

Plan Lazo: Evaluation and Execution

by Charles H. Briscoe



WHILE involvement of the two major “white-hat” players and one “black-hat” player in today’s narco-terrorist war in Colombia dates to *La Violencia* of 1948–1966, the stakes for the insurgents have changed. They have dramatically shifted from trying to achieve political power to effect socioeconomic changes in the countryside to using economic power to control sociopolitical affairs in rural areas. *La Violencia* may have been officially declared as ended in 1966, but mass killings have continued as insurgent and self-defense elements competed to dominate the peasants and prosper from their source of economic power—the illegal drug production

and extortion of the wealthy and government justices. This article will show how the U.S. government worked to assist Colombia with its insurgent and bandit problems during the early 1960s through 1966. The early recommendations to employ counterinsurgency measures had merit then and remain viable today in Colombia. Many now appear in *Plan Colombia* and *Plan Patriota*.

The first phase of the post-*Bogotazo* and *Violencia* (violence) encompassed the first two National Front governments led by Liberal Alberto Lleras Camargo and Conservative Guillermo León Valencia (August 1958–1966). The National Front resulted from a 1957 bipartisan agreement to alternate the presidency and

U.S. and Colombian governments led to the development of an internal security system to support one of the most successful counterinsurgency campaigns of the time.¹

Shortly after his August 1958 inauguration, President Lleras Camargo requested “expert U.S. assistance” to



President Alberto Lleras Camargo, former OAS Secretary General, 1945–1946 and 1958–1962

ministries every four years, effectively dividing power between the two major political parties for sixteen years. During this period extensive collaboration between the



Principal regions of colonization in Colombia after 1940 are shown in yellow. Rural areas in Regions 7 and 8 (east and south of Bogotá) and in the northern part of Tolima (west of the capital) were those most affected by the bandits and quasi-guerrillas instigating La Violencia.

help with his government's highest priority, the National Emergency Issue. Lleras Camargo, the well-respected former Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), had been the driving force behind the armistice between the Conservatives and Liberals that had united them in the National Front to restore order and end the bloodshed. In November and December 1959, a State Department-sponsored team was sent to Colombia to conduct an extensive survey of the violence problem to make recommendations to the White House before Lleras Camargo's official Chief-of-State visit to Washington in April 1960.²

The joint U.S. government team, chartered to survey the violence problem in Colombia, was organized and led by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) with Defense and State Department representation. Hans V.



Hans V. Tofte in World War II, the Joint Survey Team Chief



Sketch of Colonel Napoleon D. Valeriano and Major Charles T.R. Bohannon.

Tofte, formerly Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Europe, World War II and JACK [Joint Advisory Commission, Korea (CIA)], was the team leader. The other team members were retired Colonel (COL) Berkeley Lewis, an ordnance expert with broad logistics experience and a tour as a military attaché in Argentina; Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Joséph J. Koontz, service with the U.S. Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG) Bogotá from 1952–1956; Major (MAJ) Charles T.R. Bohannon, former WWII guerrilla leader in the Philippines who also advised the government during the Communist HUK uprising; COL Napoleon Valeriano, Philippine Constabulary and former Police Chief, Manila, who was “rated the most successful anti-guerrilla fighter in the military campaigns against the HUKs”; and Bruce Walker, ex-U.S. Marine lieutenant with foreign service tours in Ecuador and Honduras. All were fluent Spanish speakers.³

To collect information, the joint survey team interviewed

“more than 2,000 officials and civilians in all walks of life during visits to more than 100 cities, townships, military garrisons, and talked with a number of guerrilla chiefs” across the country. Their assessment was pretty grim. According to the report, the violence situation was critical. It was worsened by a much more active Communist threat than reported. The “Auto-Defensa” armed militias

in rural areas “bore watching.”⁴

The social upheaval after more than ten years of political strife (of civil war proportion) had led to an estimated 250,000 deaths and had forced another 1.5 million Colombians to leave their homes and farms. The public confidence in government at all levels had been destroyed. The 35,000-man army was garrison-bound and the national police (33,000) were unable to stop the violence perpetrated by bandits and quasi-guerrilla gangs. The military and police were not popular with the rural people. Civilians generally avoided contact and did not report incidents of violence for fear of “terroristic reprisals” by the bandits or quasi-guerrilla elements. A traditional peasant saying applied: “The law, like a dog, bites only the man wearing a poncho.”⁵ The team made specific recommendations in several areas.

The Americans felt that the Army had to be proactive instead of taking pride in not being involved because it showed how “non-political” the military was. The armed forces had to demonstrate their integrity and a sincere desire to help and befriend the civilian population. Effective suppression of the violence would regain the popular prestige the Army had earned during the Korean War and restore confidence and respect for government. But, the armed forces had to fight the bandits and quasi-guerrillas like an insurgency instead of emulating U.S. Army conventional war doctrine that perpetuated a traditional external defense role.⁶

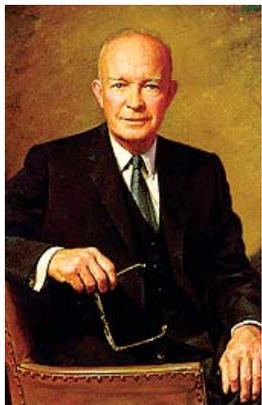
The report recommended that a special 1,000-man “Lancero” counter-guerrilla force be organized, trained, and equipped “to eliminate the quasi-guerrillas.” The force had to be able to conduct operations in units as small as a fire team. Dedicated aerial reconnaissance and resupply assets were essential and they needed organic ground transportation to move 200 men. It was envisioned that the “Lancero” force would conduct special intelligence missions and combat operations under a military command that was focused exclusively on finding and eliminating the enemy.⁷

Supporting measures included the establishment of an effective intelligence branch in the Armed Forces and a major reorganization of the civilian intelligence service. The government information program had to be aggressive and imaginative and capable of psychological warfare. The image of the Army and Police had to be rehabilitated to make them more “attractive” to the people. Critical to this was a broad reorganization and improvement of Police forces through better education, training, and equipment. Land settlement and civic action “self-help” projects were part of rehabilitation programs. The “Lancero” force was to receive paramilitary and civic action training and their activities were to be geared to support national rehabilitation efforts.⁸

Resettlement projects would serve as long-term



Original Lancero shoulder patch



President Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953–1961



Secretary of State Christian A. Herter

solutions if the government provided temporary support and the means to rapidly make families self-sufficient. Self-help projects started in the established rural communities, while insignificant contributions to the national economy, created immediate popular support. The civic action projects initiated by Army and Police units in the field had to be designed to improve the image of the security forces among the people. Those with the most potential were direct government-to-people efforts.⁹ A key part of all recommendations was assignment of dedicated U.S. specialists to serve as advisors to the “*Lancers*,” national police, civil affairs, government information, psychological warfare, and intelligence elements.¹⁰

In the final 25 May 1960 report to Secretary of State Christian Herter, the joint survey team concluded that the present violence was primarily criminal activity by bandit gangs who operated like quasi-guerrillas. The team estimated that current violence perpetrated by these bandit groups could be quelled in ten to twelve months by “*Lancero*” forces, if they had qualified advisors and were supported with solid intelligence, psychological warfare, and civic action programs. They felt that the Colombian government could eradicate these bandit gangs more easily because unlike “real guerrillas,” the bandits were not ideologically motivated and lacked popular support.¹¹ The long-term obstacle to eliminating future potential violence was more complicated.

To bring long-term stability to Colombia, significant reforms of the country’s social, political, and economic structure were needed. Military efforts were largely a derivative of nation-building programs needed to anchor a popular, democratic government. Well-trained military and police forces alone were not sufficient to prevent a future recurrence of violence.

While the joint survey team provided the general essential elements, more like those in a broad contingency plan, the short- and long-term solutions were linked to achieve popular democratic government in Colombia. However, the broad social, political, and economic reforms, as they were proposed under the Alliance for Progress, proved unpalatable in Latin America.

Less than a month after President John F. Kennedy announced the Alliance for Progress program, the new administration was plagued with the Bay of Pigs fiasco on 21 April 1961. CIA covert support to a Cuban-exile force intent on overthrowing Fidel Castro was initially approved by President Dwight D. Eisenhower and then sanctioned by President Kennedy. The anticipated popular uprising in Cuba against Castro never materialized.

Lacking air support, the “invasion fleet” was destroyed before the exiles could get ashore. The ease with which the Cuban dictator was able to crush the overthrow attempt demonstrated that he controlled the island. Kennedy accepted the blame for the failure. President Kennedy’s recourse was to accelerate funding for the Alliance for Progress. Fidel Castro declared

Alliance for Progress

IN March 1961, President John F. Kennedy proposed a ten-year economic cooperation plan between the United States and Latin America that countered the announcement by Premier Nikita Khrushchev that the Soviet Union would support “wars of national liberation” worldwide. The U.S.-sponsored program was intended to counter Communist threats to American interests and dominance in the region. The mutual cost-sharing capital investment program was designed to promote social, political, and economic reform in the region to reduce the latent causes for insurgency. The objectives seemed reasonable: annual increase of 2.5 percent in per capita income; establishment of democratic governments; elimination of adult illiteracy by 1970; price stability; land reform; more equitable income distribution; and economic and social planning. Latin American countries were to pledge a capital investment of \$80 billion over ten years in return for a U.S. agreement to supply or guarantee \$20 billion. Comprehensive national development plans



U.S. 1963 “Alliance for Progress” postage stamp

submitted by each country would be approved by an inter-American panel. Among the criteria for approval were land reform and new tax codes that demanded more from the wealthy. The reality was that almost all Latin American countries had accrued large international debts and service of those obligations used up the majority of U.S. aid. Reforms associated with the Alliance for Progress entailed monumental changes in social, political, and economic structures attendant to Latin American culture and way of life. The extent of social turmoil caused by the initiatives associated with the Alliance could be measured in the number of new military dictatorships



President John F. Kennedy (1961–1963) announcing the Alliance for Progress.

that emerged during the early 1960s—six. By 1963, it was so significant that military aid had tipped the scales against Alliance for Progress foreign aid.¹

1 “Alliance for Progress,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alliance_for_Progress.



Kaman H-43B helicopter



deHavilland L-20A Beaver (STOL-short takeoff/landing) aircraft

Cuba a Communist state and turned to the Soviet Union.

A “special impact shipment” of \$1.5 million dollars of military arms and equipment that included three U.S. Air Force Kaman H-43B medium helicopters and several deHavilland L-20A STOL (short take-off and landing) aircraft was delivered to Colombia in late 1961. The arms and equipment were to support military “public order” missions. The intent was to equip and mobilize the prototype “Lancero” force to elimi-

nate the quasi-guerrilla bandits, thereby reducing violence in the countryside. It was the first tangible U.S. commitment to Colombia in its struggle against the continued *Violencia*.¹² An evaluation of how this military aid had been applied to the Colombian Army’s counterinsurgency effort was the reason for a U.S. Army Special Warfare Center team visit.

Brigadier General William P. Yarborough, Commander, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center (SWC), Fort Bragg, North Carolina, accompanied by 7th Special Forces Group (SFG) commander, COL Clyde R. Russell, and LTC John T. Little, G-3, SWC, visited Colombia from 2–13 February 1962. General Yarborough’s mission was to assess the violence problem, evaluate the effectiveness of military counterinsurgency

efforts, and recommend appropriate mobile training teams (MTTs). The group traveled to four of the eight brigades to assess the situation. Their discoveries were not surprising.¹³

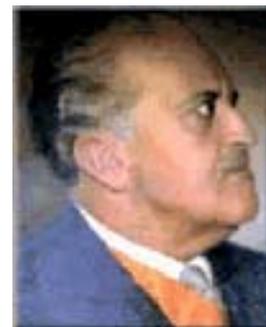
Yarborough reported that a lack of central planning, coordination, and intelligence dissemination and general fragmentation of resources were hindering the counterinsurgency campaign at all levels. Responsibilities had not been specified nor delineated between military and police forces. Civic action and psychological warfare activities were sporadic. The quasi-guerrilla bandit groups still had the initiative in rural areas. His findings,

based on the HUK counter-insurgency model, reiterated those of the 1959 State Department joint survey team. General Yarborough recommended the use of MTTs (mobile training teams) for psychological warfare, civic action, air support, and intelligence) and five Special Forces teams [operational detachment alphas (SF ODAs)] to work with the battalions of the four brigades most engaged with the bandits and quasi-guerrilla groups. Using the “*Lancero*” force to fight the insurgency was not mentioned. Resolution of the broader social, political, and economic problems was considered remote.¹⁴

The Yarborough team recommendations supported the Kennedy administration’s weighted emphasis on military assistance to Latin America versus socioeconomic aid through the Alliance for Progress. Though less focused on the broad nation-building elements, the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center report recommended professionalizing all security forces, collaborative intelligence sharing, and the development of rapid reaction forces. All were critical to the tactical and operational success of a military counterinsurgency campaign. Notably, Washington policymakers balked on sending Special Forces teams; Colombia’s problems would have Colombian solutions. MTTs were acceptable.¹⁵

Following the Yarborough visit, a Colombia Internal Defense Plan that focused on anti-violence was prepared. A draft plan, put together during May and June 1962, by a country team task force in the U.S. Embassy, Bogotá, integrated military efforts with the economic, social, and political aspects of the internal security problem. Ambassador Fulton Freeman hand-carried the plan to Washington for presentation at the White House. In August 1962, Ambassador Freeman presented the final recommendations and an implied offer of U.S. assistance to implement them to President León Valencia and his Minister of War as a formality. By then, General Alberto Ruíz Novoa, Commanding General of the Armed Forces (a former *Batallón Colombia* commander in Korea), Generals Rebeiz and Fajardo, Colonel Alvaro Valencia Tovar (a *Batallón Colombia* veteran), and a dozen other Army, Air Force, and National Police officers, with the assistance of a U.S. Army Counterinsurgency MTT, had prepared a military response to the violence problem. It was called *Plan Lazo* (“snare/noose/lasso”).¹⁶

Plan Lazo ultimately became the basis for additional counterinsurgency plans. It called for broad civic action programs within the violence zones and an improved antiviolence system that, coupled with military action, would target for elimination the leading bandit elements



President Guillermo León Valencia, 1962–1968



General Alberto Ruíz Novoa being awarded the U.S. Legion of Merit.



Brigadier General William P. Yarborough, Commander, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina

and quasi-guerrilla forces. The initial effort was to suppress. Follow-on operations would eliminate the insurgents. The primary components of *Plan Lazo* were:

1. Integrate the command structure of all forces engaged in public order missions to establish military responsibility for all operations;
2. Create more versatile and sophisticated tactical units capable of successful unconventional warfare operations;
3. Expand military public relations and psychological warfare units to improve civilian attitudes toward the military role in public order;
4. Employ the armed forces in civic action tasks that contribute to the economic development and social well-being of all Colombians, but especially those subjected to guerrilla-bandit activity.¹⁷

The Colombian Army began implementing elements of *Plan Lazo* in July 1962. One of primary objectives of *Plan Lazo* was “to eliminate the independent republics” created by leftist insurgents and bandit elements in the upper Magdalena Valley. The estimates for the lat-

ter were 1,600–2,000 men and 4,500 men for the former. There were also another 90–150 bandit gangs that numbered over 2,000 men who were primarily active in the coffee-rich Cauca Valley. A part of the ongoing military civic action programs was to target the enclaves of the bandit groups and communist insurgents. To free soldiers for the counterinsurgency missions, the Colombian Army organized civilian self-defense (*autodefensa*) units to improve popular support in the villages and to relieve the military of local patrolling and garrison duties. Radios linked the civil defense early warning networks to the security forces. From the inception of *Plan Lazo*, the counter-violence measures became more determined when seventy-five percent of the military was committed to the counterinsurgency campaign.¹⁸ This increased military involvement followed up on earlier efforts by President Lleras Camargo.

The Colombian president had a dual-track policy against the quasi-guerrilla bandit zones. While the civil administration attempted to encourage peasants in these zones to participate in rehabilitation programs, the military focused on eliminating the guerrilla leadership that resisted government efforts to gain local support. This was the *modus operandi* in 1961, when Manuel Marín (*Tirofijo*—“Sureshot”) and Communist Jacobo Arenas declared the separate “Republic of Marquetalia.” In early 1962, the military launched a largely unsuccessful attack against the area.¹⁹ It would be the *Plan Lazo* counterinsurgency strategy that “turned the tables” against Marín and Arenas later in the year. Meanwhile, the civic action track of Lleras Camargo’s policy did make progress.

The Lleras Camargo government had instituted rehabilitation commissions at the national level and community welfare teams (*Equipos Polivalentes*) in the countryside. The rehabilitation commissions worked to track civic action programs in the designated violent zones, to coordinate relief efforts (particularly for abandoned children), to assist the refugees in finding work, to solve land title issues, and promote colonization of unused land. At the community level, thirty welfare teams composed of a doctor, nurse, several agrarian technicians, an engi-



General locations of the “Seven Independent Republics” identified by the Colombian Asamblea (Legislature) in 1964 overlaid on a 1957 national map. The bandits were concentrated in northern Tolima department, west of Bogotá, and the coffee-rich Cauca Valley south of Cali.



Manuel Marín (*Tirofijo*—“Sureshot”) and Jacobo Arenas.



President John F. Kennedy with President Alberto Lleras Camargo at an Alliance for Progress school dedication in Bogotá.



Alliance for Progress-funded adobe brick-making factory.

neer, veterinarian, home economist, and sometimes a public administrator served as advisors to community development projects. Most were small-scale undertakings using agrarian credit assistance and co-op systems of local labor to build rural schools, brick factories, medical clinics, and establish “model farms.” These efforts produced the best propaganda and supported long-term administration objectives.²⁰ It was during Lleras Camargo’s administration that Colombian military interest in civic action began to grow.

LTG Alberto Ruíz Novoa strongly advocated using

military civic action in conjunction with counter-violence programs. Destroying guerrillas was simply not enough. The Colombian Army had to attack the social and economic causes as well as the political reasons for ongoing violence. Military efforts were sporadic until a U.S. Army Civic Action MTT was dispatched in April 1962. The MTT helped the Colombian military evaluate their short-range and long-term plans. Road construction and maintenance, health clinics, and communications networks became the core of the military program. Army infantry battalions, supported by combat engineers, dug wells, constructed potable water systems, established literacy programs, organized youth camps (somewhat like U.S. Civilian Conservation Corps camps during the Depression), and built rural schools.²¹ Progress continued in Colombia despite the abrupt change of U.S. focus caused by the Cuban Missile Crisis in the fall of 1962.

By 1964, with substantial U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funding, nineteen health care centers had been established. These were reaching approximately 100,000 people in those rural areas particularly impacted by the violence. The Air Force modi-

Cuban Missile Crisis

THE Cuban Missile Crisis was a Cold War confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States regarding the Russian deployment of intermediate range (1,000–2,000 km) ballistic missiles [IRBM, today medium range ballistic missiles (MRBM)] to Cuba. The Soviet SS-4 “Sandal” and SS-5 “Skean” missiles were ostensibly provided to protect Cuba from further attacks by the United States. Premier Nikita Khrushchev rationalized the action as equivalent to the U.S. placing weapons with nuclear warheads in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Turkey. The crisis began on 16 October 1962, when U.S. reconnaissance photos revealing Soviet nuclear missiles in multiple locations on the Caribbean island were shown to President Kennedy. U.S. armed forces were put on alert. In conjunction with the Organization of American States (OAS) a naval quarantine (blockade is an act of war) of Cuba was established. Latin American nations overwhelmingly supported the regional defense measure because the lethal range of the IRBMs in Cuba covered Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean states, and the northern third of South America. The crisis peaked when Cuba used a SA-2 “Guideline” surface-to-air missile (SAM) to shoot down an American U-2 aircraft on 27 October. On the following day Premier Khrushchev announced that he had ordered the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis period was the closest the two world superpowers came to escalating the Cold War into a nuclear war.¹

1 “Cuban Missile Crisis,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Missile_Crisis;
 “The Cuban Missile Crisis,” http://library.thinkquest.org/11046/recon/recon_room.html; “Cuba: Cuban Missile Crisis,” <http://www.fas.org/irp/imint/cuba.htm>.



Countries within range of the IRBM in Cuba.



Map of Cuba with missile locations depicted.

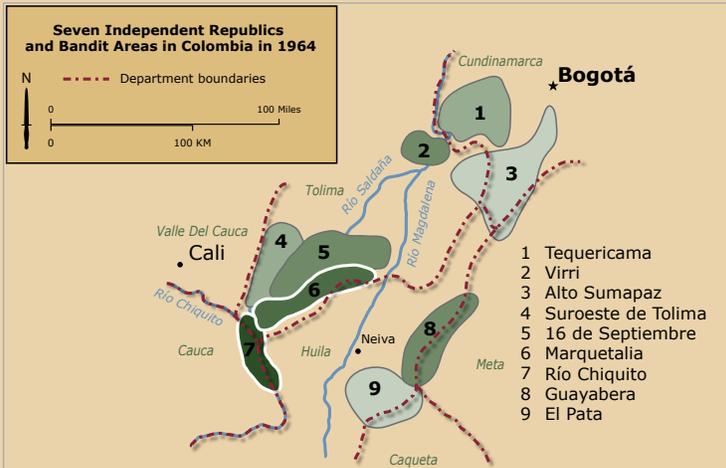
Independent Republics

ACCORDING to Jacobo Arenas, the Communist who shared the leadership of Marquetalia with Marín, the government attack to destroy the social and military infrastructure built-up under his leadership included the civilian bases of the rebel settlement. Arenas tried to create a form of primitive socialist commune in Marquetalia, based on the Paris Commune of 1871, and the 1949 Chinese revolution. It was described by him as a small socialist society or “commune” where not only peasant fighters and Communist Party ideologues lived, but also their families and friends. Everyone worked together as a community in Marquetalia for both common socioeconomic and military/defense purposes.¹



Colombian Communist Party symbol

1 Jacobo Arenas, *Diario de la resistencia de Marquetalia* (Spain: Ediciones Abejón Mono, 1972) cited in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plan_Lazo.



Seven Independent Republics and Bandit Areas.

fied one cargo plane to create a “Flying Dispensary” and the Navy installed two “Floating Dispensaries” along the Putumayo and Magdalena Rivers. The three mobile military health clinics enabled the military to reach colonists and indigenous populations in remote areas. All civic action projects were designed to improve internal security in the countryside. They reduced factors contributing to violence, opened areas to pacification by security forces, and



Colombian Navy floating riverine dispensary



Manuel Marín (second from left) and survivors of Marquetalia.

projected state power into rural regions long overlooked by successive governments in Bogotá.²² The continued success of civic actions to economically, socially, and politically reconstruct former violence zones after military pacification prompted the León Valencia government to launch a major offensive to eliminate the “independent republics.”

The assault began on 18 May 1964, when Colombian security forces launched *Operación MARQUETALIA* against the enclave of Marín and Arenas. It was a joint operation involving the Army, Air Force, and National Police that began with vast military and police encirclements of villages and towns. The “cordon, search, and destroy” tactics of counterinsurgency warfare were employed. Aerial bombing and artillery preceded the infantry clearing operations as police kept the villages surrounded until the Army forces had gained control.

Paez Indians had been recruited to serve as military scouts and guides in the mountainous terrain. More than 3,500 soldiers and policemen conducted simultaneous sweeps through “independent republic” villages in designated zones while 170 elite troops helicopter assaulted directly onto Marín’s hacienda redoubt. Marín lived on a commandeered 4,000 hectare (10,000 acre) *hacienda* (ranch) at the base of Mount Huila. Unfortunately, the local quasi-guerrilla intelligence network provided sufficient warning. Marín and most of his followers managed to escape the military and police cordons, fleeing to the neighboring “republic” of Río Chiquito.²³

Two months later, Marín and other quasi-guerrilla and bandit groups from the Tolima-Cauca-Huila border areas gathered for the First Southern Guerrilla Conference. After declaring themselves to be “victims of the policy of fire and sword proclaimed and carried out by the oligarchic usurpers of power,” the new coalition called for an “armed



FARC flag



Bandit William Aranguren, alias "Desquite" (Avenger), killed with Jacinto Cruz Usma, alias "Sangre Negra" (Black Blood) in northern Tolima by elements of Batallón Colombia in May 1964.



Colombian PSYOP "Most Wanted" poster for Jacinto Cruz Usma, alias "Sangre Negra," contained a sketch, physical description, reward, list of crimes committed, and government efforts to curb his activities in northern Tolima.²⁸

revolutionary struggle to win power." Composed originally of both communist and non-communist quasi-guerrilla and bandit groups, this southern guerrilla bloc, with some financial assistance, but more ideological support from the Colombian Communist Party, consolidated its armed elements into a unified group called the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia [*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)*].²⁴

The first two National Front governments considered the existence of insurgent base areas simply unacceptable. Both Lleras Camargo and Valencia pushed the Colombian armed forces to relentlessly hunt down the quasi-guerrilla and bandit groups in the countryside that proved unresponsive to rehabilitation. Seven violence zones were targeted in *Plan Lazo*: No. 1: Antioquia-Choco; No. 2: South Santander-Boyaca; No. 3: Caldas, Norte del Valle, Norte del Tolima; No. 4: Cundinamarca-Tolima (Sumapaz); No. 5: Tolima-Huila; No. 6: South Valle-North Cauca; and No. 7: Llanos Orientales (Ariari).²⁵

By 1966, the counterinsurgency strategy had eliminated the quasi-guerrilla and bandit sanctuaries, the "independent republics," and significantly reduced violence in the countryside to some semblance of stability. It was sufficient for the Colombian government to stop attributing internal problems to *La Violencia* after almost eighteen years.²⁶ Unfortunately, at a time when Colombian armed forces were capable of eliminating the remnants of most insurgent elements, government officials reclassified the threat as criminal activity.

The government began considering the threat in the countryside as a law and order issue. Once again, it became a police problem. The Colombian Army, having "eliminated" the guerrilla sanctuaries, the so-called "independent republics," gladly relinquished primary responsibility to the police. They resumed their traditional apolitical role to focus on national defense. The

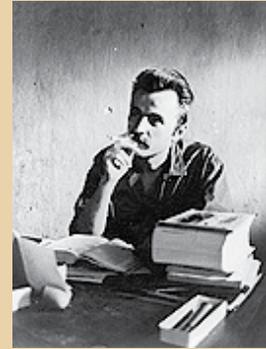
Operación MARQUETALIA

THE modern mythology of the FARC promotes the idea that *Operación MARQUETALIA* was a defeat for the Colombian state. Ernesto "Ché" Guevara, in reference to *MARQUETALIA*, declared that the existence of a "self-defense zone when it is neither the result of a total or partial military defeat of enemy forces, is no more than a colossus with feet of clay." Its recapture by security forces, "... will have a major effect: a great victory for the bourgeoisie, a great defeat for the Castro-Communist revolution." Responding to Guevara's assessment, Régis Debray wrote that the recapture of Marquetalia forced the FARC back to the first stage of guerrilla warfare.¹

1 Dennis M. Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue? A History of Counterinsurgency Policy in Colombia, 1958-1966* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2002), 29.



Ché Guevara



Régis Debray

failure of successive administrations (the National Front presidential power rotation agreement expired in 1974) to expand the police forces and build an effective state presence in rural areas enabled the FARC and other insurgent forces to regain momentum and expand their areas of domination of the countryside. Ultimately, the absence of law and order prompted the privatization of civil defense. Paramilitary forces sanctioned by the Bogotá government were regarded as extensions of the Colombian military in the rural areas.²⁷ Reciprocating exponentially to FARC methods of dominating the rural population, the paramilitaries ushered in *La Violencia II*.

In summary, the U.S. response to *La Violencia* in Colombia began with the Joint Survey Team Report provided by Hans Tofte in early 1960. The Joint Team recommended short-term security force solutions to quell the rural violence based on the counterinsurgency strategy successfully employed against the HUKs in the Philippines. These were integral to a long-term strategy that addressed social, economical, and political fixes that would reduce causes of popular unrest outside the cities of Colombia. The key element short-term was a mobile, well-equipped 1,000-man counter-guerrilla *Lancero* force, capable of rapidly exploiting actionable intelligence. As these *Lanceros* dealt with those causing the violence, the government would be rehabilitating formerly oppressed peoples through civic action and community welfare programs. Government psychological warfare capitalized on military civic action to improve their public image. The first \$1.5 million of U.S. military aid in 1961 was tied to public order.

BG Yarborough; LTC Little, the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center G-3; and COL Russell, the 7th Special Forces Group commander, went to Colombia in February 1962, to study the violence problem and evaluate the effectiveness of their counterinsurgency effort. Yarborough recommended that relationships between military and police be delineated, that military and intelligence services at all levels collaborate more, and that intelligence and counterintelligence programs be coordinated and standardized. These were deemed critical to a national counterinsurgency plan. The HUK counterinsurgency basic concept of operations was used by the team. To conduct antiviolence planning, identify requirements, and coordinate operations, Yarborough recommended that MTTs—psychological warfare, civic action, air support, and intelligence—and five Special Forces ODAs be sent to work with the Colombian military. The Special Warfare Center recommendations became part of Ambassador Freeman’s antiviolence plan and helped the Colombian generals preparing *Plan Lazo*.

National and community civic action in conjunction with aggressive counterinsurgency operations, fundamental tenets of *Plan Lazo*, enabled *La Violencia* to be brought to an end in 1966. Then, when Bogotá policymakers deemed that the problems in rural areas were caused by criminal activity, the Army reverted back to its traditional external defense role. Police in the countryside were not increased commensurately to fill the vacuum left by the Army. Over time, this enabled rural and urban insurgent movements to regroup and grow. The absence of law and order in the countryside fostered the privatization of self-defense forces to provide law and order vigilante style. This led to *La Violencia II*. ♣

Endnotes

- 1 Dennis M. Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue? A History of Counterinsurgency Policy in Colombia, 1958–1966* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2002), 4.
- 2 Department of State, The Colombia Survey Team, A Preliminary Report Summarizing Observations, Conclusions and Principal Recommendations with an Operational Analysis (Annex I) Concerning Proposed U.S. Overt and Covert Action, Field Survey Nov/Dec 1959 by Joint State/CIA/Defense Team dated 1 February 1960, Classified Files ARSOF Archives, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, “The Past as a Prologue?,” 6; Dennis M. Rempe, “Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics: U.S. Counter-insurgency Efforts in Colombia 1959–1965,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, VI:3 (Winter 1995), 2, <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/Colombia/smallwars.htm>. **The key to improvement of the situation in Colombia was determined to be President Lleras Carmargo because he alone commanded the respect and support of populace throughout the country.**
- 3 Department of State, The Colombia Survey Team, A Preliminary Report Summarizing Observations, Conclusions and Principal Recommendations with an Operational Analysis (Annex I) Concerning Proposed U.S. Overt and Covert Action, Nov–Dec 1959,” Lieutenant General William P. Yarborough Papers, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Preliminary Report of the Colombia Survey Team; “Colombia–Plan Lazo,” <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/Colombia/surveyteam>. **Two team members later wrote a book on counter guerrilla operations based on their World War II experiences in the Philippines, Napoleon D. Valeriano and Charles T.R. Bohannon, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations: The Philippine Experience* (NY: Praeger, 1962); Colonel Napoleon D. Valeriano was a 1937 graduate of the Philippine Constabulary Academy. Valeriano participated in the Bay of Pigs invasion. Major Charles T.R. Bohannon and Colonel Valeriano were guest speakers at a U.S. Army Special Warfare Center**

seminar on the HUK Campaign at Fort Bragg, NC, on 15 June 1961, prior to Brigadier General William P. Yarborough taking his team to Colombia in early February 1962. U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fort Bragg, NC.

- 4 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960.
- 5 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?*, 5.
- 6 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, “Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics,” 4.
- 7 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?*, 6; **The counter-guerrilla force, organization, tactics, and command structure that was recommended emulated that used by the government to crush the HUK insurgency in the Philippines.** Colonel Napoleon D. Valeriano and Lieutenant Colonel Charles T.R. Bohannon, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations: The Philippine Experience* (NY: Praeger, 1962), 255–69.
- 8 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?*, 6.
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- 10 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960.
- 11 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?*, 7.
- 12 *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study*, Department of State Airgram A-649, 6 April 1964, National Security File, Country File, “Colombia, Volume 1,” Box 14, Austin, TX: Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 15, cited in Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?*, 10; Rempe, “Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics,” 4. **The U.S. Air Force Kaman H-43B “Huskie” was used primarily for crash rescue and aircraft fire-fighting, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/hh-43.htm>. The principal mission of the U.S. Air Force L-20A was aerial evacuation of litter and ambulatory patients. Other missions included courier service, passenger transport, light cargo hauling, reconnaissance, rescue, and aerial photography. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/u-6.htm>**
- 13 U.S. Army Special Warfare Center Report, “Visit to Colombia, South America, by a Team from Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina,” dated 26 February 1962, hereafter cited as BG Yarborough Report 26 February 1962.
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- 17 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?*, 16; Rempe, “Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics,” 7.
- 18 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?*, 16–19; Rempe, “Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics,” 7–8, 19.
- 19 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?*, 27; Rempe, “Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics,” 12.
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- 28 Vasquez Franco, unpublished paper, 23; Ramsey, “Colombian Infantry,” 4; U.S. Department of State, Telegram 23361 from Bogotá, dated 28 April 1964, <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/Colombia/sangrenegra28apr1964.jpg>.