

Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee

Issue: Measures to reduce Paramilitary Groups in Latin America

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Position: Co-chair

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Esteemed delegates,

My name is Pelia Manteli and I have the honor to serve as the co-chair of the Disarmament and International Security Committee of the 2nd ACGMUN conference. Currently, I'm a student at the 11th grade at PIERCE-The American College of Greece.

MUN is an activity I truly enjoy doing and I hope this conference encourages and motivates you to follow the interesting path of MUN as well. This will be my second time serving as a chair and I am beyond excited to work with all of you. I believe our collaboration and mutual interest on the topics will lead to a very fruitful debate and create an unforgettable experience for all of us.

This study guide will provide you with some key-information about the topic "paramilitary groups in Latin America". However, it's significant that you do your own research as well, regarding your country's policy as it varies with each country. Moreover, the committee work will happen more easily, if you have all drafted some clauses regarding the topics prior to the conference.

For any additional questions regarding the topic or the committee work I will be at your disposal at any times, so don't hesitate to contact me by email at P.Manteli@acg.edu.

Sincerely,
Pinelopi Manteli

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Paramilitary forces in Latin America the past years have become a major issue which takes three forms: “officially sanctioned forces that supplement the military and police, illegal groups, and private security companies”¹. The private ownership of security is widely spread in Latin America, as there are cases in which governments are unable to enforce the rule of law, many rural and urban areas are insecure, and judicial systems may fail to ensure the security of the country. Another factor that leads to the consolidation of private paramilitary groups is the fact that the police are inadequately paid, trained, and equipped, and often corrupt. All the above lead to the existing high crime rate in Latin America, where an estimated 15% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is lost to violence annually.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Paramilitary groups

Paramilitary groups are considered to be “of, relating to, being, or characteristic of a force formed on a military pattern especially as a potential auxiliary military force”². Paramilitary groups can either be legal, meaning they are formally recognized by each country’s government, or irregular military forces. In our case, paramilitary groups in Latin America are considered to be irregular and illegal military forces.

Militarism

Militarism is generally described as the ideology that a strong military capability should be maintained in a country or state and ready to be used aggressively in order to defend or promote national interests.

Right-wing

The right wing can be defined as “the conservative or reactionary section of a political party or system”³. Among others, the right wing believes in privatization, which is the goal of the paramilitary groups in Latin America.

¹ "Paramilitaries in Latin America." Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture. Encyclopedia.com. 20 Feb. 2018. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/paramilitaries-latin-america>

² "Definition of Paramilitary by Merriam-Webster." Merriam-Webster. 20 Feb. 2018. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paramilitary>

³ "Definition of right wing in English by Oxford Dictionaries." Oxford Dictionaries. 20 Feb. 2018. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/right_wing

Guerrilla

A guerilla is considered to be “a member of a small independent group taking part in irregular fighting, typically against larger regular forces”⁴, an underground fighter. It also refers to “actions or activities performed in an impromptu way, often without authorization.”⁴

Narcotrafficking

By definition narcotrafficking is “the smuggling and distribution of illegal drugs”⁵. The illegal drug trade, which operates on the global black market, includes the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of drugs that are subject to drug prohibition laws. Most drugs sold on the black market are prohibited by jurisdiction.

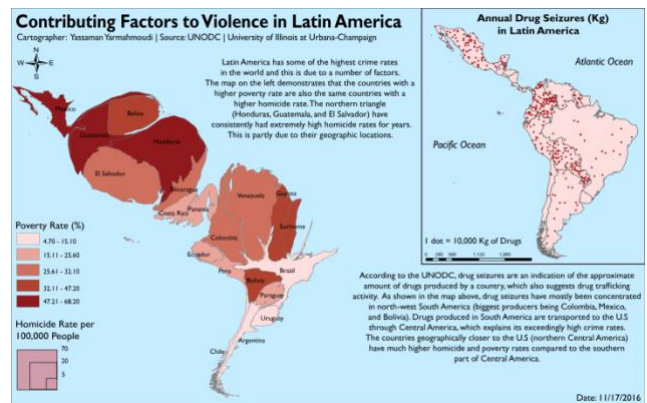
Demobilization

“To discharge someone from military service”⁶. Demobilization is the process of standing down a nation’s armed forces from combat-ready status. This may come as a result of war victory, or because a crisis has been efficiently combated and military force is no longer necessary. The opposite of demobilization is mobilization.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Causes of the rise of paramilitary groups in Latin America

Before analyzing these paramilitary groups one should keep in mind the following. Paramilitary groups were formed in the 1960s-1980s to fight for values such as independency and liberalism. Years after their formation, their goal has by far changed and the groups have deviated to actions, such as killing people and being involved in drug trafficking.



#1: Crime and violence in Latin America map

Why do paramilitary groups rise in Latin America? As a matter of fact, the groups have stepped on the continent’s inefficiencies and problems in order to rise.

⁴“Definition of guerrilla in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” Oxford Dictionaries. 20 Feb. 2018. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/guerrilla>

⁵“Narcotrafficking.” The Free Dictionary. 20 Feb. 2018. www.thefreedictionary.com/narcotrafficking.

⁶“Demobilize.” Dictionary.com. 20 Feb. 2018. www.dictionary.com/browse/demobilization.

High levels of social inequality, civil wars and armed conflicts, low rates of economic growth, high unemployment rates, rapid growth of large cities and metropolitan areas, absence and/or weakness of basic urban infrastructure, basic social services and community organizations in the poorest neighborhoods, culture of violence, reinforced by organized crime as well as the media, low level of effectiveness of the police and other institutions in the criminal justice system and poor public education system have given the opportunity to many paramilitary groups to take advantage of the situation. If these problems aren't tackled, then the paramilitary groups will continue gaining power. In countries like Brazil, Colombia, or the Honduras, paramilitary groups are fighting with the excuse of confronting drug traffickers. But instead of that, paramilitary groups benefit from drug trafficking. The Colombian Army openly trained paramilitary groups until 1989, when the government banned them due to their ties with drug traffickers. However, ties between the army and the paramilitary groups have not been severed completely. The paramilitaries now dominate the border zones with Panama and Venezuela, where most drug trafficking takes place.

Autodefensas Unidas de Colombias (AUC): United self-defense forces of Colombia

According to the *Democratic Peace History* by Small and Singer, “an international war is a military event with more than 1,000 murders that requires the intervention of at least two states”. According to this definition, Latin America lived through a small number of international wars. At the same time Europe was experiencing seven international wars, during the early years of the twentieth century, Latin America was experiencing three. However, illegal armed groups have been constantly present in the continent, some created in the region, other imported. Some of the above guerrillas have political goals. Despite their great differences, all these paramilitary organizations share one thing in common: they use drug dealing as a source of funding. Latin America counts more than 40 different paramilitary groups at the moment, which recruit and use child soldiers in their fight against Government. One of the most powerful paramilitary groups is located in Colombia and is known as the AUC, United self-defense forces of Colombia. The AUC-commonly referred to as *the paramilitaries*- is an umbrella organization formed in April 1997 with its utter goal being “to consolidate most local and regional paramilitary groups each with the mission to protect economic interests and combat the FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia insurgents locally”⁷. In 2002, the AUC dissolved and then reconstituted most of the organization, claiming to be trying to purge it of the



#2: logo of the United self-defense forces of Colombia

⁷ “The guerrilla groups in Colombia”. United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe. 20 Feb. 2018. <https://www.unric.org/en/colombia/27013-the-guerrilla-groups-in-colombia>

factions most heavily involved in narco trafficking. The AUC is supported by economic elites, drug traffickers, and local communities lacking effective government security, and claims its primary objective to be to protect its sponsors from insurgents. It is adequately equipped and armed, and reportedly pays its members a monthly salary. Its personnel is estimated around 6000 to 8150 people. The group, which had selected mayoral, governor, and council representatives in regions they had strong influence in, claimed in 2006 to have control of 30% of the Colombian Congress. In addition to playing a strong role in Colombian politics, the AUC has threatened to halt the ceasefire and demobilization unless the government adopts amnesty terms acceptable to the paramilitary group's leaders. A major point of contention was the abolishment of laws allowing AUC members to be extradited and detained in the United States. The AUC was designated as a terrorist organization by many countries and organizations, including the United States, Canada and the European Union. The U.S. State Department added the AUC to their list in 2001, condemning it for massacres, torture, and other human rights abuses against civilians.



#3: Paramilitary personnel in Colombia

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America

In 2001, "Plan Colombia", a plan created in the US, won almost US\$1 billion in mainly military aid from the US to confront drug-trafficking and rebels who profit and protect the trade. The United States of America generally does not support paramilitary groups, and does not recognize them as constituents, or relate with them in any possible way.

Colombia

As mentioned before, Colombia is home to many powerful military groups. Many Colombian military manuals from the 1960s urged the creation of paramilitary groups to confront guerrillas. Back in the 2000s, the Colombian government overlooked many of the AUC's routine executions. When the group attacked a village in 2001, the government remained silent. However, when the FARC, the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, whose goals are to represent

Colombia's rural poor by seizing power through armed revolution and establishing government, committed similar attacks in neighboring areas, the Colombian government responded immediately and forcefully.

Brazil

Paramilitary groups in Brazil are fighting drug gangs for control of the favelas. These paramilitary groups are led by retired or active police officers and are said to be controlling more than 100 of Rio de Janeiro's 700 favelas. These "community self-defense" forces, as they call themselves, began to grow and multiply in 2006, but only attracted significant media attention a year after, when drug traffickers unleashed a wave of attacks against police officers, police stations and buses. Former Rio de Janeiro Mayor Cesar Maia has stated that the paramilitary groups in the city are illegal, but can be seen as a smaller threat than drug trafficking gangs. He has stopped publicly expressing his support for them, but he has admitted that cracking down on these groups would encourage a comeback by the drug traffickers.

El Salvador

During the civil war of 1970s and 1980s, the paramilitary Organización Nacional Democrática (ORDEN), Democratic National Organization, was established under the Ministry of Defense. They organized some 100,000 members at village and town levels. After having been accused for several human rights violations, the Democratic National Organization was disbanded, but some members joined death squads that were illegal.

Peru

Peru is home to the famous "*rondas campesinas*", or peasant militias. *Rondas* have played a key role in the Peruvian history as they are based on indigenous communal traditions of providing local security. In the 19th century, *rondas* were employed by Andrés Cáceres (then General, later president of Peru) to confront Chilean forces during the War of the Pacific (1879–1884). In 2003, President Alejandro Toledo signed a legislation that gave the *rondas* extensive legal responsibilities for protecting communal security and resolving conflict.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1960-1980	Most Latin American groups are formed during this period
January 1999	The AUC attacks six regions in Colombia and kills alleged FARC sympathizers. The attack was a response to the FARC's attack on AUC headquarters the previous month. (150 killed)
2005	The Colombian government and the AUC reach an agreement, "a transitional justice mechanism that includes convicting paramilitary members, sentencing them, and ensuring reduced jail terms if the highest-ranking AUC members returned stolen property and confessed their crimes".
December 2006	The truth tribunal bill (further explained in the following section) is in effect
April 2008	AUC was considered to be responsible for attacks on businesses and private citizens in Colombia and Ecuador, challenging the groups publicized demobilization in 2006.
2009	The Colombian government denies the possible existence of paramilitary in the country

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

An attempt to solve this baffled issue was made in 2005, when the Colombian government and the AUC reached an agreement, incorporating the Justice and Peace Law, "a transitional justice mechanism that included convicting paramilitary members, sentencing them, and ensuring reduced jail terms if the highest-ranking AUC members returned stolen property and confessed their crimes"⁸. One of AUC's founders, Vicente Castaño, immediately went into hiding and was never arrested. Human Rights Watch has criticized the agreement as it was thought to be too lenient. In 2006, the peace talks came to an end. While the AUC supposedly completed the demobilization process, the actual number of those who demobilized in 2006 varied; some reported that less than 4,000 demobilized by 2006 and other reports alleged that all 30,000 members demobilized by 2006.

⁸ "United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia". Mapping Militant Organizations, Stanford University. 20 Feb 2018. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/85?highlight=farc>

After a ceasefire was declared, the administration of President Álvaro Uribe began negotiations with the AUC aiming to eventually dismantle the organization and reintegrate its members to society. The stated deadline for completing the demobilization process was later extended into February 2006. Between 2003 and February 2, 2006, about 17,000 of the AUC's 20,000 fighters gave up their weapons. This is more than double the figure originally estimated by the government before negotiations began.

A draft law was presented to the public which suggested pardoning the members of any illegal armed group that declared a ceasefire and entered talks with the government, in return for, mainly, “their verified demobilization, concentration within a specific geographic area, and the symbolic reparation of the offenses committed against the victims of their actions”. Shortly afterwards, a further revised draft was distributed to the media and political circles. This new project was not officially submitted for approval by Congress and further public discussion on the matter continued.

The bill, among others, suggested the creation of a three to five member Truth Tribunal, which would study each case brought before it, after the groups or individuals sign an agreement “to respect the international humanitarian laws and accept the authority of the Tribunal, in exchange for a minimum sentence of five to ten years for those guilty of the most serious crimes, the confession of the crimes which were committed in connection with the activities of the illegal armed group, and the completion of concrete acts of reparation towards the victims”⁹.

Also, there have been internal conflicts within the illegal organization, as other AUC leaders have mutually accused each other of being tainted with narco-trafficking and their troops have even met in combat. These different, sometimes warring factions within the AUC, make successfully concluding any peace initiative a considerably difficult task.

In 1969, the Colombian government stated that the armed forces should organize self-defense committees which were defined as “military-type organization made up of civilian personnel in the combat zone, which are trained and equipped to undertake operations against guerrilla groups that threaten an area or to operate in coordination with combat troops”¹⁰. These committees were to contact with local military officers, to prevent any suspicious communist action in their communities, especially those that were thought to be “guerrilla supporters”. The manual also gave the chance to military personnel to dress in civilian clothes when necessary to

⁹ “Smoke and Mirrors: Colombia's demobilization of paramilitary groups”. 21 Feb. 2018. Human Rights Watch. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/45cb15032.html>

¹⁰ “The FARC's biggest fear: Colombia's paramilitary groups”. Colombia Reports. 21 Feb. 2018. <https://colombiareports.com/the-farcs-biggest-fear-colombias-paramilitary-groups/>

infiltrate areas of suspected guerrilla influence, and also for civilian helpers to travel alongside military units. Separately, in order to help gain the trust of local citizens, the military was advised to participate in the daily activities of the community where applicable.

These were the several attempts that have been made to solve the issue, but the problem hasn't disappeared yet. The complexity of the issue and the fact that it doesn't affect only one country, but threatens democracy as a whole in Latin America, makes it even more difficult. It is therefore up to you delegates to cooperate, take into account the global community and the state of democracy, in order to achieve the desirable level of efficiency.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

As mentioned in the background information section, the route of the problem is the many economic, social and political problems Latin American countries are currently facing. It is important for all delegates to keep that in mind throughout the making of their resolution, so as to find not just a temporary solution for the problem, but a long term one, because as long as socioeconomic problems exist, paramilitary groups will also exist. As a matter of fact, the paramilitary soldiers' only income is their salary from such groups. Therefore, if the United Nations gives motives to these individuals, they have a very good reason to leave the paramilitary groups, which will eventually be weakened, and at the same time contribute to the country's economic growth.



#4: Paramilitary groups in Latin America consist of both men and women.

Another factor that should exist in a resolution for paramilitary groups in Latin America is, of course, drug trafficking. As we all now know, paramilitary groups have close relations with drug traffickers and benefit from them. Therefore, imposing strict measures on the drug traffickers and limiting their actions will have an effect on the paramilitary groups as well.

Besides that, however, it's equally important to deal with the paramilitary groups themselves. Therefore it's up to the delegates to decide whether the policy of their country would allow them to restrict the action of these paramilitary groups, legalize them or assimilate them into the country's formal armed forces. In general, all delegates should remember that a mutual agreement that would benefit both

sides is desirable. To achieve that, negotiations between the governments or the United Nations and the paramilitary groups is necessary. For example, guided by the previous attempts to solve the issue, giving money to the paramilitary groups in exchange to their members being demobilized would be a long term solution to the problem and would, at the same time, benefit the United Nations and the paramilitary individuals, who will gain money.

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