



## Shame and Peacebuilding Colombian Counter-Terrorism Strategies

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Armed conflict in Colombia is one of the longest in the world of contemporary conflicts, having lasted for almost 60 years. It started in the 1960s between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army (FARC-EP), until the signing of the September 2016 peace agreement after extensive peace talks for nearly four years.

Despite the violence that could amount to terrorism, the heavy toll in lives and property, the lack of security, and the widespread terror, many analysts did not believe that the conflict amounted to substantive domestic or global terrorism, and thus it did not garner international attention.

This article examines the origins of this complex conflict, which resulted in 200,000 deaths and millions of displaced people; subsequent terrorist acts against civilians; Colombia’s response; and the strategic plans developed to establish peace.

### Root Causes

Clashes between conservatives and liberals have erupted since the early 1900s; they peaked in Colombia in April 1948 as a result of hostility between the two factions following the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, charismatic leader of the Liberal Party and presidential candidate. He was extremely popular and was on the verge of winning the elections; thus, his assassination sparked the massive riots known as La Violencia, in which approximately 5,000 people were killed. This was followed by a protracted conflict that resulted in over 200,000 deaths and significant migration flows as a result of insecurity and rising unrest.

Consequently, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, People's Army (FARC-EP), the world's oldest guerrilla force, came into being. It was involved in a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla war against Colombia's ruling Conservative Party. According to some estimates, the FARC-EP seized 15-20% of Colombian territory, primarily forests, jungles, and mountainous areas in the Andes foothills. Guerrilla warfare and drug trafficking flared up from time to time, resulting in the secession of the FARC-EP from the Communist Party.

As a result of these clashes and hostile acts, several active, terrorist, and extremist movements emerged, particularly right-wing paramilitary groups appealing to the armed forces, some landowners, businessmen, politicians, and drug trafficking gangs. This resulted in an increased violent armed surge and an unbroken series of massacres and human rights violations that claimed approximately 260,000 lives, left over 45,000 people missing, and displaced 7 million people. The United States designated FARC-EP as a terrorist organization in 1997. This has become an international political trend in the context of supporting the Colombian government in its fight against insurgents and the US-Colombia strong bilateral relations in the domains of counter-terrorism and drug trafficking.

### **Peace Agreement**

In 2016, the FARC-EP and the Colombian government signed a 297-page, six-chapter peace agreement. This article examines two peacebuilding approaches that were implemented following the signing of the peace agreement in order to achieve social reconciliation and integration.

The Integral System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIVJRNR) stemmed from the agreement, made up of the following mechanisms: the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), the Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition Commission (CEV), the Unit for the Search for People Presumed Disappeared in the Context and by Reason of the Armed Conflict (UBPD), reparation measures for peacebuilding purposes, and guarantees of non-recurrence. This system contextualizes acts committed by FARC-EP as terrorist acts within the framework of internal armed conflict, which makes the penalties incurred less severe than those imposed in a peaceful context.

The JEP was established to handle offences perpetrated during the armed conflict. It was agreed that representatives of the armed forces are authorized to work with the JEP, given that the State is a main actor in this conflict, and that the truth uncovered by

military men—even those who committed crimes against humanity—can end years of war and provide redress to victims in a framework of restorative justice.

Analysts confirm that Colombia has been shattered since the conflict, and that healing the subsequent social and cultural wounds begins with a convincing interpretation of the past that gives voice to a large number of people. However, only a reasonable portion of this narrative should be made available to people in order for them to learn from previous experiences and comprehend the atrocities and horrifying consequences of such terrorizing events that threaten their security and existence. This is a good strategy for overcoming the barbarism of terrorism in future.

Because of the civil nature of Colombian society, it is difficult to divide it definitively into victims and terrorists. Victims and perpetrators are frequently confused within the same family or in everyday life. As a result, a multilateral model for establishing the truth was approved in order to listen to all parties. This approach allows victims to be heard unconditionally and their pain and grief to be understood, regardless of their political affiliation or who is to blame for their suffering. In addition to the continuously published preliminary and partial reports, their experiences are streamed directly on YouTube. This undoubtedly entails acknowledging people's suffering and pain, as well as taking into account people's shame towards terrorists' actions.

This post-war approach differs from others in the absence of a single legal document or the imposition of specific penalties following historic trials. The emphasis has been on attempting to predict various experiences in order to understand the past and accept its flaws.

The aim was to reach the truth about the sequence of events that prompted JEP to open seven macro-cases, where it provided a comprehensive account of the committed crimes. The data gathered by the CEV may answer some pressing questions, such as: What led to all this barbarity? How do perpetrators feel about acts of violence? What explanation could be given to families of victims?

The following shows the cases according to the number of casualties:

1. Illegal Detentions of Individuals by the FARC-EP.
2. Violence in certain Municipalities
3. Assassinations and forced disappearances

4. Armed conflict in Northern Cauca and Southern Cauca Valley Regions.
5. Massacres of members of the Patriotic Union (UP)
6. Recruitment of children in wars.

### **Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition Commission (CEV)**

CEV submitted its final report on June 28, 2022, comprising information gathered via interviews with over 1500 victims of the conflict living in Colombia and abroad, as well as testimonies of deported Colombians in 23 States. Hearings were held for 30,000 people as well as extensive investigations of 730 cases, and 1195 reports were presented on various violent acts.

Civil society organizations helped prepare for those interviews in municipalities that were prioritized for being hardest hit by the armed conflict. Different parties of the conflict were heard, including FARC-EP. Fourteen dialogues were held to bring the conflicts to a halt and guarantee commitment to non-resumption of hostilities. They included interviews with three former Presidents of Colombia .

The CEV report consists of two parts: the first highlights significant findings and explains the causes that ignited the conflict; the second provides proposed recommendations by CEV. Though this report is legally non-binding, it is definitely morally binding. It aims at rebuilding the social fabric .

The CEV report estimates the total number of fatalities to be almost half a million people. Missing persons are estimated at 100,000, 90% of whom are innocent civilians of the most impoverished strata in Colombia, and around 1 million people were deported for security purposes. The report also uncovered the use of non-conventional weapons, gas tanks for bombing entire towns, and mine-laying at war, which made Colombia the second highest rate of mine-laying in the world after Afghanistan.

### **Conflict Evils**

The Colombian conflict has underscored several evils, such as the rise of security models that achieved significant economic gains from arms trafficking and exploiting the other spoils of war, which hindered the peacebuilding process and misrepresented the relationship between the armed forces and the people. This situation prompted a recommendation to formulate a new military doctrine that would hold officials, military

men, and security officials accountable before civilians, restoring and strengthening state authority.

The armed conflict in Colombia also exacerbated the levels of discrimination between people based on race, caste, culture, and gender. Some were awarded privileges often denied to others. This impeded good communication between people and enhanced their sense of injustice, marginalization, and violation of their fundamental rights .

Not only did Colombia suffer from violence, terrorism, and armed clashes during the conflict between a terrorist organization and the state and civilians. It fell into a bottomless pit. This was followed by a complex array of interests for several conflicting actors, which made it difficult to differentiate the “good” from the “bad”. The socio-political roots of terrorism continued to exacerbate conflicts. They stepped into different historical contexts characterized by the absence of political decisions that seek to bring peace. Terrorism flourished over and over in Colombia in the span of sixty years, ultimately regarded by all parties as the only way for legitimization. This led to the failure of political and diplomatic efforts made to bring peace over the years .

## Conclusion

A collective sentiment of shame towards the atrocities of the armed conflict in Colombia plays an important role in implementing a strategy for peacebuilding and eradicating terrorism. Not only does this come into play for victims of the armed conflict, but also for the entirety of the Colombian society that has been trapped in a chaotic discourse, due to the violence that threatened social cohesion and peacebuilding efforts, especially with the continued armed activity of a group of insurgents who did not accept the peace agreement, and were inscribed on the “terrorist organizations” list by the US State Department on November 30, 2021. Future indictments will probably be filed against former leaders of FARC-EP, drug traffickers, and perpetrators of crimes against humanity.