



START

Demystifying Gray Zone Conflict: A Typology of Conflict Dyads and Instruments of Power in Colombia, 2002- present

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About This Report

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About START

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Executive Summary

This case study elucidates the dynamics of Gray Zone conflict with particular emphasis on the role of non-state actors. It does so through a detailed examination of the most recent phase (2002-present) of Colombia's internal conflict (1964-present). More specifically, this research analyzes conflict dyads occurring between different types of conflict actors. It further examines which types of dyads leverage which instruments of power and to what extent activities are Gray versus Black or White across each type of dyad and instrument of power. Consequently, this research will help practitioners determine which instruments of power warrant careful consideration in Gray Zone conflicts depending on the types of actors engaged in conflict. This investigation will also aid Special Operations Forces in determining which types of belligerents may make effective partners and which instruments of power they should train and equip these partners to implement.

This research substantially bounds the scope of what needs to be considered by state forces operating in these environments. Specifically, the analysis shows that aggregating by actor-type is effective and that actors of the same type (e.g. leftist insurgents) behave very similarly. Moreover, it reduces the number of instruments of power that need to be considered for each type of conflict dyad. Even though five of the six types of conflict dyads entail multiple instruments of power, and the most complex dyad (government versus insurgents) involves six of the seven instruments, the average type of conflict dyad includes just 2.5 of the seven instruments.

Furthermore, this analysis demonstrates that Colombia's conflict is Gray. While, Gray Zone dynamics also include White and Black activities, five (Government versus Insurgents, Government versus BACRIM Syndicates, Insurgents versus Insurgents, Insurgents versus Paramilitaries, and Insurgents versus BACRIM Syndicates) of the six types of dyads involve Gray activities. Gray Zone activities are especially prominent in four (Government versus Insurgents, Insurgents versus Insurgents, Insurgents versus Paramilitaries, and Insurgents versus BACRIM Syndicates) of these cases. The only dyad (Government versus Paramilitaries) that did not include Gray activities was extremely short-lived and involved the paramilitaries quickly acquiescing to government pressure to demobilize.

While the approach adopted by this research entails myriad advantages, readers should be cautioned that Gray Zone conflicts are extremely complex. Practitioners ought to consider how an intervention against one type of conflict actor might affect other types of belligerents. Only by doing so will they avoid negative externalities such as inadvertently strengthening other combatants. Moreover, commanders must recognize that the successful use of certain tactics by the state or their proxies within one instrument of power (e.g. military), can have profound effects on the efficacy of their opponent's use of other instruments (e.g. informational). Finally, this case provides numerous examples of government forces collaborating with various, violent non-state actors. While Special Operations Forces are especially well positioned to do so, this requires extensive situational awareness at the micro-level. Alliances are fleeting and the willingness to cooperate with Special Operations Forces varies both over space and time.

Introduction

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism (START) has been tasked with providing support to the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) Gray Zone project undertaken as a Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) initiative. This research initiative's starting point is the following working definition of Gray Zones:

*"The Gray Zone is a conceptual space between peace and war, occurring when actors purposefully use multiple instruments of power to achieve political-security objectives with activities that are ambiguous or cloud attribution and exceed the threshold of ordinary competition, yet fall below the level of large-scale direct military conflict, and threaten US and allied interests by challenging, undermining, or violating international customs, norms, or laws."*¹

This case study elucidates the dynamics of Gray Zone conflict and how coercion and threat assessment operate in light of Gray activities, especially with respect to non-state actors (NSAs). It does so through a detailed examination of the most recent phase (2002-present) of Colombia's internal conflict (1964-present). Given the diverse array of different types of belligerents involved – including government forces, pro-government paramilitaries, leftist insurgencies and transnational organized crime – Colombia offers an ideal lens for examining the dynamics of Gray Zone conflict and especially the role of NSAs. By exploring how the types of Gray Zone activities used and the instruments of power leveraged vary across different types of dyadic configurations of conflict actors, this case study will decrease uncertainty about conflicts occurring in the Gray Zone. Moreover, examining different types of dyads occurring within the same conflict is especially instructive. This is the case as a host of potentially relevant factors including conflict-specific background conditions are naturally held constant.

This case study proceeds in four sections. The first provides a descriptive summary and general background information on the conflict. The subsequent section describes the data and methodology employed. The third section is devoted to analyzing Gray Zone dynamics occurring in each type of conflict dyad. Focus is also directed to understanding which instruments of power are leveraged by the different types of pairs of belligerents and used for Gray Zone activities. The final section concludes.

Conflict Summary

The 1948 assassination of populist politician and presidential front-runner, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán Ayala, touched-off a decade's long civil war known as The Violence (*La Violencia*).² The conflict was resolved with the implementation of a power-sharing agreement between Colombia's two dominant political

¹ Department of Defense Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment, "Gray Zone Effort Update," September 2016.

² Jon-Paul N. Maddaloni, "An Analysis of the FARC in Colombia: Breaking the Frame of FM 3-24" (Master's thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2009); "La Violencia Begins in Colombia: 1948," Gale *World History in Context*, accessed August 31, 2016, http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/whic/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?failOverType=&query=&prodId=WHIC&windowstate=normal&contentModules=&display-query=&mode=view&displayGroupName=Reference&limiter=&currPage=&disableHighlighting=false&displayGroups=&sortBy=&search_within_results=&p=WHIC&action=e&catId=&activityType=&scanId=&documentId=GALE%7CWLQXWN895912996&source=Bookmark&u=lawr16325&jsid=9e638c0d6f607dc24920f279e746373b.

parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives.³ The agreement, which effectively excluded the left from political power, gave rise to leftist insurgencies and eventually also rightist paramilitaries and organized criminal syndicates.⁴ The ensuing conflict continues to this day and has already claimed well over 250,000 lives and displaced millions more.⁵ The various non-state belligerents have, at times, collaborated against the Colombian state. However, these actors also have a long history of fighting each other.⁶ As regards the government, on myriad occasions it has engaged in peace negotiations with all of the violent NSAs that are involved in the conflict. At other times, it has targeted these groups militarily. Sometimes peace negotiations have even occurred absent a cease-fire agreement, and military action takes place concurrently.⁷ On occasion, the government (or at least elements within the government and security services) have aided paramilitary forces targeting other belligerents.⁸ Along the way, many of the armed groups began working with narco-traffickers and eventually pursued varying degrees of more direct, vertical integration into the narcotics trade. This development has provided the NSAs involved with immense profits, which has exacerbated the conflict.⁹ The insurgent-narco-trafficker nexus has also ensured massive amounts of U.S. military assistance for government security forces.¹⁰ While some of the

³ Ibid.; Danielle Renwick, "Colombia's Civil Conflict," *CFR Backgrounders*, August 25, 2016.

⁴ Maddaloni, "An Analysis of the FARC;" Renwick, "Colombia's Civil Conflict."

⁵ BBC, "Colombia Peace Deal: FARC to Announce Ceasefire on Sunday," August 28, 2016; Grupo de Memoria Histórica, *Basta ya: Colombia: Memorias de guerra y dignidad* (Bogota, Colombia, 2013); *The Guardian*, "Colombian Conflict has Killed 220,000 in 55 Years, Commission Finds," July 25, 2013.

⁶ See for example, Christopher Looft, "Arrests Highlight ELN-Rastrojos Alliance in Southwest Colombia," *InSight Crime* (January 27, 2012): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/arrests-highlight-eln-rastrojos-alliance-in-southwest-colombia/>; *InSight Crime*, "FARC Clash with Rastrojos in Cauca," (February 14, 2011): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/farc-clash-with-rastrojos-in-cauca>.

⁷ Adriaan Alsema, "Colombia Appoints Ex-ELN Members to Mediate Resumption of Peace Talks," *Colombia Reports*, July 27, 2016, <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-appoints-ex-eln-members-mediate-resumption-peace-talks/>; Aldo Civico, "Negotiating Peace in Colombia: A Missed Opportunity?," *NACLA*: <https://nacla.org/news/negotiating-peace-colombia-missed-opportunity>; Arturo Herrera Castano and Shane L. Tarrant, "Are the Guerrillas Gone? A Historical Political Economy and Social Analysis of the Rise and Demise of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas* (FARC), 1964-2010" (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2009); Camilo González Posso, "Negotiations with the FARC: 1982-2002," *Accord* 14 (2004): 46-8; David L. DeAtley, "Illicit Drug Funding: The Surprising Systemic Similarities between the FARC and the Taliban" (Master's thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2010); Diogo Monteiro Dario, "Peace Talks between the FARC and Santos Government in Colombia," *BRICS Policy Center, Policy Brief* 4, no. 2 (March 2014): 8; James Bargent, "The FARC 1964-2002: From Ragged Rebellion to Military Machine," *InSight Crime* (May 26, 2014): <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/the-farc-1964-2002-from-ragged-rebellion-to-military-machine>; Kyra Gurney, "Colombia Announces Peace Talks with ELN Guerrillas," *InSight Crime* (June 11, 2015): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/colombia-announces-peace-talks-with-eln-guerrillas/>; Ricardo Vargas Meza, "The FARC, the War and the Crisis of the State," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 31, no. 5 (1998): 24-5; Robert D. Ramsey III, *From El Billar to Operations Fenix and Jaque: The Colombian Security Force Experience, 1998-2008* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009), 29; "United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, last updated August 28, 2015, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/85>; Vivian Sequera, "Santos Becomes Colombia's 59th President," *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 7, 2010.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, "Colombia: The Ties That Bind: Colombia and Military-Paramilitary Links," (February 2000): <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/colombia/>.

⁹ Bargent, "The FARC;" DeAtley, "Illicit Drug Funding;" *InSight Crime*, "FARC Clash with Rastrojos;" Looft, "Arrests Highlight ELN-Rastrojos Alliance;" "National Liberation Army (Colombia)," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, last updated August 17, 2015, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/87#note13>; Stephanie Hanson, "Colombia's Right-Wing Paramilitaries and Splinter Groups," *Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder* (January 11, 2008): <http://www.cfr.org/colombia/colombias-right-wing-paramilitaries-splinter-groups/p15239>.

¹⁰ "Military and Police Aid (Programs)," *Security Assistance Monitor*, http://securityassistance.org/latin-america-and-caribbean/data/program/military/Colombia/2002/2017/is_all/Latin%20America%20and%20the%20Caribbean.

groups have demobilized, relationships between the remaining armed groups in Colombia continue to be fluid. This section endeavors to provide readers with relevant background on key violent NSAs including insurgents, paramilitaries and organized criminal syndicates.

The Insurgents

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

For over half a century, Colombia has been home to six different Marxist-Leninist insurgencies. The largest group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*; FARC) emerged in 1964 and remains active today (though a peace process is currently underway). It was founded by Pedro Antonio Marín Marín (better known by his nom de guerre, Manuel Marulanda Vélez) and Luis Alberto Morantes Jaimes (Jacobo Arenas) in response to the aforementioned power-sharing agreement, which not only excluded the left from political participation but also ushered in a new wave of political violence targeting them. Renewed government repression focused on legal, but leftist political opposition groups in the early 1980s substantially enhanced support for the FARC. In 1982, expanding involvement in the drug trade further aided in converting the group into a potent military force.¹¹

This prompted two successive peace processes. The first occurred during the government of Belisario Betancur Cuartas (1982–1986) and quickly produced an accord. However, the Congress rejected the agreement and once Betancur left office, his successor, Virgilio Barco Vargas (1986–1990), almost immediately began militarily targeting the FARC.¹² A second round of negotiations took place between 1991 and 1992 during the administration of César Augusto Gaviria Trujillo (1990–1994), but these talks quickly broke down.¹³ FARC's lethality and reach further expanded in 1993 after it moved in to fill the void left by demise of Colombia's two large drug cartels, the Medellín and Cali cartels.¹⁴ A series of spectacular attacks convinced newly elected President Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998–2002) to pursue another round of peace negotiations.¹⁵ However, this peace process was derailed in early 2002, when the FARC hijacked a commercial airliner in order to kidnap one of its passengers, Senator Jorge Eduardo Géchem Turbay.¹⁶

President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002–2010) succeeded Pastrana and the failed peace process. He oversaw the professionalization of the Colombian armed forces and national police (with extensive U.S. support) and went on the offensive against the FARC. Increased pressure from the Colombian government coincided with a surge in the strength of the paramilitaries (prior to their demobilization in 2006). As a

¹¹ Bargent, "The FARC;" DeAtley, "Illicit Drug Funding."

¹² González, "Negotiations with the FARC," 46-8; Meza, "The FARC," 24-5.

¹³ Herrera and Tarrant, "Are the Guerrillas Gone?," 48.

¹⁴ Bargent, "The FARC;" DeAtley, "Illicit Drug Funding."

¹⁵ Ramsey, *From El Billar*, 29.

¹⁶ Ibid.; Adriana Palacio and Félix Quintero, "Secuestro aéreo, puntillazo final," *El Tiempo*, February 21, 2002, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1308661>.

result, FARC's force strength decreased by nearly half (from 17,000¹⁷ insurgents in 2002 to less than 9,000 in 2008).¹⁸ Encouraged by Juan Manuel Santos Calderón's (2010–present) inaugural address, which announced his interest in restarting peace talks and cognizant of their declining force strength, international legitimacy and mounting risks of fragmentation, the FARC opted to pursue peace talks once again.¹⁹ After years of negotiations, a cease-fire agreement was signed on August 29, 2016 and a final deal was signed on September 26, 2016. However the deal required ratification through plebiscite, which failed on October 2, 2016. Government and FARC negotiators have returned to the drawing board.²⁰ While it is impossible to predict the outcome of these negotiations, the government, political opposition and FARC are all strongly incentivized to reach a revised accord. Moreover, the opposition has been moderate in their demands for reforms.²¹

The National Liberation Army

Colombia's second largest insurgency is the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*; ELN). ELN, which blends Marxist-Leninism with Liberation Theology, was initially founded by Fabio Vasquez Castaño. Its subsequent leaders have also included a multitude of priests. Like the FARC, ELN first emerged in 1964 and was motivated by their political exclusion following The Violence and the subsequent power-sharing agreement. ELN's initial growth was extremely limited. Indeed, by 1973, it was estimated that the guerrilla force numbered just 200 fighters, approximately 135 of which were killed that year in an engagement with the Colombian military, Operation Anori.²² Following this near fatal blow, the ELN opted to engage in kidnapping, extortion and bank robbery. These activities netted the organization hundreds of millions of dollars a year. Moreover, by the 1990s, the group also branched out into narco-trafficking.²³ As a result, their numbers swelled to approximately 5,000 fighters at their height in the mid-1990s. However, beginning in the late-1990s, increased military and paramilitary activities targeting the ELN again turned the tides.²⁴

Given their military decline in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the ELN pursued peace negotiations with the Uribe government in 2005. However, both sides' distrust of one another and Venezuelan meddling caused the process to break down.²⁵ Prior to these talks, the ELN also negotiated with the Betancur government and participated as part of the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Board (*Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar*; CGSB) with the FARC during the negotiations that took place under the Gaviria

¹⁷ Other sources suggest that the decrease was even more dramatic. One report notes FARC's force strength as being just under 21,000 combatants in 2002 (Universidad Militar Nueva Granada, Instituto de Estudios Geoestratégicos y Asuntos Políticos, "Evaluación de la política de defensa y seguridad democrática, 2002 – 2010," September 1, 2010).

¹⁸ Ramsey, *From El Billar*, chapter 3.

¹⁹ Monteiro, "Peace Talks," 8; Sequera, "Santos Becomes Colombia's 59th President."

²⁰ Helen Murphy and Julia Symmes Cobb, "Colombia's Peace Deal in Limbo after Shock Referendum," *Reuters*, October 3, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-peace-idUSKCN1230BH>.

²¹ Author's interview with Alfonso Aza (professor and Secretary of the Governing Board at Universidad de La Sabana in Colombia), October 18, 2016; Author's interview with Federico Hoyos (representative from Antioquia in the Colombian House of Representatives), October 24, 2016; Nick Miroff, "Colombia's Opposition Wants to Modify Peace Deal – With a Scalpel, Not a Hammer," *The Washington Post*, October 13, 2016.

²² *InSight Crime*, "ELN," <http://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/eln-profile>.

²³ "National Liberation Army (Colombia)," *Mapping Militant Organizations*.

²⁴ Zach Edling, "ELN," *Colombia Reports*, October 22, 2012, <http://colombiareports.com/eln/>.

²⁵ Civico, "Negotiating Peace in Colombia."

and Pastrana governments.²⁶ Most recently, the ELN began negotiations with the Santos government in 2014. However, these talks remained stalled until October 27, 2016, when the ELN agreed to cease kidnappings – a precondition of the Santos government – during the negotiations.²⁷

Other Insurgent Groups

Four other insurgent groups were previously active in Colombia. All four group demobilized prior to 2002 and as such, are not analyzed in this case study. The 19th of April Movement (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*; M-19), which emerged in 1974 and was the first to demobilize and form a licit political party in 1989; the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*; EPL), the Quintín Lame Armed Movement (*Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame*; MAQL) and the Workers Revolutionary Party of Colombia (*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores de Colombia*; PRT) all formed between 1967 and 1984 and demobilized in 1991.²⁸

Paramilitaries

Myriad disparate paramilitary groups emerged shortly after the insurgencies in the mid-1960s. Their genesis was in a law that authorized the formation of local self-defense groups. However, many of the newly formed paramilitary groups went well beyond self-defense. Some, such as the infamous Death to Kidnappers (*Muerte a Secuestradores*; MAS), were formed by cartel kingpins to take the fight to the guerillas. In doing so they were supported and armed by the Colombian military. MAS and other groups also used violence on behalf of wealthy cattle ranchers and foreign multinational corporations to suppress organized labor movements and to displace residents residing on valuable land.²⁹ In 1997, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*; AUC) was formed, unifying myriad disparate paramilitary forces. In addition to fighting the insurgents, the AUC became heavily involved in narco-trafficking, extortion and illegal bunkering of oil and gas. Despite this, Colombian security forces closely collaborated with the AUC. Indeed, among approximately 50 public officials implicated in the 2007 “parapolitics” scandal were a former foreign minister, governor, several congressmen and the heads of the national police and the army.³⁰ While the AUC demobilized in 2006 following a successful peace process, approximately 30 percent of the AUC failed to lay down their arms and have instead formed organized criminal syndicates to continue their involvement in illicit activities.³¹

²⁶ Gurney, “Colombia Announces Peace Talks.”

²⁷ Alsema, “Colombia Appoints Ex-ELN Members;” *BBC News*, “Colombia and ELN Rebels Announce Historic Peace Talks,” October 11, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37614809>.

²⁸ Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001), chapter 7.

²⁹ Hanson, “Colombia’s Right-Wing Paramilitaries;” Human Rights Watch, “Colombia’s Killer Networks: The Military – Paramilitary Partnership and the United States,” (New York, Washington, London, Brussels: Human Rights Watch, 1996), chapter 2.

³⁰ Hanson, “Colombia’s Right-Wing Paramilitaries.”

³¹ *InSight Crime*, “AUC,” <http://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/auc-profile>.

BACRIM

As indicated, the AUC's demobilization resulted in the emergence of 16³² organized criminal syndicates (*Bandas Criminales*; BACRIM). Unlike the AUC, the BACRIM are not interested in fighting leftist insurgents. Indeed, in 2006, the ELN and BACRIM syndicate, *Los Rastrojos*, began collaborating to produce and traffic cocaine and worked together to fight the FARC.³³ For their part FARC routinely sells coca base to another syndicate, *Los Urabeños*.³⁴ These relationships are mutually beneficial as BACRIM receive narcotics and protection from the insurgents, while the insurgents receive resources (often accepting weapons and ammunition in lieu of cash) from the traffickers.³⁵ Additionally, combining forces has at times enabled the relatively weaker ELN to ward off FARC's attempts at territorial encroachment.³⁶ Despite forming out of the remnants of the AUC, the BACRIM are not unified. The various syndicates routinely fight to control lucrative trafficking routes and cultivation spots. For example, in Bajo Cauca four groups (the *Paisas*, *Urabeños*, *Rastrojos* and *Aguilas Negras*) have been fighting for control.

Data and Methodology

This case study is the product of an open source investigation involving both primary and secondary sources. It also leverages insights from 13 months of recently completed field research in Colombia and Peru. Given that this research is at an early, inductive phase, the primary research tool employed is "thick description." Detailed descriptive analysis of this sort is ideal for developing complex, multidimensional concepts and theories.³⁷ Process tracing is also used. This approach also utilizes extensive description. It does so in order to analyze key events to enhance understanding of the precise causal process at play.³⁸ (Subsequent deliverables will build upon this enhanced understanding in order to allow for more rigorous testing utilizing quantitative approaches.)

As already indicated, the focus of this case study is on the most recent phase of Colombia's conflict, from 2002 to the present. Studying this period is ideal as it includes coverage of a wide variety of different types of conflict actors (government forces, insurgents, paramilitaries and BACRIM syndicates) employing multiple instruments of power. On a practical level, this period is especially well documented.

³² The 16 syndicates are *Aguilas Negras*, *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia*, *Banda Criminal de Uraba*, *Los Urabeños*, *Los Machos*, *Los Paisas*, *Renacer*, *Nueva Generación*, *Los Rastrojos*, *The Popular Revolutionary Anti-terrorist Army of Colombia (ERPAC)*, *Cordillera*, *Cacique Pipinta*, *grupo de Martin Llanos*, *Los Nevados*, and *La Oficina de Envigado*.

³³ Looft, "Arrests Highlight ELN-Rastrojos Alliance."

³⁴ *InSight Crime*, "FARC Clash with Rastrojos."

³⁵ *Ibid.*; Looft, "Arrests Highlight ELN-Rastrojos Alliance."

³⁶ *InSight Crime*, "FARC Clash with Rastrojos."

³⁷ Michael Coppedge, "Thickening Thin Concepts and Theories: Combining Large N and Small in Comparative Politics," *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 4 (July 1999); See also, Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 2 (April 1980).

³⁸ Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, 2005), chapter 10; David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 4 (2011); Peter A. Hall, "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research," in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, eds. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Analysis

This section explores how the types of Gray Zone activities used and the instruments of power leveraged vary across different types of dyadic configurations of conflict actors. By doing so, this research will help practitioners determine which instruments of power warrant careful consideration in Gray Zone conflicts depending on the types of actors engaged. For Special Operations Forces involved in these dynamics, this enhanced understanding may also help inform which types of belligerents would make effective partners and which instruments of power they should equip said partners to employ depending on the types of adversaries faced. This section proceeds by analyzing six distinct types of conflict dyads: government versus insurgents, government versus paramilitaries, government versus BACRIM syndicates, insurgents versus insurgents, insurgents versus paramilitaries and insurgents versus BACRIM syndicates. Each dyad type is examined with specific reference to the salient instruments of power: diplomatic, informational, military, economic, financial, intelligence and legal.

Government vs. Insurgents

Conflict between the government and the FARC and ELN occurs across six distinct instruments of power. This subsection proceeds by examining activities taking place in each of the pertinent instruments of power. Furthermore, it attempts to classify these activities as White, Gray or Black.

Diplomatic

Diplomatic efforts involving both the government and the insurgents (including both the FARC and ELN) can be subdivided into two distinct categories. The first type, peace negotiations occurring between the government and insurgents (and also involving foreign nations and international organizations, which hosts negotiations and act as guarantors of the processes), are an example of de-escalatory behavior. While conflict (Gray and/or Black Zone activity) is necessarily *a priori* to peace negotiations, governments normally negotiate with a wide array of NSAs (e.g., industry groups, labor unions). Consequently, these types of diplomatic efforts are best classified as occurring in the White Zone. Colombia has experienced a multitude of such negotiations. Three rounds of negotiations occurred between the government and the FARC and ELN (either acting independently or in coordination through the CGSB) prior to the period covered in this study. In addition, the ELN began negotiating with the Uribe government in 2005. In December, after three months of initial discussions in Colombia, the peace process officially began in Havana. By June 2007, a framework agreement calling for the suspension of all military activity by both belligerents had been drafted. The text also called upon the ELN to cease kidnappings, free hostages and collaborate with the government on demining. Both sides recognized the importance of including civil society organizations in the peace process. Unfortunately, due to distrust, the ELN refused to meet the government's demand that the ELN disarm and demobilize by moving into designated zones where the government would be able to identify and monitor the insurgents. Political meddling by Venezuelan President Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías was the last draw and the government backed away from the negotiating table.³⁹

³⁹ Civico, "Negotiating Peace in Colombia."

Subsequently, the FARC restarted peace negotiations with the Santos government.⁴⁰ A cease-fire agreement and then a final deal were signed but the plebiscite to ratify the accords failed. Government and FARC negotiators have returned to the drawing board. In its current form, the deal offers amnesty or reduced sentences to many ex-combatants and guarantees (through reserved seats in the legislature) that FARC will play a substantial role in Colombian democratic politics.⁴¹ As indicated, there is reason to be cautiously optimistic that a revised deal, which is slightly less generous to the FARC, can be reached.⁴² Finally, in 2014, the ELN began separate negotiations with the Santos government. At present, these talks are just resuming, after having been stalled, and a deal, if one can be reached, is at least a few years away.⁴³

The second class of diplomatic activities involves diplomatic engagement with foreign states that are (at least tangentially) involved in the conflict. For the Colombian government, this has largely involved security cooperation (e.g., training, equipping) with the United States and counter-narcotics (given that narco-trafficking is a major source of insurgent financing, these efforts are often also aimed at reducing insurgent resources) collaboration with numerous partners including the United States and the European Union (EU). Governments routinely engage in bi- and multi-lateral security and counter-narcotics cooperation. For the most part, these activities fall within the White Zone. However there are notable exceptions, such as diplomatic efforts intended to support combined covert action. On the other hand, diplomatic engagement by the insurgents aimed at securing international recognition and/or assistance is inherently Gray. At the core of all insurgent conflicts is a challenge to the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Endeavoring to achieve formal diplomatic recognition as a distinct entity, is merely another way for NSAs to challenge state legitimacy.

As regards the government, Uribe developed close relationships with the U.S. government. His carefully crafted rhetoric, recast the FARC and ELN as "terrorist groups" as opposed to belligerents with potentially legitimate political objectives. This not only denied the insurgents external legitimacy, it also enabled the government to reframe Colombia's conflict as part of the larger, "Global War on Terrorism."⁴⁴ This ensured ample U.S. support. Indeed, between 2002 and the present, Colombia received over \$8 billion in military and police assistance (including for counter-narcotics) from the United States alone.⁴⁵ (Strong bilateral relations also resulted in non-security related diplomatic successes during Uribe's tenure, including the negotiation and implementation of a free trade agreement.⁴⁶) Close bilateral

⁴⁰ Monteiro, "Peace Talks," 8; Sequera, "Santos Becomes Colombia's 59th President."

⁴¹ BBC, "Colombia Referendum: Voters Reject FARC Peace Deal," October 3, 2016: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37537252>.

⁴² Author's interview with Alfonso Aza; Author's interview with Federico Hoyos; Miroff, "Colombia's Opposition."

⁴³ Alsema, "Colombia Appoints Ex-ELN Members;" BBC News, "Colombia and ELN Rebels."

⁴⁴ González, "Negotiations with the FARC," 49-60.

⁴⁵ Author's calculations from *Security Assistance Monitor*.

⁴⁶ M. Angeles Villarreal, "The U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement: Background and Issues," CRS Report RL34470 (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, February 14, 2014).

relations also facilitated coordinated, covert action. This included a program, whereby the United States provided the Colombian military with precision guided munitions to target top insurgent leaders.⁴⁷

For the insurgents, international legitimacy remains important. Extensive evidence of foreign diplomatic contacts emerged when laptops and USB drives were recovered following the September 2010 raid that killed the FARC's foreign minister and second-in-command, Víctor Julio Suárez Rojas (also known as Jorge Briceño Suárez and as Mono Jojoy). Recovered emails document communications with government officials and political party leaders in Spain, Italy, Germany, Canada, Brazil, the United States, Nicaragua, Paraguay, El Salvador, Ecuador and Venezuela. Additionally, they note that far-left political parties in Italy and Germany offered to help get FARC removed from the EU's list of terrorist organizations. In addition to meeting with the FARC, Italian Communist Renewal Party members also provided them with funds. Nevertheless, most experts suggest that, with the exception of Venezuela, foreign support has boosted the FARC's stature but has not had a discernable effect on FARC's military capabilities.⁴⁸ Venezuela on the other hand provides the FARC with money, weapons and importantly cross-border sanctuary.⁴⁹ In addition, in 2008, Chávez proposed and pushed through Congress a motion that extended formal diplomatic recognition to both the FARC and ELN.⁵⁰

Informational

In addition to diplomacy, both sides have sought to use information engagement to their advantage. In general information campaigns are overt (though occasionally, the government has encoded secret messages to military and police hostages in radio broadcasts⁵¹) and do not attempt to incite violence. As such, most of these activities fall within the White Zone. In recent years, the Colombian military has engaged in a number of creative campaigns to encourage FARC combatants to demobilize. These campaigns typically leverage themes that resonate with a disproportionate share of Colombians, irrespective of their stance on and involvement in the ongoing conflict. For example, one campaign centered around family and Christmas. Specifically, the military planted lighted Christmas trees in areas with a strong guerrilla presence and disseminated baby photos of insurgent fighters with messages from their parents asking them to return home for Christmas. Other campaigns have involved floating soccer balls with messages of peace downriver to insurgent strongholds to highlight the near universal Colombian interest in the sport and airdropping seven million pacifiers with messages written to pregnant combatants encouraging them to demobilize.⁵²

⁴⁷ Dana Priest, "Covert Action in Colombia: U.S. Intelligence, GPS Bomb Kits Help Latin American Nation Cripple Rebel Forces," *The Washington Post*, December 21, 2013.

⁴⁸ *Global Security*, "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," last modified June 26, 2016, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/farc.htm>; Mike Ceaser, "Recovered Emails Detail the FARC's International Support," October 3, 2008, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/2742/recovered-emails-detail-the-farcs-international-support>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; Jose de Cordoba, "Chávez Lets Colombia Rebels Wield Power Inside Venezuela," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 25, 2008, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122721414603545331>.

⁵⁰ de Cordoba, "Chávez Lets Colombia Rebels Wield Power."

⁵¹ Jeff Maysh, "The Code: A Declassified and Unbelievable Hostage Rescue Story," *The Verge* <http://www.theverge.com/2015/1/7/7483235/the-code-colombian-army-morsecode-hostages>.

⁵² *Ibid.*; David Leveille, "Colombia's Government has a Christmas Message for FARC Rebels. Come Home," *Public Radio International*, December 16, 2013, <http://www.pri.org/stories/2013-12-16/colombias-government-has-christmas-message>

For their part, the insurgents have made especially thorough use of digital media. Both the FARC and ELN have regularly updated websites. The FARC's site (www.farc-epeace.org) is especially well curated and is available in five languages (Spanish, English, Portuguese, French and German). It includes detailed coverage of the Colombian peace process, official FARC communiqués, links to sympathetic news articles, background on the movement and regular blogs from nine members of FARC's top leadership. There are also links to sites with more specialized contents, such as the "FARC-EP women's website" and the opportunity to connect with the FARC on social media. Regular Twitter posts are clearly attributable to the FARC. The Twitter handles all contain "FARC," and posts use #InformativoInsurgente and #FARC. FARC also maintains a YouTube channel replete with regular news broadcasts and a SoundCloud account, where they post expertly produced music videos.⁵³ The ELN's website (www.eln-voces.com) is not quite as professional as the FARC's page and is only available in Spanish. Nevertheless, it still contains a wide range of content. This includes information about the peace process, updates and news articles from both the ELN and other sympathetic sources, a number of digitally published magazines, links to their own YouTube channel and an "Arts & Culture" section that includes poetry and particularly biting political caricatures.⁵⁴

Military

Militarily, both the government and the FARC have often employed large-scale, overt military operations that are best classified as occurring in the Black Zone. Given its relatively smaller size and more limited capabilities, the ELN has largely endeavored to avoid conventional battles. All three groups have also used less conventional tactics, where attribution is not always certain (sometimes due to explicit attempts to cloud attribution). These activities can be classified as occurring in the Gray Zone.

In 2003, the government began implementing Plan Patriot (*Plan Patriota*). This plan was the largest military campaign against the insurgents to date.⁵⁵ Uribe noted that the first phase alone called for 17,000 soldiers.⁵⁶ The plan prioritized offensive military operations targeting FARC camps and leadership. Typical operations began with detailed intelligence collection. This enabled precise aerial bombardment designed to weaken defenses and disorient fighters. Ground forces would then move in to capture or kill remaining insurgents and to collect documents and electronics, which might have intelligence value. Plan Patriot was followed by Sword of Honor (*Espada de Honor*). This plan built upon its predecessor by adding the elimination of FARC's 15 most important fronts as an objective. In order to

farc-rebels-come-home; Emily Steel, "The Ads Making Colombian Guerrillas Lonely This Christmas," *Financial Times*, December 12, 2013, <https://www.ft.com/content/3dc53856-4ddc-11e3-8fa5-00144feabdc0>.

⁵³ Casey Kahler, "How FARC Operates: FARC Online," *FARC This*, University of Southern California, last updated September 21, 2015, <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/farc-this/farc-online>; *FARC-EP International*, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, accessed September 27, 2016, <http://farc-epeace.org/>.

⁵⁴ *Portal Voces de Colombia*, Ejército de Liberación Nacional, accessed September 27, 2016, <http://www.eln-voces.com/>.

⁵⁵ *Council on Hemispheric Affairs*, "Plan Patriota: What \$700 Million in U.S. Cash Will and Will Not Buy You in Colombia," (April 20, 2006): <http://www.coha.org/plan-patriota-what-700-million-in-us-cash-will-and-will-not-buy-you-in-colombia/>.

⁵⁶ Harvey F. Kline, *Showing Teeth to the Dragons: State-building by Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Velez, 2002-2006* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 46; *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Yearbook 2005: Armaments, Disarmament, and International Security* (Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2005), 93.

meet its goals, the plan called for expanding Colombian security forces by 25,000 personnel. These activities resulted in thousands of captured or killed insurgents, including top FARC and ELN commanders.⁵⁷

However, the government's approach is not limited to overt military action. Extensive evidence has emerged that Colombian forces have worked closely with paramilitary groups such as the AUC. As already noted, dozens of senior political and military officials were implicated, when the "parapolitics" scandal broke in 2007.⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch has documented collaboration between the armed forces and paramilitary groups and notes that it has often included intelligence sharing, joint planning and daily coordination, as well as the provision of weapons and ammunition, helicopter-borne transportation and medical assistance.⁵⁹ By utilizing paramilitary proxy forces, the government is able to distance itself from certain counterinsurgency activities and thereby obscure attribution.

Like the government, the insurgents have also employed multiple strategies. FARC has proven adept at complex military operations. While it occurred shortly before the period being studied, the battle of El Billar warrants brief discussion as it highlights the FARC's conventional military competencies. At El Billar, a force of 600-800 FARC fighters laid ambush to the Colombian Army's elite 52nd Counter-guerrilla Battalion. The insurgents used a combination of carefully prepared fixed fighting positions and mobile tactics (including a successful envelopment). At the conclusion of five days of sustained fighting, and despite close air support provided by the Colombian Air Force, roughly 70 percent of the army battalion had been killed, wounded or captured. In the years to follow, the FARC routinely executed large-scale conventional operations, some involving more than 1,000 fighters.⁶⁰ However, by late 2008, the FARC realized they could not win in conventional military confrontations against the Colombian armed forces, which had benefited substantially from U.S. training and assistance, as well as internal reorganization during the Uribe presidency. As such, the FARC developed Plan Rebirth (*Plan Renacer*), which returned to FARC's early focus on hit-and-run tactics that avoided direct engagements with militarily superior forces. This plan prioritized the use of mines and improvised explosive devices, sniper teams and the reorganization of FARC fighters into small, mobile units.⁶¹ Given its smaller size, the ELN has endeavored to avoid direct military confrontation and instead utilizes kidnapping, extortion, bombings, assassinations and hijackings to maintain pressure on the government.⁶²

⁵⁷ *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Yearbook 2005*, 93.

⁵⁸ Hanson, "Colombia's Right-Wing Paramilitaries."

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Colombia."

⁶⁰ Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, chapter 4; Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2002), 18.

⁶¹ Colby Martin, "Colombia's New Counterinsurgency Plan," *STRATFOR*, March 29, 2012, <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/colombias-new-counterinsurgency-plan>; Luis Jaime Acosta, "Exclusiva-FARC lanzan Plan 'Renacer' y buscan oxígeno político," *Reuters*, February 17, 2009, <http://lta.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idLTASIE51G11Q20090217?sp=true>.

⁶² "National Liberation Army (Colombia)," *Mapping Militant Organizations*.

Economic

Both insurgent groups employ sabotage and extortion. Oil and gas pipelines represent a particularly attractive target as they are especially difficult to secure. This tactic not only enables the insurgents to extract “revolutionary taxes” (extortion) from multinational oil and gas corporations that they use to fund their activities, it also robs the government of much needed resources.⁶³ Energy exports amount to nearly 10 percent of GDP, and taxes on these resources contribute heavily to the government’s budget.⁶⁴ Moreover, insurgent targeting of energy infrastructure has forced the government to expend limited resources to protect critical infrastructure. Often, troops that would otherwise be used to protect key government targets and for offensive operations against the FARC and ELN, have been reassigned to secure crucial energy infrastructure. Indeed, after Emerald Energy shut down operations and other companies such as Occidental Petroleum Corporation threatened to follow suit if security did not improve in 2011 and 2012, the Colombian Ministry of National Defense created six new infrastructure protection battalions.⁶⁵ Highlighting the importance of energy infrastructure, which the Minister of Defense characterized as “the wealth of Colombians,” the new battalions were partially formed using units previously assigned to protecting the capitol.⁶⁶ Despite improvements in energy security, the Colombian Oil Association, estimated industry losses for roughly the first three quarters of 2014 as exceeding \$500 million.⁶⁷

Financial

Both the FARC and ELN have built up huge cash reserves, in order to ensure that they can sustain their fight against the government as needed. One (likely high) estimate suggests that the FARC could possess assets worth as much as \$10.5 billion.⁶⁸ Precise figures are more difficult to come by for the ELN; however they are numerically smaller, entered into narco-trafficking later and are less diversified in their illicit dealings. As such, it is almost certain that their financial assets are considerably less than those of the FARC.⁶⁹ Assisted by U.S. training and resources, the Colombian government established a Financial Information and Analysis Unit tasked with anti-money laundering activities. The unit focuses heavily on targeting the financing of insurgent organizations.⁷⁰ Despite the illicit sources of these funds, building up

⁶³ David Gagne, “Losses of \$500 Mn Show Guerrilla Impact on Colombia Oil Industry,” *InSight Crime* (August 21, 2014): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/colombia-oil-industry-500-mn-losses-guerrilla-attacks>.

⁶⁴ João Pedro Bumachar, “Oil Goes South,” *Breakingviews*, January 15, 2015, <http://www.breakingviews.com/features/guest-view-hard-to-spell-colombia-without-o-i-l/>.

⁶⁵ *Hydrocarbons Colombia*, “Creation of Six Battalions to Protect Oil and Energy Infrastructure,” March 25, 2012, <http://www.hydrocarbonscolombia.com/security-1/creation-of-six-battalions-to-protect-oil-and-energy-infrastructure>; Martin, “Colombia’s New Counterinsurgency Plan;” “National Liberation Army (Colombia),” *Mapping Militant Organizations*.

⁶⁶ *Hydrocarbons Colombia*, “Creation of Six Battalions.”

⁶⁷ Gagne, “Losses of \$500 Mn.”

⁶⁸ *The Economist*, “Unfunny Money,” April 16, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21697008-government-may-never-get-its-hands-guerrillas-ill-gotten-gains-unfunny-money>.

⁶⁹ David Gagne, “The Financial Pitfalls of Peace for Colombia’s ELN,” February 16, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/financial-pitfalls-peace-colombia-eln>.

⁷⁰ Michael L. Waggett, “The United States National Security Strategy for Colombia: Is Plan Colombia the Right Solution?” (thesis, National Defense University, National War College, 2004); Mimi Yagoub, “Money Laundering 2% of Colombia GDP,” *InSight Crime* (November 2, 2015): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/money-laundering-two-percent-of-colombia-gdp>.

cash reserves does not rise to the level of Gray Zone conflict. Similarly, anti-money laundering and asset forfeiture activities are normal activities carried out by many peacetime governments.

Intelligence

Intelligence efforts largely fall below the level of Gray Zone conflict. However, tactical intelligence efforts have undergirded military actions falling within both the Gray and Black Zones. As such, tactical intelligence collection efforts should not be classified into a particular Zone without regard for their associated military action.

The Colombian government has made considerable advances in improving its intelligence capacity. Notably, a nationwide intelligence computing system was established. In addition, regional intelligence fusion centers were created that combined intelligence from multiple source and across all six of Colombia's intelligence agencies. These centers then provided actionable reports to military units on the ground. Enhanced intelligence capacities have enabled the effective targeting of insurgent leaders.⁷¹ As already indicated, these activities are occurring in the White Zone.

While FARC has dedicated intelligence personnel, the organization has not proven adept at strategic or counterintelligence tasks. However, both FARC and ELN have excelled at tactical level intelligence collection, especially in support of pre-planned attacks on military forces, kidnappings and political assassinations.⁷² Tactical intelligence collection efforts by the insurgents typically occur in support of either Gray or Black Zone activities.

Dyad Summary

Conflict between the government and each of Colombia's two active insurgencies spans six instruments of power (diplomatic, informational, military, economic, financial and intelligence). In aggregate this class of dyads is best classified as Gray. Indeed, Gray Zone activities occur across four of the instruments of power (diplomatic, military, economic and intelligence) being utilized. It is however worth noting that consequential White Zone activities are also occurring. Black Zone activities are limited to the military instrument of power (and to tactical intelligence collection in support of Black Zone military engagements). Moreover, the relative frequency of Black Zone military activity has decreased since 2008.

Government vs. Paramilitaries

While other sections illustrate a long history of cooperation between the Colombian government and the AUC, this section is devoted to conflict between the two actors. Specifically, in the early 2000s and especially after Uribe's inauguration, government pressure against the AUC developed. This resulted in a successful peace process and their ultimate demobilization. The primary instrument of power in this dyad was diplomatic. Nevertheless military instruments were also relevant. Legal action (prosecutions

⁷¹ Barnett S. Koven and Cynthia McClintock, "The Evolution of Peru's Shining Path and the New Security Priorities in the Hemisphere," in *Reconceptualizing Security in the Americas in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Bruce M. Bagley, Hanna Kassab, and Jonathan Rosen (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 203; Matthew M. Aid, *Intel Wars: The Secret History of the Fight against Terror* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), 210; Priest, "Covert Action in Colombia."

⁷² John A. Gentry and David E. Spencer, "Colombia's FARC: A Portrait of Insurgent Intelligence," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 4 (2010).

and extraditions) also occurred. However, this largely took place following the AUC's demobilization. As such, it is not discussed herein. Additionally, while the paramilitaries were primarily financed through illicit activities, their illegal business ventures were only a means of raising funds. Unlike the insurgents, they did not target critical infrastructure in order to attack the government economically. As such, their purely criminal activity falling within the economic instrument of power is not discussed herein.

Diplomatic

Extensive U.S. support to the Colombian military provided the government with the capacity to confront the insurgents on their own. Not only did U.S. assistance reduce the government's reliance on the paramilitaries, it also contributed pressure for the government to distance itself from the AUC, which had been designated a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. government in September 2001. For their part, the AUC sensed that Uribe was sympathetic to their cause and that the time was right for a favorable, negotiated peace.⁷³ As already indicated, peace negotiations are de-escalatory in nature and governments routinely conduct negotiations of various sorts with NSAs. As such, these negotiations are best classified as White.

Negotiations began after the AUC responded to the Uribe administrations announcement that they would be open to negotiations by declaring a unilateral ceasefire in 2002.⁷⁴ The following year, formal negotiations began. Despite numerous glaring violations of the ceasefire agreement, including a 2003 cross-border raid into Panama that resulted in the torture and murder of four indigenous leaders and the forcible displacement of 600 more, the talks continued.⁷⁵ Two key inducements ensured that a final agreement was reached: first demobilized AUC fighters who committed serious crimes would spend no more than eight years in prison, and second, no AUC members would face extradition.⁷⁶ The latter concession was especially important for the AUC leader who began the talks, Carlos Castaño Gil, and his successor, who continued the negotiations, Salvatore Mancuso Gómez (also known as *el Mono* Mancuso, Santander Lozada and *Triple Cero*). Both Castaño and Mancuso were under indictment for smuggling 17 tons of cocaine into the United States and Europe.⁷⁷ (In 2015, Mancuso – who despite the agreement was extradited to the United States – was sentenced to 15 years in a prison for drug trafficking in a U.S. federal court.⁷⁸) The accords were signed in 2006, and ultimately more than 30,000 paramilitary fighters demobilized. However, many refused to demobilize and reconstituted themselves as BACRIM.⁷⁹

⁷³ Cynthia J. Arnson, *The Peace Process in Colombia with the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia-AUC* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2005); Douglas Porch and María José Rasmussen, "Demobilization of Paramilitaries in Colombia: Transformation or Transition?," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31, no. 6 (2008); Ryan E. Holroyd, "The Twilight of the Colombian Paramilitary," *Past Imperfect* 27 (2011).

⁷⁴ Holroyd, "The Twilight of the Colombian Paramilitary."

⁷⁵ "United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia," *Mapping Militant Organizations*.

⁷⁶ Anastasia Moloney, "In Colombia, Success of AUC Peace Process Depends on Reconciliation," *World Politics Review* (September 20, 2006).

⁷⁷ Arnson, *The Peace Process in Colombia*, 3.

⁷⁸ Steven Dudley, "After US Sentencing, Colombia's Top Paramilitary Braces for Next Legal Battle," *InSight Crime* (July 6, 2015): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/colombia-paramilitary-salvatore-mancuso-us-sentencing>.

⁷⁹ *InSight Crime*, "AUC."

Military

Military conflict between the government and the AUC was rather one-sided. The AUC always maintained at least a nominal allegiance to the state and avoided attacking government forces.⁸⁰ Prior to the late 1990s or early 2000s, government forces also did not attack the paramilitaries. The tempo of military action against the paramilitaries rose considerably with Uribe's inauguration. A number of military actions, involving hundreds of Colombian troops were carried out. These operations often killed or captured dozens of fighters and recovered an even more considerable amount of arms and ammunition.⁸¹ While military operations against the AUC did not occur for a long enough time to have a decisive effect on the organization's martial capacity, it did clearly signal the government's resolve. Indeed one paramilitary leader noted that "there are not antecedents in our history of the intense military action by the state against our organization."⁸² Given the overt (if anything, the Colombian government attempted to increase the visibility of these actions in response to mounting U.S. pressure to take action against the AUC), conventional nature of these operations, government military action against the AUC is best characterized as occurring in the Black Zone.⁸³

Dyad Summary

While the government's collaboration with the AUC in order to conduct unconventional operations against the FARC entailing limited government exposure is clearly Gray, the ultimate conflict between the government and the AUC is not. This dyad mainly involved the diplomatic and military instruments of power. Relations between the two actors are best characterized as White in the former instrument and Black in the latter.

Government vs. BACRIM Syndicates

Some, including two former paramilitary commanders, have argued that the peace process and subsequent demobilization of the AUC was a failure. Those who share this position highlight the fact that many paramilitary leaders simply rearmed and reengaged in conflict.⁸⁴ Today 16 BACRIM organizations exist and have retained some of the leadership, tactics and weapons of the original 16 AUC units they emerged from.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, it is a mistake to treat BACRIM as merely a continuation of the AUC. While the AUC was motivated by political aims, the BACRIM are motivated purely by greed. Specifically, the AUC endeavored to rid the country of leftist insurgents and sympathizers. Given this goal, it refrained from attacking the government. BACRIM have not only collaborated with both the FARC and ELN in order to

⁸⁰ Arnson, *The Peace Process in Colombia*, 66; Holroyd, "The Twilight of the Colombian Paramilitary," 17.

⁸¹ *Ejército Nacional*, accessed August 31, 2016, <https://www.ejercito.mil.co/?idcategoria=73213>; *The New York Times*, "Colombian Government Troops Kill 20 Rebel Fighters," August 10, 2002, <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/auc/metro-block.htm>.

⁸² *El Tiempo*, "Comunicado de las AUC," September 28, 2004, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1586783>.

⁸³ *Ibid.*; Arnson, *The Peace Process in Colombia*; Holroyd, "The Twilight of the Colombian Paramilitary."

⁸⁴ Brett Borkan, "Paramilitary Bosses: Demobilization Failed," *Colombia Reports*, April 28, 2010, <http://colombiareports.com/paramilitary-bosses-label-demobilization-a-failure/>; Emma Rosser, "Urabeños Founder Says AUC Demobilization Failed Due to Government Betrayal," *Colombia Reports*, September 29, 2015, <http://colombiareports.com/urabenos-founder-says-auc-demobilization-failed-due-to-government-betrayal/>.

⁸⁵ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, "Response to Information Requests COL104030.E," (Ottawa, Canada, 2012), <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/11/07/COL104030.E.pdf>; Rosser, "Urabeños Founder Says AUC Demobilization Failed."

expand their narco-trafficking empires, they have also participated in joint attacks on the government.⁸⁶ Conflict between the government and BACRIM is largely relegated to the military instrument of power. The financial instrument is also used by the government in an attempt to undercut the BACRIM's financing.

Military

The military aspect of this conflict falls largely within the Black. Government forces have operated overtly and in a conventional manner. BACRIM forces have done so as well. However, they also employ tactics such as arming insurgents, which attrits government capacity to fight BACRIM but is not easily attributable to them. Thus, Gray Zone activities are also occurring within this instrument of power.

The Colombian government has begun taking military action against BACRIM. Indeed, one report suggested that over 1,800 military and police actions had been carried out against the various syndicates, leading to the capture of more than 12,000 members, 6,000 firearms and 90 tons of drugs by March 2013.⁸⁷ Moreover, the Santos administration has created a special unit, the Search Bloc (the same name given to the unit that ultimately killed drug kingpin Pablo Escobar), that is tasked only with targeting BACRIM. Santos further indicated that once the peace deal is concluded with the FARC, the government will reallocate forces and redouble its focus on countering BACRIM.⁸⁸ The military and police have also begun to utilize tactics against BACRIM that had proven effective against the FARC and ELN. To this end, in November 2015, Colombian forces launched their first airstrike on a camp belonging to Colombia's most powerful BACRIM group, *Los Urabeños*.⁸⁹

For their part, BACRIM syndicates have for a long time posed an indirect challenge to the government by arming groups like the FARC and ELN.⁹⁰ However, more recently, they have begun to undertake armed actions against the government on their own and in collaboration with the insurgents. In March and April 2016, *Los Urabeños* successfully perpetrated an armed strike that paralyzed much of the Caribbean

⁸⁶ "Bandas Criminales," *Mapping Militant Organizations*, last updated August 28, 2015, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/607>; David Gagne, "Colombia's Urabeños, FARC Collaborated in Police Attack: Govt," *InSight Crime* (September 17, 2014): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/new-alliance-farc-urabenos-police-attack>; Elise Ditta, "ELN-FARC Battle Urabeños in Colombia," *InSight Crime* (April 13, 2016): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/eln-farc-battle-urabenos-in-colombia>; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Response to Information Requests COL104030.E*; *InSight Crime*, "FARC Clash with Rastrojos;" Jason P. Howe, "Interview with an Assassin," *NACLA*: <https://nacla.org/article/interview-assassin>; Looft, "Arrests Highlight ELN-Rastrojos Alliance;" Olle Ohlson Pettersson, "Drug Alliances' Terrorize Colombia's Pacific Coast," *Colombia Reports*, January 10, 2013, <http://colombiareports.com/drug-alliances-terrorize-colombias-pacific-coast/>; Sam Tabory, "Uncovered Emails Point to Potential FARC Criminalization," *InSight Crime* (August 7, 2015): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/new-emails-raise-red-flags-of-farc-criminalization>; *STRATFOR*, "Colombia: Bacrim and FARC Increase Cooperation," April 24, 2012, <https://www.stratfor.com/sample/analysis/colombia-bacrim-and-farc-increase-cooperation>.

⁸⁷ Carlos Andrés Prieto, "Las Bacrim y el crimen organizado en Colombia," *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Seguridad*, March 2013, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/la-seguridad/09714.pdf>.

⁸⁸ David Gagne, "Colombia Redoubles Efforts Against BACRIM," *InSight Crime* (April 13, 2016): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/colombia-redoubles-efforts-against-bacrim>.

⁸⁹ David Gagne, "Aerial Bombing Potential Game Changer for Colombia's BACRIM," *InSight Crime* (November 5, 2015): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/aerial-bombing-possible-gamechanger-for-colombia-bacrim>.

⁹⁰ *STRATFOR*, "Colombia: Bacrim and FARC."

coast.⁹¹ Moreover, in 2014, *Los Urabeños* and the FARC jointly executed an ambush that killed seven police officers and wounded seven more. It appears that the attack was retribution for the wounding of *Los Urabeños'* leader in an earlier shootout with security forces.⁹²

Financial

Like the FARC and ELN, the BACRIM are exceedingly well financed through their illicit activities. While most of their revenue is derived from narco-trafficking, these groups are also involved in illegal mining, extortion and human as well as weapons trafficking.⁹³ Given that their primary motivation is financial gain and that funds are obtained illegally, one way in which the government has sought to confront them is through anti-money laundering initiatives. Approximately 70 prosecutors from the attorney general's office have been engaged for these purposes.⁹⁴ In February 2015, federal prosecutors working alongside the military had one of their biggest successes, arresting 15 individuals suspected of using gold to launder approximately 830 million dollars.⁹⁵ Because anti-money laundering and asset forfeiture initiatives are normal, peacetime activities carried out by many governments, these activities do not rise to the level of Gray Zone conflict.

Dyad Summary

This dyad has played out using the military and financial instruments of power. Militarily, the majority of activities are Black. However, Gray Zone activities have also taken place. Action in the financial realm remains limited to the White Zone.

Insurgents vs. Insurgents

While the FARC and ELN have often collaborated both diplomatically, by presenting a combined front in negotiations with the government, and militarily in challenging the state, the two groups have also frequently engaged in open conflict. This conflict has manifested itself in military battles fought for control of valuable territory. Diplomatic efforts were also carried out beginning in 2008 in an effort to end hostilities between the two insurgencies so that they could present a common front against the government.

Diplomatic

While Marín desired to absorb the ELN and its resources as part of the FARC, upon his death in 2008, his successor opted to cooperate with them. A ceasefire was agreed to in late 2009. However, it took nearly a year to implement because both sides had difficulty controlling their subordinates in Aruaca (a city

⁹¹ Michael Lohmuller, "Colombia's Urabeños Order Strike, Seek Peace Negotiations?," *InSight Crime* (April 1, 2016): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/colombia-urabenos-order-strike-peek-peace-negotiations>.

⁹² Gagne, "Colombia's Urabeños, FARC Collaborated."

⁹³ Jeremy McDermott, "The BACRIM and Their Position in Colombia's Underworld," *InSight Crime* (May 2, 2014): <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/bacrim-and-their-position-in-colombia-underworld>.

⁹⁴ Prieto, "Las Bacrim."

⁹⁵ Author's calculations using data from: Holger Alava, "El Ejército Nacional de Colombia desmantela red de lavado de dinero vinculada al terrorismo," *Diálogo*, February 11, 2015, <https://dialogo-americas.com/es/articles/el-ejercito-nacional-de-colombia-desmantela-red-de-lavado-de-dinero-vinculada-al-terrorismo>, using historical exchange rate data from: X-Rates, <http://www.x-rates.com/historical/?from=COP&amount=1&date=2015-02-11>.

strategically located near the Venezuelan border), who continued open, armed conflict.⁹⁶ While specific details of the agreement are unknown, it is evident that it established clearly demarcated territorial boundaries and committed the two groups to collaborate in targeting major infrastructure and extractive projects undertaken by multinational corporations as well as the government.⁹⁷ Negotiations routinely occur between NSAs. Moreover, these negotiations were de-escalatory in nature (at least with respect to the conflict between the FARC and ELN). As such, the use of the diplomatic instrument of power has been largely relegated to White Zone activities.

Military

Prior to the aforementioned diplomatic resolution the two sides engaged in open, armed conflict that was best characterized as Black.⁹⁸ Both sides also engaged in indirect competition in strategic areas. For example in Arauca, the two sides attempted to outdo one and other and thereby assert their dominance by perpetrating a series of armed strikes, sabotage operations targeting oil and gas pipelines and violent actions perpetrated against government forces and civilians.⁹⁹ Given their relative weakness, the ELN has been especially reliant on proxies in their battle against the FARC. For example, the ELN has collaborated with the BACRIM syndicate, *Los Rastrojos* to counter FARC encroachment on their territory.¹⁰⁰ The ELN also appears to have provided intelligence on FARC positions to the Colombian Army. In one instance, a recorded telephone conversation captured a conversation between an ELN column commander and a Colombian Army major. The ELN commander called the major and informed him that his men had observed a FARC position and, while they were capable of conducting their own operation against this FARC contingent, they would be willing to provide details such as the number of fighters and the types of armaments they possessed if the major would be interested in carrying out the operation himself. The major agrees, at which point the ELN commander asks if he could spare some grenades. The major promises he will.¹⁰¹ These latter activities fall squarely within the Gray Zone given the indirect nature of confrontation and the apparent desire to limit attribution. Moreover hostilities have recently resurfaced as the ELN has tried to take control of FARC territory in advance of their demobilization.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Jeremy McDermott, "Colombia ELN Rebels Climb Back Into the Fray," *InSight Crime* (June 27, 2011): <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/colombia-eln-rebels-climb-back-into-the-fray>; John Otis, "Colombia: ELN Rebels Join Forces with FARC," *Diálogo*, January 23, 2012, <https://dialogo-americas.com/en/articles/colombia-eln-rebels-join-forces-farc>; STRATFOR, "FARC-ELN Alliance May Escalate Violence," August 29, 2003, <https://www.stratfor.com/sample/analysis/farc-eln-alliance-may-escalate-violence>; Tom Lansford, *Political Handbook of the World* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2014), 300.

⁹⁷ McDermott, "Colombia ELN Rebels;" Olle Ohlson Pettersson, "ELN Announces 'Alliance' with FARC in Northwest Colombia," *Colombia Reports*, February 18, 2013, <http://colombiareports.com/eln-alliance-with-farc-in-northwestern-colombia/>.

⁹⁸ Pettersson, "ELN Announces 'Alliance.'"

⁹⁹ Arcadio González Ardila, "¿Por qué Arauca se convirtió en un botín que se reparten las FARC y el ELN?," *El País*, September 1, 2013, <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/judicial/noticias/por-arauca-convirtio-botin-repartido-por-farc-y-eln>; *El Tiempo*, "FARC y ELN se enfrentan por el botín de Arauca," November 4, 2001, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-691800>.

¹⁰⁰ *InSight Crime*, "FARC Clash with Rastrojos;" Looft, "Arrests Highlight ELN-Rastrojos Alliance."

¹⁰¹ Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia*, 2nd ed. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 217-8.

¹⁰² Mimi Yagoub, "Displacement Rising as Colombia's Conflict Moves into New Phase," *InSight Crime* (June 13, 2016): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/displacement-conflict-continue-in-colombia-despite-peace-plans>.

Dyad Summary

Conflict between the FARC and ELN largely played out in the military domain. Here the conflict was largely Gray, involving the use of proxy forces and other forms of indirect armed confrontation. However, more traditional, Black engagements did occur. Diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict also took place. These activities are best characterized as occurring in the White Zone. Nevertheless, the ceasefire agreement proved difficult to implement and relatively short-lived. In aggregate, this dyad is best characterized as Gray.

Insurgents vs. Paramilitaries

Since the 1990s, the insurgents and the AUC became increasingly dependent on narco-trafficking, consequently the location of coca cultivation and trafficking routes informed their territorial expansion.¹⁰³ Military competition between the insurgents and the AUC manifested itself in fights for control of lucrative territory.¹⁰⁴ This competition was zero sum. Not only did capturing control of valuable drug cultivation sites and trafficking routes deny territory and the associated resources to the other side, it provided the organization that controls the area with massive rents, which were used to further enhance that side's military capabilities in order to contest additional territory. In this type of conflict dyad, the military and economic instruments of power are intrinsically linked.

Military-Economic

Military competition over valuable territory involved both direct, armed competition and indirect efforts aimed at intimidating local populations as a means of gaining control of an area without direct fighting. As regards direct engagements, the 2002 battle for control of Bellavista, an important trafficking hub located just 235 miles northwest of Bogota, is emblematic. In advance of open hostilities, FARC began by cutting off food, gas and cooking fuel to the AUC-controlled village. This was followed by multiple days of sustained fighting involving 1,400 fighters, prepared fighting positions and improvised heavy mortars (which fire empty propane cylinders packed with more than 40 pounds of dynamite; one of which unintentionally destroyed a church and killed 119 of the more than 300 civilians taking refuge there).¹⁰⁵ These types of engagements can be clearly classified as Black.

While large-scale engagements, like the battle of Bellavista are not uncommon, indirect competition for control of territory is far more frequent. These events are nonetheless very violent. The AUC in particular has sought to use fear to ensure the support of civilians in contested areas. AUC fighters often arrive with lists of alleged guerrilla sympathizers to be executed. Even more sinister is the use of civilian massacres as a means of ensuring support and decimating existing insurgent support networks.¹⁰⁶ The FARC and

¹⁰³ Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed & Grievance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 79.

¹⁰⁴ Howe, "Interview with an Assassin."

¹⁰⁵ *BBC News*, "Colombia Referendum: Voters Reject FARC Peace Deal," October 3, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37537252>; Scott Wilson, "No Sanctuary from Colombian War," *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2002, <http://www.globalexchange.org/news/no-sanctuary-colombian-war>.

¹⁰⁶ Howe, "Interview with an Assassin;" Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, 56; Wilson, "No Sanctuary from Colombian War."

ELN have used similar tactics, albeit much less frequently.¹⁰⁷ Specifically, one investigation showed that between 1982 and 2013, the paramilitaries¹⁰⁸ committed 1,166 massacres versus 294 (238 attributed to the FARC and 56 to the ELN) atrocities committed by the insurgents.¹⁰⁹ The AUC's extensive use of brutality has proven particularly effective. The territory they captured provided the funding to grow their forces exponentially.¹¹⁰ These activities, which attempt to achieve the desired territorial control while avoiding direct confrontation with one's opponent, represent Gray Zone activities.

Dyad Summary

In this type of conflict dyad competition is limited to the military and economic instruments of power, both of which are very closely associated with each other. Competition using these instruments occurs in both the Black and Gray Zones. However, the majority of conflict is Gray.

Insurgents vs. BACRIM Syndicates

Relations between the insurgents and the BACRIM are extremely complex and entail considerable geographic (and also temporal) variation. In some areas the FARC and/or the ELN are in conflict (either jointly or on their own) with BACRIM. However, in other areas either the FARC or the ELN cooperate with BACRIM against the other. It is often the case that the same BACRIM syndicate will collaborate with either or both the FARC and ELN in one area, while engaging in conflict at the same time in another area. Like the dyads occurring between the insurgents and the AUC, conflict occurs over control of valuable territory. However, the BACRIM are non-ideological, and they do not desire to control territory in order to finance a larger conflict against insurgents. Consequently, conflict between the insurgents and BACRIM is largely restricted to the military instrument of power.

Military

Militarily, it appears that a considerable amount of direct conflict is occurring between the insurgents and BACRIM. For example, a large battle occurred in Cauca between the FARC and the BACRIM syndicate, *Los Rastrojos*, in early 2011. In this case, *Los Rastrojos* and their ELN partners had occupied an area of dense coca cultivation that had been previously controlled by the FARC. The FARC were forced out by a military offensive and were trying to return to the area only to find that *Los Rastrojos* and the ELN had taken over their territory after security forces departed. At least 20 belligerents were killed in the fighting that ensued.¹¹¹ In early 2016, the FARC and *Los Urabeños*, which collaborate in some parts of Colombia, began fighting over territory in northern Colombia. The conflict displaced over 400 people from the area surrounding El Bagre.¹¹² Also in 2016, fighting between the ELN and *Los Urabeños* in

¹⁰⁷ Daniela Castro, "The Trail of Death: 30 Years of Massacres in Colombia," *InSight Crime* (May 8, 2014): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/the-trail-of-death-30-years-of-massacres-in-colombia>; Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, 56.

¹⁰⁸ This includes all paramilitary groups and covers a period of time before they converged as the AUC.

¹⁰⁹ Castro, "The Trail of Death."

¹¹⁰ Nazih Richani, "The Political Economy of Colombia's Protracted Civil War and the Crisis of the War System," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 7, no. 1 (1997).

¹¹¹ *InSight Crime*, "FARC Clash with Rastrojos."

¹¹² Adriaan Alsema, "400 Displaced in FARC-Urabeños Clashes, Military Accidentally Kills Pregnant Minor," *Colombia Reports*, January 18, 2016, <http://colombiareports.com/farc-clashes-with-urabenos-400-displaced-in-northern-colombia/>.

northwest Colombia resulted in the displacement of approximately 3,000 civilians.¹¹³ These types of engagements are examples of Black Zone conflict.

Alliances between the ELN and BACRIM have also served as a deterrent to conflict with the FARC in certain areas. In places where the FARC is weaker and/or where additional conflict would have an undue adverse effect on their narcotics business (e.g., in the Eastern Plains, which are densely planted with coca and home to crucial trafficking routes to Venezuela) the FARC has been reticent to engage in conflict on multiple fronts. Arms and cash exchanged for drugs between the ELN and BACRIM further enhance the ability of these alliances to deter the FARC.¹¹⁴ While a plethora of different types of non-violent NSAs routinely cooperate with each other, the transfer of arms and cash involved in cooperation between the ELN and BACRIM in order to deter the FARC, clearly exceeds normal, White Zone competition. However, successful deterrence also avoids armed conflict. As such, this type of competition also falls below the threshold for Black Zone activities. Therefore, it is Gray.

Dyad Summary

Despite the complex relationship between the various actors involved in these types of dyads, competition is largely relegated to the military instrument of power. Competition within this instrument sometimes manifests itself as open, armed conflict. In other cases, it is limited to using the threat of force to deter aggression. Consequently, this type of dyad involves both Black and Gray Zone activities.

Summary

In summary, Colombia is embroiled in a highly complex conflict involving a multitude of actors. Even when the different belligerent groups are aggregated by type of actor, there are still six distinct types of conflict dyads. Moreover, all but one type of conflict dyad are prosecuted utilizing multiple instruments of power. In one type of dyad (government versus insurgents) alone, six of the seven instruments of power are used. Nevertheless, analyzing the conflict by types of dyads and by instruments of power utilized is instructive as it enables the development of typologies that will help bound the scope of what needs to be considered when the government is planning to confront violent NSAs either directly or through NSA proxies. This analysis shows that rather than treat each group as a distinct actor, many groups can be considered in aggregate. For example, the discussion of the government versus insurgent dyad type illustrates that with the exception of the ELN's reluctance to engage in set-piece battles with government forces due to their relatively smaller force strength, the FARC and ELN behave similarly when combating government forces across all instruments of power in which they engage. Perhaps more importantly, it helps restrict the number of instruments of power that need to be considered for each type of conflict dyad. The average type of conflict dyad involves just 2.5 of the seven instrument of power.

This analysis also confirms the classification of the Colombian conflict as Gray. Gray Zones conflicts (almost) always include White and Black elements. Colombia is no exception. Nevertheless, arguably the most important type of conflict dyad, government versus insurgents, is best classified as Gray. Moreover, four of the five

¹¹³ *NSNBC International*, "Clashes Between Colombian Military, Los Urabenos and ELN Displace Thousands," April 24, 2016, <http://nsnbc.me/2016/04/24/clashes-between-colombian-military-los-urabenos-and-eln-displace-thousands/>.

¹¹⁴ *InSight Crime*, "FARC Clash with Rastrojos."

remaining types of conflict dyads involve Gray activities, and these are substantial in three of the four cases. Finally, while the conflict dyad between the government and the AUC does not include Gray Zone dynamics, this dyad was very short-lived as the government only shifted from cooperation to conflict with the AUC in order to pressure them to demobilize. The AUC very quickly acquiesced.

Conclusions

As indicated, breaking the analysis of Gray Zone conflicts down by the types of conflict dyads occurring and then by the instruments of power utilized within each type of conflict dyad can be instructive. It enables planners to develop typologies and thereby limit the number of distinct groups and instruments of power that must be considered for a particular intervention. While this approach confers numerous benefits, practitioners must keep in mind that Gray Zone conflicts are highly complex systems; if counterinsurgency “is the graduate level of war,”¹¹⁵ then Gray Zone dynamics are the Ph.D. Specifically, adopting this approach will help in planning interventions against one type of conflict actor, but practitioners must also recognize that an intervention against one actor (or system), will also affect other belligerents (or systems). For example in the Colombian case, government successes against the FARC often strengthened the position of the ELN and BACRIM.¹¹⁶ As such, government planners ought to consider the U.S. Army’s new operating concept, “Win in a Complex World.” This doctrine implores commanders to not only consider the effects of their planned interventions on the system that they are targeting but also its effects on all other systems.¹¹⁷ A so-called system of systems approach to planning in Gray Zone conflicts will help to avoid negative externalities such as inadvertently strengthening other opposition forces.

In addition, the tactics employed by the state can also entail negative externalities. For example, prior to November 2015, government forces had refrained from using aerial bombardment against BACRIM. They did so despite the fact that this tactic proved highly effective against other belligerents. Nevertheless, they feared that bombing runs carried out against BACRIM could confer political status similar to that of the FARC or the AUC on BACRIM. *Los Urabeños*, despite their profit-driven motivation, see themselves as a third type of conflict actor and desired to be included in the ongoing peace process.¹¹⁸ The choice of tactics in one domain (e.g., military) can have profound effects on other domains (e.g., informational, diplomatic). As such, government forces need to be careful when identifying the tactics to be utilized for any planned intervention in Gray Zone conflicts.

A final observation regarding state interventions in Gray Zone dynamics is warranted. The Colombian case illustrates numerous examples of government forces collaborating with violent NSAs, including both the AUC

¹¹⁵ Qtd. in U.S. Army and Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual No. 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5 (Washington, D.C., December 2006), 1.

¹¹⁶ David Gagne, “BACRIM: Winner or Loser in Colombia Peace Deal?,” *InSight Crime* (July 1, 2016): <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/bacrim-winner-or-loser-in-colombia-peace-deal>; *NSNBC International*, “ELN Spotted in FARC Territory as Both Continue Peace Process with Colombian Government,” February 29, 2016, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/eln-spotted-in-farc-territory-as-both-continue-peace-process-with-colombian-government/5511209>.

¹¹⁷ U.S. Army, *The Operations Process*, Field Manual No. 5-0 (Washington, D.C., March 2010).

¹¹⁸ Gagne, “Aerial Bombing.”

and also, at times, the ELN.¹¹⁹ U.S. Special Operations Forces are especially well positioned to support NSAs. However, these activities require keen situational awareness. The conflict dyads pertaining to the insurgents versus BACRIM clearly illustrate that alliances are highly flexible and certain groups collaborate in some areas, while simultaneously fighting each other in other parts of the country. Special Operations Forces can take advantage of these dynamics, but in order to do so they must understand the hyper-local situation in their areas of operations and recognize that the situation is always subject to change at a moment's notice. When Special Operations personnel do collaborate with actors in one area that they are simultaneously opposing in other areas (or are likely to oppose in the future), they need to take care to ensure any assistance they provide cannot be turned against them (e.g., grenades promised to the ELN by a Colombian Army major in response to a tip off concerning FARC forces¹²⁰).

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¹¹⁹ Hanson, "Colombia's Right-Wing Paramilitaries;" Richani, *Systems of Violence*, 217-8.

¹²⁰ Richani, *Systems of Violence*, 217-8.

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