army leaders decided to announce the reforms when the peace talks were approaching an end, hence giving the impression of being a political decision. Overall, the increasing probability of the principal threat's demobilisation was doubtlessly one of the primary sources of uncertainty that accelerated these changes. Yet, it was only one among many that combined and belonged to the army's macro-institutional context.

The role of power in stability and change: interests and trade-offs between actors

The analytical stance of this case study emphasised the impact that institutions have in allocating material and symbolic resources in a social and political system. From this follows that power is a central category to understanding institutional stability and change. For one thing, frameworks that guide actors, their roles and interaction within organisations are likely to prevail when those benefited by them have enough influence to impose their interests. If emerging institutions or a shifting environment challenges their resources and prerogatives, they will oppose such reforms and mobilise to safeguard their interests. Likewise, when potentially benefitted by a new arrangement, actors with enough leverage are likely to favour reforms. In this sense, preserving or altering institutions entails tensions and bargaining amongst those concerned.

Such propositions are crucial to understanding military change in general and the decision-making process in the studied case in particular. Not only does an army possess significant material and ideational resources, especially in a country that has endured internal armed conflict for decades, but it is also embedded in a broader context that features civil-military relations. In this respect, innovations in fighting organisations do not happen in a vacuum, and the interface between politicians and the armed corps is pivotal to its study. In Colombia, this also entails considering that the governing elite has traditionally delegated the management of public order issues to the top brass, resulting in a conditional subordination of the armed corps in exchange for leeway and non-interference in their decisions.

For the object of this research, this interplay is essential to the exchange of interests and how this shaped the reforms as suggested the second partial hypothesis by which *uncertainty led actors to resist changes adverse to the military and then introduce reforms to preserve the status quo*. When delving into the actors' rationale, Chapter 6 advanced the argument that civilian and military leaders were concerned with preserving the interests relevant to the army, which led them to resolve the rising ambiguity in favour of the latter. First, the one central goal of the Santos administration was to achieve a peace accord with the FARC. In consequence, the president invested his political capital in this objective and was willing to make concessions to the process' stakeholders, including the military. The latter, in turn, exerted direct and indirect resistance –in the form of opposition, criticism and pressure through active, retired members and opinion-makers close to the sector– to prevent disadvantageous conditions.

Although the peace process was not the only source of uncertainty for the EJC during that time, it became the focus of apprehensions and resistance from active and former officers. Chapter 6 provided evidence on the expressed fears, concerns, and critique by the military sector regarding their institutional conditions and symbolic place in the Colombian society. Government delegates in Havana and the executive in Bogotá insisted that military issues were a red line and, by no means, part of the peace talks. However, this did not stop fears in the ranks and the perception of risks stemming from the negotiation for the land force's status and prerogatives. For one thing, they feared that their budget, size, and roles would be reduced. Additionally, the development of judicial decisions and the construction of historical memory gave them insights into what consequences could they face in a potential post-conflict scenario.

Moreover, the military corps saw the negotiation with the FARC as a part of the "combination of all forms of struggle". Indeed, while some active and former officers stressed

the government's "good intentions", they also expressed their scepticism towards the process. The fact that the guerrilla leaders kept demanding a profound reform of the security forces further reinforced this perception. Meanwhile, justice tribunals in Bogota convicted former officers for human rights violations, and the government was negotiating amnesty and political prerogatives for the insurgents, which severely impacted military morale. Publications by the official centre for historical memory that included state forces as one of the perpetrators in emblematic cases of the armed conflict augmented concerns over how they were portrayed. Overall, in reaction to the increasingly uncertain environment that Chapter 5 analysed, the members of the army and retirees perceived that the ongoing process could substantially affect their material resources, but they also felt that their honour, reputation and role in the society and political system were being tarnished.

As Chapter 6 demonstrated, in reaction to these apprehensions, and recognising the army as a key stakeholder of the peace process and an important pressure group in the political system, the civilian executive resorted to a series of compensation strategies. By attending to their interests, displaying support and granting autonomy in those areas where the army could adapt to the changing environment, the government attempted to gain the military's backing for its political goals. Indeed, the president was adamant about praising the army, showing approval and admiration for service members. Additionally, by equating the peace accord with a military victory and often affirming that a peace accord was the triumph of the armed forces, Santos tried to enhance military morale and increase support from the ranks.

Besides this logic of appreciation, evidence shows that the executive tried to appease the army's concerns by attending to their material and symbolic interests. In events with service members and public declarations, the president portrayed the hypothetical post-conflict missions of the public force as a brighter and better future "instead of going to the jungle for three months chasing guerrilleros". Additionally, the civilian leaders of the defence sector insisted on how new missions would entail upheaving the army's institutional conditions while repeating that "the military forces remain untouched". The government also yielded to the sector's pressure by including a special provision for command responsibility in the transitional justice agreement. Finally, the executive paved the way and granted autonomy to implement the reforms that, as Chapter 7 analysed, responded to the need to protect and mitigate unfavourable effects on material and ideational needs.

In turn, the army top-brass aligned with the government's narrative and, thus, its spokespeople affirmed that "peace is our victory", "the soldier is who most yearns for peace" or portrayed themselves as "men of war who want to be architects of peace". In sum, the land force leaders depicted the organisation as being ready for both war and peace-related roles. Throughout the studied period, active and retired members displayed fierce opposition to changes detrimental to the army's interests. However, active officers adopted the official narrative, showing support for the government's goals in exchange for preserving their institutional conditions.

In this sense, the service members and the civilian executive were keen on safeguarding the military's status quo. Nevertheless, while this was the final objective for the army leaders, it was an intermediate motive for the head of the executive. By reducing resistance and winning leverage for the process from an actor with significant influence and importance for its success, Santos sought to favour the ultimate objective of reaching a peace accord with the guerrilla.

This interplay of interests and narrative alignment on behalf of protecting the EJC's status quo results problematic since the army reforms got entangled in the polarised political debate around the peace process. Consequently, instead of maintaining neutrality as the top brass professed, the military change got politicised. Additionally, those topics of which the government and the high-ranking officers constantly affirmed were redlines in the peace dialogues ended up being taboo issues in the public agenda, excluding the possibility of a necessary discussion, among others, with the participation of the congress.

For instance, no broad political debate took place on the necessary resources to face emerging threats in view of budgetary pressures, macro-economic instability and growing needs. Moreover, the profound structure of civil-military relations remained untouched, showing how change can preserve interests and power relations in a political system. In this sense, within the same reform process, change agents might act as status quo actors. Finally, as the next section elaborates, the case also highlights a dissonance in strategic terms that results from this interaction pattern between civilian leaders and armed forces in the country.

Strategic ambiguity, existential needs and legitimacy-seeking goals

Following the third partial hypothesis, the last chapter of this dissertation explored how pressures and constraints on the army's material and ideational resources shaped the actors'

choice of reforms. The specific mechanisms underpinning this explanation stem from the propositions of isomorphic organisational change presented in Chapter 2. Although sometimes intertwined at the empirical level, it was possible to trace and confirm two broad causalities that explain the outcome of the reform. First, under circumstances in which the military organisation's resources are jeopardised, it will likely *incorporate standards expected by organisations upon which it depends and following the expectations of the society in which it operates.* Second, *when facing strategic ambiguity, reforms will emulate organisations perceived as successful and appropriate.*

Indeed, Chapter 7 explained how the formal and informal pressures from the Colombian army's effective and potential financing sources –added to the social and political expectations given a possible post-conflict scenario– led the EJC to adopt standards and roles to expand military cooperation. The land force largely depends on the national budget, mainly appropriated for personnel and operational expenses. However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, assistance, training, and bolstering equipment were enabled by extraordinary local taxes and military assistance from the US.

Encompassing inland roles beyond combat was, therefore, a means to emphasise the army's relevance for domestic missions even if the irregular threats' scenario would change after a massive demobilisation of the largest guerrilla group. Army commanders portraying the force as a "great war and services machine" that "supports the country's development" stems from this purpose. A communication campaign under the name of "multi-mission heroes" accompanied these efforts to underscore the existential relevance of the ground force. Even if some of the tasks are not totally novel, such as the military engagement in engineering and infrastructure, there was a clear intention of underscoring the EJC's suitability for non-combat, civilian-related roles.

Additionally, the expectations and priorities of the army's longstanding hemispheric partner, the US, and the potential of new cooperation horizons through NATO's global partnership platform significantly influenced the EJC reforms, particularly concerning interoperability and possible missions abroad. As Chapter 7 elaborated, some of the central doctrine and structure parameters that the Colombian army used as a blueprint for the reforms stemmed from requirements to further cooperation with its main international ally. Indeed, in the uncertain environment that Chapter 5 addressed, the aim of enabling additional forms of assistance with the US land branch led to enhancing joint operations and conforming to

standards to engage, for instance, in triangular cooperation with other countries in counterterrorism and drug-interdiction.

Furthermore, seeking alternative sources of military cooperation, in which SOUTHCOM units provided decisive assistance, the path towards a global NATO partnership required the inclusion of some of this organisation's principles and codes for interoperability. The military industry was also involved in these standardisation efforts regarding potential new business opportunities. Additionally, service members and civilian officials put forward this collaboration as positive for the army's reputation, stressing how the agreement enhanced the EJC's positive image abroad. In sum, the relationship with the transatlantic Alliance responded to the objective of countering or minimising the disadvantageous impacts of a changing environment to the EJC's material and ideational interests.

The analytical framework that guided this study also observed that a combination of ambiguous goals and strategic uncertainty influence the choice of military models from partner organisations deemed successful and that enhance legitimacy. Certainly, following the literature on military change, the case identified that the reforms were motivated by legitimacy-seeking goals parallel to addressing existential concerns. In this respect, the doctrine and structure reform included armoured warfare principles for conventional conflict, for which the Colombian land force approached the Chilean counterpart for advice. "We are catching up with modern warfare", claimed one of the officers that championed the reforms.

As Chapter 7 thoroughly explained, officers in Bogota saw the Chilean road of military transformation as a paragon of excellence, especially in view of how that country's army preserved resources after the transition to democracy, bolstering capabilities and standing out in the region. Although the two organisations have a long tradition of military cooperation and exchange, the Chilean army's status as a transformation ideal in the first decade of the twenty-first century determined the choice of its doctrinal and force-structure aspects. Consequently, the decision to emulate the southern partner confirms that, under strategic ambiguity and environmental uncertainty, military organisations are likely to imitate those peers they considered successful.

Indeed, the EJC incorporating NATO and Chilean army blueprints fall into the legitimacy-seeking category. However, the additional tasks included in the Colombian army's missions related to peacekeeping and comprehensive action also relate to symbolic objectives

and not only existential needs. For instance, the EJC incorporated international missions linked to peacekeeping and stabilisation missions in its doctrinal, educational, and structural parameters. Additionally, non-kinetic actions that the Colombian armed forces have denominated *acción integral* were given a central role as a response to material and symbolic interests.

Regarding the latter, comprehensive action serves to project the army as a relevant organisation for eventual post-conflict reconstruction, development, and other non-combat tasks in regions where state presence has been sparse. Moreover, service members depict it as a way to respond to the political and lawfare actions they identify as part of the adversary's strategy. Finally, this aligns with the population-centric focus of counterinsurgency in the last decades, primarily championed by the US and other NATO forces in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Indeed, although the Colombian land force has certainly accumulated more experience in irregular warfare than its North American peer, civilian and military representatives of Bogota's defence sector emphasised that the US army endorsed and inspired their new strategic approach.

The findings presented in the last chapter also allow for a reflection on the strategic ambiguity in which these reforms occurred and its implications for warfighting. As previously mentioned, emulation is likely to occur under circumstances where the organisation's goals are unclear and when the relationship between means and ends is uncertain. In the case of the EJC, this can be witnessed in two parallel ways. On the one hand, there was a significant ambiguity in the conduction of warfare during the decade in which the reforms unfolded. On the other, the army's role in the government's strategic goals was contentious.

With regard to warfighting, it is worth recalling the assessment of the strategic moment at the time, detailed in Chapter 6. After a decade of improvement in the state forces' capabilities, the guerrilla was significantly diminished but not defeated. Around the change of administration, the idea of annihilating the enemy was seen as less plausible and, therefore, the tactical goal of weakening the opponent's will as a means to a negotiated peace gained momentum. In short, from envisioning the strategic aim of achieving peace through military victory, the balance tilted towards a peace accord in which the FARC would yield and negotiate from a disadvantageous position.

Although the whole military corps did not necessarily support this shift in strategic and tactic goals, the top brass embraced the new administration's narrative and designed war plans to deliver the mentioned objective. However, there was a high degree of dissonance in the particular way in which the sectors' leaders framed the negotiation. Issues related to grievances that represented common ground between the government and the rebels were included in the dialogues' agenda to gain leverage, which raised concerns of too high concessions.

Indeed, executive officials claimed that, even though they did not justify the illegal group's actions to any extent, these political and socio-economic problems were to be tackled to consolidate democracy and build peace in Colombia. To the military, the government should definitely respond to these needs but not in accordance with the guerrilla. In their view, insurgents should disarm and demobilise, not demand structural changes in the country. Moreover, from their perspective, the fact that the former combatants would receive amnesty and political rights was at odds with any vision of fair treatment for those who defended the state.

Additionally, as Chapter 6 evidenced, while the head of the executive excessively emphasised the new peace-related goals for the EJC and a bright future with missions abroad as a sort of El Dorado, leaders of the land force expressed concerns about the volatile and unfavourable domestic threats context. The country already witnessed how splinter groups from previous demobilisation processes turned into the next generation of criminal gangs. At the same time, some of the guerrilla fronts with the most substantial participation in drug-trafficking were likely to form new illegal alliances, as in fact happened with dissident factions of the FARC.

Besides the domestic security challenges, the fact that irregular groups used bordering territories, like Venezuela, as safe rearguard complicated the operational scenario. This happened on the backdrop of a highly ambiguous bilateral relation with the neighbouring country: while Caracas remained permissive and supportive towards the guerrilla, the new government adopted a more conciliatory approach to this regime and included it as a guarantor of the peace talks. Therefore, while aligning with the official narrative, the army focused on preparing for a possible post-conflict while still fighting against a complex combination of domestic and transnational threats.

In addition to this dissonance in the conduction of warfare, the army's role in the government's political objectives reinforced the uncertain relationship between means and ends for the organisation. Parallel to the negotiations, the EJC executed war plans to debilitate the enemy and prevent the guerrilla leaders from using the peace talks as a platform for political and tactical strengthening. Indeed, the government demanded that the land force broke the FARC's will on the battlefield and thus ensured a favourable position for the dialogues. However, the nature of hostilities led more than once to attacks and ambushes, which, in turn, froze the peace talks and endangered the process. The changing legal framework on the backdrop of the ongoing confrontation reinforced this impasse.

Overall, it is possible to witness ambiguous goals in which combat-related tasks are simultaneously expected to break the enemy's will and favour a negotiated armistice, but also fight irregular threats to avert a more complex security scenario, including splinter groups from the peace talks' counterpart. At the same time, bringing the insurgency to the negotiating table to improve the threats environment, while the government incorporated former rebels into peacebuilding efforts, impacted the army's status quo. As the following section will further elaborate, this goes beyond the consequences for the tactical level and has implications for the strategic conduction of war in Colombia.

Two Steps Forward, One Backwards? Implications for Future Research and Practitioners

A frequent comment by senior army officers in Colombia that refer to the social conditions of places in which the armed forces fight illegal armed groups is that "the only face of the state that the citizen knows is that of a soldier". Far from being an isolated observation from the barracks, civilians in and out of the public sector have also long expressed the worrisome fact that, in regions where population density is low and, therefore, voters seem to be less relevant to the political centre, the military is left to its own devices in dealing not only with public order but also with any kind of social demand.

Throughout the decades of counterinsurgency in the Andean country, this has led to reinforcing the image of an army that is present, but with blurred roles on the backdrop of warfighting and trying to provide the civilian state's services with already scarce resources for its core mission. Besides leading to inertia in this kind of state response, such actions put the

population in an even more dangerous position vis-à-vis actors in arms. Moreover, these dynamics further erode legitimacy, affecting governance and the consolidation of the rule of law. The last section of this concluding chapter aims to highlight some relevant implications of the research in terms of the study of military change and for actors that influence decisions on this matter in Colombia.

First, although the results of this work cannot be generalised to all cases of military adaptation, it leaves some key insights about the value of the analytical approach adopted for the subject. Both for the study of military reforms and institutional change, it is worth considering *disruptive or revolutionary innovations without ignoring gradually unfolding adaptation*. Encompassing multiple interacting variables is useful to this purpose since it allows to delve into possible external shocks that trigger change, as well as dynamics internal to the institutional framework that lead to progressive steps towards major reforms. This, in turn, can shed light on effective drivers of change or undesirable consequences of reforms.

The peculiarities of the Colombian case justified a single case study, which allowed to delve into the complexity of the process. Nevertheless, comparative research could eventually benefit from the insights of the three interconnected analytical dimensions. Focusing solely on organisational dynamics would neglect the power relations and exchange of interests that were essential for the process of change. Likewise, an exclusive view on the political and security environment would be incomplete without delving into how actors framed these developments to make decisions to adapt. Indeed, this research built a case for the role of ideas in military change only insofar as they serve to the interests driving reforms and, in doing so, shape their content.

The process-tracing method proved particularly useful to unveiling the course of decision-making. Conducting research on military change with this procedure and the adopted analytical perspective can reveal parallel unfolding and cumulative developments. Certainly, the chronological occurrence of events is an important basis for proving causation. Nevertheless, confirming the influence of factors as the hypothesis predicted is even more important to trace these relations. For this purpose, the views and expressed rationale by relevant actors are pivotal: it is *not only the coexistence of the variables but their relation as unveiled by the reasoning underpinning decisions* that provides conclusive evidence.

Additionally, based on the abovementioned standpoint, the research showed that *pro-change leaders can, at the same time, behave as status-quo agents.* This should be considered when adopting analytical viewpoints that assume only civilian-led reforms or that change occurs in a unidirectional way. In this case, the reforms ended up favouring continuity at a more profound institutional level to preserve civilian and military interests.

A final implication for future scholarship stems from the evidence that, in a country long affected by a domestic armed conflict, there is a relatively *favourable coalescence of interests between politicians in power and military leaders,* which hinders democratic civilian control and management of the security sector. The significant degree of autonomy that the army enjoyed for the reforms and the civilian sector's failure to assume leadership of military issues are certainly worth delving into in this and other cases where security threats long coexist with such a civil-military configuration. Following the literature, one could assume that the persistence of public order issues has hindered steps towards consolidating civilian control. However, one could also inquire whether the internal turmoil is beneficial to other prerogatives and, therefore, assuming a leading role in strategic matters poses fewer incentives to the governing elite.

Additional to the connotation of the research findings for future academic endeavours, there are important practical lessons related to how the reforms unfolded, some of which have been previously outlined. Consequently, the following remarks aim at drawing implications for practitioners in counterinsurgency strategy, the political management of the security sector, and consolidating the democratic civilian control over the military in Colombia.

First, after giving personnel and doctrine a central role, the army should continue its efforts to update and adapt its operational and training guidelines. For this purpose, officers in charge of doctrine and education should further emphasise a *dialogue between the foreign referents inspiring innovation and lessons learned from the field.* After all, the combat experience of this Andean ground force is substantially valuable and should prevail when reviewing its principles. In this respect, the EJC force generation component should emphasise the development and support of local military intellectual production. Such efforts must be accompanied with a critical posture vis-à-vis the own experience and that of international peers in similar operational contexts to recognise when not to replicate flawed approaches.

Likewise, on behalf of transparency and modernisation, the land force must continue publishing its doctrinal reference documents and other non-sensitive guidelines with open access to general citizenship. When promoting socialisation events, the EJC should primarily engage specialised civilian organisations and go beyond dialogues from which the outcome is unclear[197]. A *targeted exchange between both sectors* would help to diminish, at least to some extent, the atmosphere of mutual distrust that has prevailed throughout decades of internal armed conflict.

Moreover, *civilians leading reconciliation and historical memory initiatives should include the military sector as a crucial agent* and *service members should accordingly be prepared to participate* in these collective efforts. Creating separate versions of the conflict's history and trying to position them will only further polarise the Colombian society. In fact, at the time of writing, the country begins to witness public versions of armed conflict participants in the truth commission that emerged from the most recent peace accord. This has shown that the still disputed reconstruction of the accounts of the conflict continues to raise sensitivities but that the contribution of diverse actors that take responsibility –beyond the perpetrators-victims dichotomy– is a positive step towards humanising decades of atrocities.

In terms of roles and missions, military engagement in domestic stabilisation is certainly vital to consolidating security and governance, provided that this is done under necessary civilian leadership. Nevertheless, the *army should beware of expanding too much its core mission* on behalf of development-related tasks. This could potentially lead, in the long term, to lose focus on fundamental capabilities and goals.

Defence and security leaders in Bogota should *buttress the reform's intention to advance in countering and deterring international or transnational threats* without ignoring that the inland scenario still requires a coordinated action between police and military forces. Indeed, the evolution of the theatre requires overcoming the counterinsurgency approach. However, it is still necessary to counter the several illegal armed actors and criminal organisation that operate as irregular groups. In this sense, even after the demobilisation of the main guerrilla group, the issue of rural security is still unattended and demands a joint approach between police and military, in cooperation with justice entities (see McDermontt & Llorente, 2014).

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[197] For instance, as Chapter 4 described, this happened with the regional dialogues where the reforms were socialised in 2016-2017.

The growth in drug-trafficking networks that surpass national borders stresses this necessity, as the confluence of illegal actors at the Colombo-Venezuelan border has shown. In fact, the beginning of 2021 has witnessed how these groups not only dispute and coalesce for control but also engage in combat with the neighbouring country's armed forces. On the backdrop of non-existent diplomatic relations between Bogota and Caracas, international actors with interests in the unstable development of these reinforcing conflicts, and multiple irregular armed groups at both sides of the border, this is likely to be a growing and long-lasting challenge for the EJC.

Just as with doctrinal matters, it is paramount to *continue adapting the army's structure to the battlefield and organisational demands*. In this sense, adopting new deployment models should respond to the warfare development in the theatre. Therefore, the army should activate or further restructure units to favour flexibility or stability depending on operational requirements, not in response to international benchmarks of what a modern army should be.

Beyond the endeavours led by the armed forces and the role of military diplomacy, the burden of necessary decisions to provide an adequate response to security threats rests first and foremost with the civilian sector in Bogota. As the previous lines advanced, there are good reasons to break the pact that has led to decades of civil-military symbiosis in Colombia, not only in the interest of governors but also service members. This research contends that the military autonomy in the country, in the form of conditional subordination, is counterproductive for the sector's management and the effectiveness of any security strategy.

Consequently, enhancing civilian control, management and oversight over the armed forces will surely find resistance. However, it should be understood and exercised as beneficial for the country's security in general and for military members in particular, who frequently claim being left hung out to dry by their political superiors. Specific measures in this direction should *decentralise the control hub from the presidential role* and enhance other executive as well as legislative functions.

Indeed, the last decades have witnessed a growing presence of civilian officials in the MDN. Besides fostering this trend, it is also necessary to *enhance personnel expertise and building more leadership capacity* in policy and strategic matters. Above all, the ministry should overcome its managerial role –often reflected on the profile of ministers–, that acts more like a good-cop when other state agencies conduct oversight or an acritical supporter when the security forces

are being questioned by the public. The creation of a high-level security advisor for the president since the Santos administration, a role that continues until now, should be reconsidered. Besides reaffirming the impression that the technical expertise for security and defence does not lie with the ministry, this dispersion of functions has led in the past to a detrimental competition within the executive.

Stating that political leaders must boost the legislative role to enhance democratic control over the armed forces in Colombia does not entail further legal provisions on the matter. As Chapter 3 portrayed, the 1991 Constitution already made important progress in this respect. However, the congress and the political parties as organisations that represent constituents of a broad ideological spectrum have not yet fulfilled their role in civilian-led control and management of the security sector. Here, too, *improving conditions so that representatives can monitor, debate and formulate defence and security policy* is necessary. In this respect, providing and increasing expertise through education and assistance for party and parliamentary members is crucial. The War College courses open to public servants and non-governmental organisations are a useful yet not sufficient tool for this purpose.

Moreover, *congress committees tasked with defence and security matters should exclusively focus on the matter* –not as a by-product of other topics– and *be equipped with the necessary mechanisms* to access and deal with national security-sensitive information. This is fundamental to enable better oversight and democratic debate of military and non-military security issues. With few exceptions, these representatives usually fail to address and conduct founded discussions on topics such as long-term planning for military capabilities. Additionally, congress members must contribute to raising transparency and awareness among the public on the relevance of military investments. To begin with, a more open and informed debate should help overcoming the deceptive and often instrumentalised "money for war versus peace" dichotomy. Overall, a *more knowledgeable congressional and party involvement* in security matters would be more helpful to service members, and the country in general, than the "we must close ranks around our public force" narrative to which most Colombian politicians resort to whenever a scandal surfaces.

The studied reforms showed progress in military professionalisation, which will also need sustained political and financial backing. While the army is still a largely conscript force, both civilian and military leaders have formulated new educational agendas to enhance specialisation and career opportunities. Notwithstanding, as Chapter 3 addressed, while the 2017 recruitment reform attempted to improve some conditions for recruits, the system still

reproduces socio-economic inequalities, and the training limitations pose severe challenges in strategic and ethical terms. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the envisioned large scope of roles for the future would entail better training conditions, which, in turn, require long-term commitments.

Usually neglected and condemned, the *political education of service members* that enhances their role as citizens beyond and coexistent with necessary military subordination is a topic in which both civilians and the public force in Colombia should join efforts. Since the mid-twentieth century, the objective of maintaining the armed forces away from political affairs has been equated to pretending absolute political neutrality of service members. In practice, this has meant removing the military from the political sphere but also a detachment of both parts that, in excess, is detrimental to the state's goal of providing security. Indeed, the armed forces must refrain from engaging in proselytism and political participation, remaining subordinated to their governors, but this does not mean that their members as individuals or the military issue are apolitical.

Paradoxically, this has sometimes led to exactly the opposite intention since high-ranking members tend to reproduce the government's rhetoric in an attempt to show loyalty as proof of neutrality. As the analysis showed, the consequence of this arrangement is precisely that military matters become a target of political polarisation[198]. Every now and then, the discussion about the political rights of service members rises in Bogota, mostly in terms of revoking the vote-ban of those in uniform. Such an issue should be broadly debated by informed congress members and discussed with representatives of the civil society. Moreover, *building democratic citizenship among the ranks* should be a priority before and parallel to measures to allow political participation.

As a consequence of the described deficient civilian engagement and leadership in security matters, the country still lacks a state-level guiding strategy for a security policy that transcends presidential tenures. Although here, too, Bogota has progressed in formulating ministerial guidelines, until now, what the successive governments call a security and defence policy is a compendium of tactical-level objectives and means, but not what a grand-strategy

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[198] An example of how the doctrinal and structural reform got caught into the highly polarised national political context is that right-wing party leaders accused the army of yielding to the FARC's intentions to change military doctrine, while the left criticises it as a continuation of an anti-communist narrative upon US influence.

would require. Without this clarity, whatever methods are chosen cannot effectively be implemented if even the goals are ambiguous.

In this respect, the Colombian executive still needs to *lead an exercise to elaborate and approve a security and defence policy*, which must be *discussed with and approved by relevant political and social actors*. Including political parties in congress and civil society organisations with expertise in the area could improve the democratic character of such a document, as a state-level basic consensus around security and defence. It should also help in understanding that these are not matters reserved to the military and allowing at least for a mid-term vision that is beyond administration changes.

On the specific matter of irregular warfare, the limitations have been on implementation rather than in policy design. As the findings in this work underscored, both politicians and service members have long recognised that an exclusive military response to irregular groups is bound to end in failure. At least during the past two decades, the technical formulation of programmes to consolidate security gains by increasing social and economic state services has shown this intention. Notwithstanding, the practical execution has been far from successful, especially because, in the absence of required resources and political leadership, the armed component has been given a central role, even for civilian or coordination tasks.

Consequently, it should be worth *shifting to a civilian-led stabilisation strategy* on the ground, and not only from Bogota. This does not entail lessening public force presence for territorial control but ensuring that the responsible state agencies provide for and coordinate political and socio-economic development projects. It also demands time and state engagement with resources that are evidently scarce. However, continuing with interventions in prioritised zones or municipalities without articulating them to national efforts, thus underestimating the dimension of the problem, has not proven successful.

Unlike other theatres that feature irregular threats, beyond numerous shortcomings, Colombia has reasonably functioning political and economic structures, relatively stable democratic institutions, and local public and private organisations highly engaged in overcoming development challenges. At the same time, Bogota's security sector and its organisations offer a solid basis for local ownership. In this context, international cooperation and defence diplomacy do not start from scratch when accompanying post-conflict

reconstruction and stabilisation efforts that occur parallel to a persisting confrontation with irregular threats.

Certainly, countries and multilateral organisations interested in fostering regional stability and security with the Colombian defence sector can and should *focus on assisting local frameworks and capacities that improve management and control* over the security forces. The beforementioned measures for civilian capacity building and military education illustrate some areas where international cooperation can offer support and guidance. Additionally, when endorsing security-sector relevant reforms or institutional adjustments, *foreign aid donors and partners should use external vetting and oversight mechanisms*. In this respect, follow-up in implementation should raise cautions when agreed standards and commitments, for instance, in transparency and human rights, are not being honoured. Overall, the goals reached through technical assistance must be buttressed through political pressure that holds leaders accountable and thus builds local responsibility.

As should be clear from the preceding lines, the reforms that the Colombian army conducted parallel to the recent peace process encompass necessary steps towards professionalisation and providing an institutional framework for roles and missions that an eventual post-conflict phase demands. Their further implementation and adjustment will unfold in a challenging context in which the rising complexity of threats and resource shortage are likely to hamper the pace of change. Nevertheless, beyond the responsibility that the military organisation has in the conduction of warfare, the civilian leadership in managing the sector and its strategic steering is paramount to consolidating these steps towards peace and stability.

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Appendix: List of Interviewees

Alejo Vargas	Professor, Universidad Nacional de Colombia	19th November 2018
Andrés Molano	Scholar in Foreign Policy and Security Affairs	7th November 2018
Armando Borrero	Scholar in Security Affairs and Professor, War College	15th November 2018
BG Javier Cruz Ricci	Director, War College	22nd May 2018
BG Óscar Tobar Soler	Director, Comprehensive Legal Department, EJC	8th November 2018
Capt. Hernando García	Naval Attaché, Colombian Emb. in Berlin	20th September 2019
Col. Fernando Farfán	Research Deputy Director, War College	23rd November 2018
Col. Pedro J. Rojas	Director, Doctrine Centre, EJC	22nd May 2018, 28th May 2020
Dora Montero	Investigative Journalist	14th November 2018
Eduardo Pastrana	Scholar in Foreign Policy and Security Affairs	9th November 2018
Eduardo Pizarro	Scholar in Security Affairs	19th November 2018
Erik Rojas	Expert, Alternative Development and Strategic Communication	3rd July 2020
Francisco Leal	Scholar in Security Affairs	20th November 2018
Gerson Arias	Former Advisor to the OACP	9th November 2018
Henry Cancelado	Scholar in Security Affairs and Professor, War College	7th November 2018
Jean Carlo Mejía	Scholar in Military Justice and Professor, War College	20th November 2018
Juan Pablo Gómez	Expert, Security Affairs and Military Intelligence	8th November 2018, 15th May 2020
Juan Pablo Hinestrosa	Scholar in International Law and Professor Universidad Externado de Colombia	19th November 2018
Juanita Goebertus	Former Advisor to the OACP	16th November 2018
Juanita León	Investigative Journalist	13th November 2018
Juanita Vélez	Investigative Journalist	7th November 2018
Lt. Col. Christian Rauwolf	Defence Attaché, German Embassy in Bogota	21st November 2018
Míkel Ibarra	Consultant, EJC Transformation and Planning	18th May 2020
ret. BG Fabricio Cabrera	Director, CAEM and CIDENAL, War College	23rd November 2018
ret. BG Rafael Colón	Former Director, Integrated Action Against Anti-Personnel Mines	1st July 2020
ret. BG William Pérez Laiseca	Director, GREAT	9th November 2018
ret. MG Eduardo Herrera B.	Former Advisor to the MDN and peace dialogues	14th November 2018
ret. MG Juan Pablo Amaya	Former Commander, Joint Command South East, CGFM	23rd October 2020
Rocío Pachón	Advisor, Presidential Advisor for Security	20th May 2020