

PAZ Y SEGURIDAD

THE LATIN AMERICAN PRESENCE IN POST-CONFLICT COLOMBIA

Monica Hirst / Bruno Dalponte

April 2021



The text analyzes Latin American participation in the United Nations Mission in Colombia (MNUC), identifying and evaluating its main characteristics between December 2016 and June/July 2017, the stage with the greatest deployment and participation of regional actors, both those belonging to military and security forces and civilian volunteers.



The document seeks to identify, understand, and analyze narratives in which a certain consensus was found regarding the development of peace-related actions in Colombia and the degrees of commitment shown by the parties.

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS	6
3	HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE CONFLICT	8
4	THE REGIONAL PRISM	10
5	BETWEEN PLOTS AND PREPARATIONS	12
5.1	A mission with meaning and uniqueness.....	15
6	THE UNMC ON TRACK	20
6.1	Paying the dues.....	20
6.2	The design.....	21
6.3	The trust factor.....	26
6.4	The gender agenda	27
7	THE CHALLENGES AHEAD	32
	CONCLUSION	35
	PRIMARY SOURCES	38
	REFERENCES	39
	ACRONYMS	43

1

INTRODUCTION¹

On Friday, September 25, 2020, the United Nations (UN) Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 2545/20², extending the mandate of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia for one year. This enabled this mission's fourth year of work, which in turn is a continuation of the United Nations Mission in Colombia (UNMC), established in 2016³ to coordinate, monitor, and verify the implementation of the Final Agreement to End the Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace (hereinafter the peace agreement or the final agreement) between the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP).

It is essential to distinguish between the mandate granted by the Security Council to the UNMC in January 2016, approving a first stage of UN involvement in the implementation of the peace agreement, and that granted to the UN Verification Mission in Colombia from July 2017 onwards, ushering the second stage of the peace process. Despite both missions being assigned coordination, facilitation, and verification tasks in Colombia,

they are distinct in terms of their objectives and planned activities. While the UNMC was dedicated to facilitating the implementation of actions necessary to secure the end of hostilities and foster the processes of demobilization, surrendering of arms, and registration of FARC-EP combatants; the Verification Mission contributes to the rapprochement between the parties and supports the process former combatants' reintegration, verifying the government provides the guarantees promised for their political, economic, and social reinsertion. Combined, the two missions seek to advance the building of mutual trust among the actors involved and, consequently, demonstrate the social and political viability of a lasting peace in Colombia. Yet, the challenges faced by either would also put to a test the credibility of the commitments made by the parties.

This paper analyzes the Latin American participation in the UNMC, identifying and evaluating its most relevant characteristics during the December 2016 - June/July 2017⁴ period. This stage saw the largest deployment and participation of regional actors in post-conflict Colombia, both by military/security forces and by civilian volunteers. Chapter 3, section 1.3 of the peace agreement established that the UNMC should be integrated mostly by Latin American personnel, entrusting the region with a leadership role in coordinating the actions of the Tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM), formed by the UN, the Colombian government,

1 The research project from which this paper is derived was funded by the 2019 IPRAF (International Peace Research Association Foundation) Peace Research Grant program. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Sabina Frederic to this research project, who made crucial contributions in the initial design, planning, and fieldwork stages. Despite leaving the project to accept the position of Minister of Security in Argentina, her participation plays a central role in the definition of several lines of work explored here. Special thanks to Mariano Aguirre for his generous recommendations and suggestions during the project's formulation and implementation stages. The arguments and conclusions in this document are the authors' sole responsibility.

2 [http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2545\(2020\)](http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2545(2020))

3 [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2261\(2016\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2261(2016))

4 While the FARC-EP declared a unilateral ceasefire since mid-December 2014, the Colombian government joined this measure only towards the end of August 2016, one month before the final agreement was signed and the creation of the UNMC was approved. Further details on the chronology of events leading up to the actual deployment of the UNMC can be found at: <https://unmc.unmissions.org/cronologia-0>

and the FARC-EP. According to the agreement, representatives from each of these pillars would partake in all decisions, from day-to-day issues in the campsites to high-level definitions adopted in Bogotá.

At first, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) granted the regional institutional stamp for the presence of Latin American military/police contingents, contributing to secure support from across the region. Southern Cone countries sent the largest contingents and assumed key coordination roles in the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) process⁵. In addition, a relevant number of civilians recruited by the UN, mainly Latin American women -many of whom are nationals of Colombia's neighboring countries-, voluntarily joined the UNMC to work as part of the MVM's international component.

After overcoming initial difficulties, the results achieved in the first phase were remarkably positive. By August 2017, the UNMC had already received, registered, categorized, and stored all the weapons declared by the FARC-EP, both those left in the campsites and those securely stashed in remote areas. According to recent

data, an average of 1.3 weapons have been laid down for each demobilized combatant, a rate that places the Colombian peace process among the four most successful in the world in the last three decades, surpassed only by the cases of Serbia, Mozambique, and Cambodia (Gentes del Común 2020, p. 45). Moreover, the final report of the MVM declares the process of laying down arms successfully concluded (MVM, 2017, p. 55).

This research sought to produce a nuanced analysis of the participation of regional actors in the UNMC, considering both the role of the military and security forces deployed, as well as that of civilian volunteers. We trace continuities with respect to previous Latin American participation in UN missions -supporting the notion of a regional trajectory in peace processes⁶-, but also identify relevant specificities to the Colombian case. We seek to identify and analyze how these influenced the region's contributions to the implementation of the peace agreement, something that was not only understood as a milestone for Colombian society but also as an indispensable step in furthering the built-up of a regional commitment to peace and stability.

5 The FARC-EP have been adamant in maintaining the use of a specific lexicon during the peace process. A clear example of this can be seen in its refusal to speak of "disarmament," preferring instead the concept of "laying down arms." The main pillar of this distinction lies in the voluntary nature of the participation inferred in the second term, contrasting with the underlying tone of military defeat generally associated with the first. Similarly, they preferred to use the notion of "reincorporation" instead of the term "reintegration," seeking to differentiate this experience from previous processes (Segura and Stein, 2019, p. 1). In this article, the terms preferred by the FARC-EP will be used interchangeably with the concepts more traditionally associated with the acronym DDR, since they are part of the jargon used in the United Nations missions and in the field of international security.

6 Frederic & Hirst (2016), Hirst (2017), Dalponte (2019), Frederic (2020).

2

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although the proposed analysis seeks to develop an interpretative framework applicable to the experiences of different Latin American countries, the restrictions imposed on international mobility in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic led our fieldwork to focus primarily on Argentina and Uruguay. Together, these two countries' contributions of military and security personnel amount to about 30% of the total deployed in the mission, and some of their representatives had key leadership and coordination roles. We do acknowledge that the absence or under-representation of verifiers from other countries –such as Chile and Paraguay– may introduce biases to the information obtained. In order to account for this issue and better contextualize the testimonies collected, we complement the information obtained from the above sources with interviews to Colombian military/security forces, Latin American authorities of the UNMC, and civilian volunteers, as well as with the available documentary sources directly or indirectly related to the mission in Colombia.

The main instrument used for data collection was face-to-face in-depth interviews with MVM participants, as well as with UN officials and members of the Latin American diplomatic corps. Due to restrictions on travel and meetings imposed during 2020, video conference interviews were used whenever the collection of testimonies needed to be expanded or when the information base needed supplementing. In total, forty-five interviews were conducted, providing insights into the individual and collective experiences of Latin American participants in the UNMC. With few exceptions, the identity of the interviewees is kept in anonymity. On the one hand, the narratives we seek to identify and analyze arise from the consideration of the interviews as a whole, not from individual testimonies. On the other hand, maintaining anonymity was an important condition for accessing

sensitive information during the interviews. The textual reproduction of selected passages from the testimonies provided by the interviewees was reserved for instances in which the chosen expressions would allow access to a better understanding of their perceptions and emotions, crystallize the dominant narrative clearly and directly, or test the hypotheses guiding this research.

The research questions that defined the design of the project and field work are related to the individual and collective experience of members of the military and security forces. We seek to investigate the influence previous training and experiences in international deployments had on the Latin American participation in the UNMC, as well as the adaptations necessary to the Colombian context and the lessons learnt during this mission. Semi-structured interviews were used in order to provide researchers with the ability to guide the central themes to be addressed, while allowing each interviewee to interpret and answer the questions as he/she thought was most relevant. This allowed us to minimize the risk of leading questions and identify the emergence of common narratives among the various mission participants –as well as some interesting differences among them.

The inclusion in the sample of UN-recruited female civilian volunteers would seem dissonant with this focus on the culture and experiences of military/security forces, and certainly their career paths differ considerably. However, it is also true that the female volunteers represented a specialized body with extensive training, backgrounds within the UN system in Latin America, and direct experience in dealing with some of the issues faced during the DDR process. In this sense, their trajectories and perspectives are useful to critically address peace and security agendas in the non-governmental spheres of

Latin American multilateral governance, providing perspectives that complement and sometimes question the actors socialized in state institutions.

In addition to the limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, it is also important to acknowledge the temporary gap in our fieldwork. With the exception of UN officials and Colombian military/security forces, testimonies were not collected in the field of operations. Most of the verifiers were interviewed between three and eighteen months after their return to their home countries. Still, we consider whatever methodological shortcomings resulting from the timespan of the fieldwork to be outweighed by the chance to expand the universe of testimonies collected and to incorporate a sense of perspective in the evaluations made by the verifiers.

In summary, we have sought to identify narratives from military and civilian actors regarding their experiences

in the UNMC, paying particular attention to their personal perceptions of the first mission, the problems and challenges faced, the contrasts and similarities with previous international deployments, the usefulness of this previous experience –whether their own or received– in their daily work in Colombia, and the lessons learnt. In view of the central role given to gender considerations throughout the peace agreement, we paid special attention to this topic. Inquiring into the day-to-day experiences of those who took part in moving forward this fragile, complex, and uncertain peace process, the identification and analysis of differentiated male and female prisms allows to shed light on aspects of international missions not commonly explored. This also allows to identify some of the tensions that emerged between the objectives set out in the peace agreement, the rules governing this type of international deployment, and the concrete development of the DDR process in Colombia.

3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE CONFLICT

With no intent to review the vast literature on the history of the Colombian conflict, this section seeks only to list some of its most relevant milestones and processes in order to provide analytical density in the understanding of the context in which the UNMC was deployed.

Although its origins are often traced to the aftermath of *the violence*⁷, the confrontation between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP has mutated countless times through the last 52 years, making this conflict one of the nodal processes of recent Colombian and Latin American history. Since the 1990s, notable changes have taken place regarding the internationalization of the conflict, whose complexity increased as new actors became involved, leading to varying alliances and the intertwining of political and economic interests, as well as to new developments in the territorial scope of the conflict inside and outside Colombia. A significant part of such changes can be attributed to the incorporation of international cocaine hydrochloride trafficking into the equation of the conflict, a business that has provided enormous volumes of resources to a variety of actors, reducing the weight of political-ideological identities, fostering new instances of conflict and cooperation, and allowing them to finance increasing levels of violence in their quest to maintain control over production territories, trafficking routes, and destination markets (Tokatlian, 2000).

In order to attract higher levels of external military cooperation and international political legitimization for

counterinsurgency actions, successive Colombian governments framed the conflict as part of different processes of eminently international characteristics (Tickner, 2007). This strategy sought primarily to discursively align the conflict with the dominant securitization agendas of the U.S.' international security concerns and strategies. In this way, a clearly domestic conflict with deep historical, social, political, and economic roots specific to Colombia was successfully linked to two of the main US-driven securitization agendas: drug trafficking, and terrorism (Borda Guzmán, 2012).

This internationalization did not seek to increase the regional or global strategic relevance of the Colombian conflict *per se*, nor to attract the cooperation of the international community as a whole. Instead, the objective was to commit the largest global power to its resolution by military means, thus gaining external legitimacy for the use of extraordinary force. Such strategy was decisive in weakening the territorial and military positions of the FARC-EP, as well as those of other insurgent groups like the National Liberation Army (ELN), but also in undermining their already weakened social legitimacy. Although the various reports of abuses in the use of force and systematic human rights violations by state forces generated political costs and show the pyrrhic nature of the military victory⁸, the position of strength obtained by the govern-

7 Period of approximately ten years in which the political confrontation between liberals and conservatives became particularly bloody after the assassination of the presidential candidate and liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, in April 1948. This conflict led to the loss of nearly 200,000 lives.

8 A good example of this is the case known as "false positives." According to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), created by the peace agreement, 6,402 civilians killed by the Colombian Armed Forces in the 2002-2006 period have been reported to date. Given the incentives offered by the State to its armed forces and a widespread *laissez faire* approach to their use of lethal force, these civilian victims were passed as "guerrillas killed in combat" in order to obtain economic benefits (JEP, 2021a).

ment certainly is one of the conditions that ensured the FARC-EP's commitment to the ceasefire and the beginning of peace negotiations during the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018).

According to data provided by the *¡Basta Ya!* report (GMH, 2013), in the period 1958-2021 the conflict in Colombia caused the death of more than 220,000 people and the displacement of close to 5.7 million, as well as broadly affecting over 11 million Colombians directly or

indirectly. At the time the final agreement was signed, in 2016, and the MVM was activated, this conflict was recognized as one of the longest-running in the world, and certainly one of the most tragic and relevant to the region since the Chaco war⁹. Its humanitarian and political effects clearly go beyond Colombian borders, being the cause of recurrent externalities and spillovers that negatively affected peace and stability in the region (Ramírez, 2017).

9 The last large-scale interstate war between actors in the region, in which Bolivia and Paraguay clashed from June 1932 to June 1935, leaving more than 90,000 dead between the two sides. Although the origins and nature of this confrontation are clearly different from those of the domestic conflict in Colombia, the scale of the impact that the latter has had is of such dimensions that (in the Latin American region) it is comparable only to a traditional war.

4

THE REGIONAL PRISM

This research operates on the premise that the UNMC adds to the trajectory of experiences lived, accumulated, and institutionalized by Latin American actors through their participation in UN missions –particularly in Central America and Haiti–, which in turn exert a strong influence on the region's approach to this type of multilateral peace governance efforts (Hirst, 2017). The institutionalization of these past experiences is materialized in the approaches designed to preparing those who will participate in international missions –particularly, the curricular design of the courses and the training provided–, thus contributing to the construction of trajectories and styles of action that are reproduced over time. Since the mid-1990s, there has also been an increasing level of regional cooperation and coordination for the exchange of experiences, incorporation of best practices, and development of joint training courses. Some initial experiences of creating and operating joint peace initiatives are already underway¹⁰, although this is still a recent and limited process. The continuity of this sort of socialization in Latin America has contributed to the development of a “regional approach” based on shared trajectories.

Latin American participation in peacekeeping missions is surely subordinated to the norms, procedures, and expectations specified in by UNSC mandates for each mission. However, the performance of the region in the various missions in Latin America and the Caribbean since the end of the Cold War allows for the identification of certain features and approaches, hinting at

the existence of a “Latin American style” in the matter (Sotomayor Velázquez, 2013). The steady growth in Latin American participation in peacekeeping missions over the past three decades has also led to increasing levels of mutual trust, regional cooperation, and –albeit still embryonic– some interoperability. In fact, Latin American cooperation in peace operations has been a cumulative process, nurtured by a sequence of relevant experiences and events. Although there is a broad consensus in the literature on the central role of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (Minustah) in this trajectory (Frederic & Hirst, 2016), this experience is part of a broader trajectory, in which legacies, lessons learnt, institutionalized practices, and memory (collective and individual) show points of communication. This notion of continuity is relevant in the understanding of Latin American involvement in Colombia. At the same time, there are notorious differences between the UNMC and past Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs). This was a political mission and represented the first experience of a Latin American-led DDR process, though the performance of the regional forces was strongly influenced by preceding PKO experiences.

The expansion of rules of engagement incorporated by UN missions are the result of global learning and socialization processes (Autesserre, 2014). However, we understand that this has had differentiated impacts on the military and security forces deployed in the field, largely due to the distinct Foreign Policy definitions, institutional cultures, informal procedures, and practices within which they are socialized. Such differences have been accounted for in our interpretation of the testimonies and events. Our starting point in this regard is the notion that, despite following a shared framework of international norms and standards, each intervening actor will

10 For example, the Argentine-Chilean Binational Peace Force “Cruz del Sur”, and the existing agreement for the creation of an Argentine-Peruvian Combined Peace Force, the Binational Company of Engineers “Libertador Don José de San Martín.”

likely understand the mission in specific ways, and even present political objections to it (Acharya, 2011).

Research on the peculiarities of Latin American participation in the UNMC thus required both identifying the context and the specific objectives for which this mission was designed, as well as contrasting it with institutionalized trajectories and the personal experiences of those in the field. Taking all this into consideration makes it possible to recognize a Latin American style in multilateral peace support missions, as well as the adaptations demanded by the specific conditions of the Colombian post-conflict context. In order to evaluate the functioning of the UNMC, and hopefully contribute to the effective incorporation of this experience into the regional *acquis*, it is crucial to acknowledge the tensions that inevitably arise in such contexts between the rules and standards established by the UN; the institutional

trajectories of the participating countries; the personal trajectories of the military and security forces deployed; and, the pressures that the specific context exerts on the design and implementation of a mission.

While focusing on sociocultural structures and cognitive platforms that guide the behavior of agents in the field, our analysis makes use of a methodological and conceptual exchange between the prisms provided by anthropology and military/security studies. Without resorting to a strict anthropological approach, we use some of the tools devised for ethnographic studies in the recollection and interpretation of information, giving preeminence to the contextual understanding of social processes and the role of human agency. We also make use of the anthropological aim to build an empathetic understanding of and connection with those whose actions are at the center of our research (Krause, 2021).

5

BETWEEN PLOTS AND PREPARATIONS

After almost five years of progress and setbacks, the final agreement was signed in the city of Bogotá in December 2016¹¹. Although negotiations to advance a peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP began in 2012, they moved forward sluggishly. In part, such delays were due to the fact that negotiations were governed by the principle of *single undertaking*¹² (Cortés & Millán, 2019). Other factors contributing to the tortuous progress of negotiations were the deep distrust between the parties, and the presence of thorough domestic opposition to a peace agreement (spearheaded by former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez). The late incorporation of women negotiators, who promoted the creation of a Gender Subcommittee to facilitate the incorporation of a gender agenda as a cross-cutting element in the agreement, also delayed negotiations (Fernández Matos & González Martínez, 2019, p. 116).

The Colombian peace negotiations became a relevant international process. Politically and diplomatically, negotiations were backed by outstanding regional and global political actors. In the Ibero-American sphere, Felipe González (Spain) and José “Pepe” Mujica (Uru-

guay)¹³ were openly supportive to the Latin American participation in the MVM. The UN and CELAC became institutional pillars that gave support to the negotiations of the peace agreement and its effective implementation.

The Cuban and Norwegian governments were essential throughout the process, mediating in Oslo and Havana, and becoming the guarantors of the final agreement. Chile and Venezuela were designated observers throughout the negotiations. The Norwegian government’s role was also crucial in training many of the MVM’s international participants, both civilian and military. Cuba was of utmost importance in the process of mutual trust-building, encouraging the FARC-EP to engage in peace negotiations from 2012 onwards, hosting the negotiations, and contributing personnel to the UNMC¹⁴. Granting such a prominent role to Cuba was seen as a controversial element in Colombia, particularly among the political elites and the officers of the Armed Forces. However, several interviewees have sustained that Cuban personnel played a positive role appeasing the demobilized FARC-EP combatants and bringing them to trust both the peace process and the Colombian Armed Forces. One of the Argentine verifiers interviewed stated that “the Cuban presence helped to place ideology aside and highlight the need for discipline, order, and human relations,” putting the existing affinity between

11 The final agreement consists of six chapters: 1) Comprehensive rural reform; 2) Democratic opening to build peace; 3) Definitive bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities and laying down of arms; 4) Solution to the problem of illicit drugs; 5) Comprehensive system of truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition; 6) Implementation, verification, and endorsement. Section 3.1.3 of the agreement establishes the tripartite MVM as a means to legitimize and advance the implementation of the agreement, which would be coordinated by the UN.

12 Commonly used in international trade negotiations (<https://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2008/Wolfe.pdf>), this principle implies that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”.

13 Uruguay had a prominent position in the areas of regional and global governance during this period, as it was simultaneously in charge of chairing the UN Security Council, the *pro tempore* leadership of Unasur, and the executive direction of CELAC.

14 This was the first time Cuba contributed military and/or security personnel to an international UN mission.

Cubans and FARC-EP¹⁵ to work for the benefit of the peace agreement.

As mentioned above, one of the demands presented by the FARC-EP was that the international component of the MVM should primarily be formed by Latin American countries. It was also agreed to assign the international component a coordinating role in the tripartite mechanism. This gave Latin Americans a central role in the first stage of the UNMC. The main intention was, to facilitate a positive predisposition by local actors and foster the building of trust with the mission. Besides, the agreement established that the MVM would make efforts to secure a balanced gender distribution in the contingents assigned to the mission, so as to keep a parity with the gender composition of the FARC-EP. This was a clause that would present difficulties to comply with on the part of most of the Latin American governments.

The UNMC was approved by the UN Security Council on January 25, 2016 (UNSC Res. 2261), in response to the Colombian government's request (S/2016/53), following the provisions of chapter 3 of the peace agreement. The responsibilities and scope of this mission would not resemble those of PKOs, characterized by the presence of armed military and/or security forces. Instead, the mandate (UNSC Res. 2307)¹⁶ established that the UNMC would be coordinated by the Department of Political Affairs, and would therefore follow the guidelines established for Special Political Missions (SPM). Among other characteristics specific to this type of mission, personnel deployed do not carry weapons nor wear military/security uniforms. The Colombian government played an active role in tailoring the specifications of the mission, thus indicating the relevant red lines in order to ensure

the assistance provided did not over extend beyond the responsibilities and duties explicitly agreed.

The support provided by the region and various countries of the international community can also be seen in the commitment shown by key figures, such as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and high-profile diplomats like Jean Arnault¹⁷. Likewise, long-standing and prestigious military officers were entrusted with command roles, with General Javier Pérez Aquino (Chief Observer of the UNMC)¹⁸ and Colonel Fernando Fleitas (Operations Coordinator of the MVM)¹⁹ heading the mission.

The peace agreement faced a highly uncertain scenario following the initial international euphoria, despite the speedy UNMC's approval (Aguirre, 2016). Unexpectedly, the non-binding plebiscite promoted by Juan Manuel Santos, held on October 2, 2016, granted a political victory to those who rejected the agreement. Though its objective was to respond to pressure from sectors led by Álvaro Uribe Vélez and strengthen the democratic credentials of the peace accord, the strategy failed. The rejection of the peace agreement by the population and the government's initial doubts about the way forward after the defeat of the referendum led to a delay in UNMC deployment. This, in turn, delayed the allocation and distribution of the necessary resources for the construction of the campsites and areas in which the

15 This tie came as a surprise to some members of the UNMC less knowledgeable about FARC-EP issues and history, but was quickly normalized. One of the interviewees expressed this very well, stating, "I realized that they were the same, but without a "C." In Cuba, the military forces are called the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR)."

16 This mandate followed the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his "Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the UNMC" (S/2016/729), submitted on August 18, 2016.

17 Delegate of the UN Secretary-General to the peace negotiations (August 2015-April 2016) and head of the UNMC (May 2016-September 2017). Previously, Arnault was mediator and head of mission in Guatemala, as well as a member of the Independent High-Level Panel on PKO. His reflections on peace processes and verification tasks conducted by the UN (Arnault, 2006).

18 His experiences as a military observer includes his deployment with the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (Unikom). After his experience in Colombia, he assumed the coordination of the Joint Technical Group for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) in the Republic of Mozambique, in 2018.

19 One of the highest-ranking military officers in Uruguay, with deployment experience in numerous UN missions, including Western Sahara (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara: Minurso), Sierra Leone (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone: Unamsil), and Congo (United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Monusco).

demobilized members of the FARC-EP would reside once they had laid down their arms. After intense negotiations between the parties, a new text for the agreement was unanimously accepted by both chambers of the Congress of the Republic²⁰ on November 30, 2016.

In this context, some Latin American governments initially resisted the idea of sending military and security personnel to fulfill the role of unarmed verifiers, considering that the uncertain context in which they were to perform involved two heavily armed factions that failed to create stable levels of trust. Various interviews reveal that, at first, these conditions became a source of anxiety for the deployed military and police personnel, especially due to their lack of uniforms and armament, a condition that impeded them from revealing their real professional identities. It is indicative of the impact these conditions had on the perception of the UNMC by local actors that the political successors of the FARC-EP refer to the international component of the MVM as “civilians” (Gentes del Común 2020, p. 20). In fact, the body of verifiers was perceived by local counterparts as a single group. While daily interaction eventually allowed to establish points of contact with local actors, facilitating the establishment of mutual respect and dialogue, being on unequal footing with armed actors was undoubtedly a source of anxiety for the mission’s military/police members.²¹

Uncertainty in Colombia contributed to the multiple difficulties faced in making the mission operational, and transformed the facilitation of mutual understandings and trust into the *leit motiv* of the daily work done by the MVM’s international component. Building trust was understood to be the single most relevant aspect to work on in order to advance the implementation of the peace agreement.

Hence, the tripartite structure of the MVM was a central element in achieving the complex and ambitious objectives set by peace process. Its inclusion in the agreement took definitive form in the final stages of negotiations, when implementation measures were addressed in articles 3.1 and 3.2. During this first mission, the MVM played an important trust-building role, allowing progress to be made regardless of the difficulties encountered. Despite the resentment towards former FARC-EP combatants, Colombian military interviewed recognized that the negotiation of peace as a Colombian process was of great importance to assure a sense of sovereignty. A Colombian military officer identified with the option of peace stated:

Thanks to the empathy [that developed] between ex-combatants and the military, we were able to move forward with a grassroots idea that this was a Colombian solution for Colombians...[Including the international component] was seen as an opportunity for the UN to do things right in Colombia.²²

In turn, according to the interpretation of one of the mission’s senior officials:

The implementation of the ceasefire was incredible, and the tripartite mechanism was a crucial element in its success. All the circumstances at play operated to limit its success. We are talking about a war that lasted fifty-five years [...] the tripartite mechanism was devised in Colombia. The Colombians –government and FARC-EP– were the ones who thought of it and agreed to put it into practice with the agreements reached in Cuba. I believe this should be recognized as a well put together formula. It was also very smart of President Santos to involve the Colombian military from the beginning. Discussions on the Ceasefire Committee first included Colombian ex-combatants and military, who were accompanied in a second instance by the UN and special verifiers.

The UNMC was ambitious in the articulation of its multiple tasks considering the challenges it faced in view

20 The legislators of the opposition line followed the call of Álvaro Uribe Vélez not to vote. They sought to demonstrate their disagreement with the modifications to the text, seen as insufficient and superficial, and their disagreement with the decision to “disregard the will of the people.”

21 The political party Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (Farc), renamed Gentes del Común.

22 All quotes included are own translations of testimonies originally in Spanish.

of the long and complex history of the Colombian conflict. In addition to the specifications put forward by the Colombian government, it was essential for the mission's success that its actions be based on a dialogue between all the parties involved. A significant amount of challenges faced by the international component in the initial stages of field operations stemmed from the effort necessary to fit in this dialogue. According to Chief Observer General Javier Pérez Aquino, negotiating and coordinating tasks on a tripartite basis entailed major differences and strong limitations with respect to PKOs. However, Gen. Pérez Aquino also highlighted that, despite the difficulties posed by the MVM's decision-making scheme, the logic of its design and the objectives pursued merited the effort:

All three parties had equal voice. There were no concessions of sovereignty. Everything was done by consensus, something very difficult that implied all incidents had to be resolved through negotiation processes. But this led to a mutual understanding based on trust.

5.1 A MISSION WITH MEANING AND UNIQUENESS

From the very beginning, the UNMC faced two major challenges: first, it had to establish a clear distinction between this effort and the preceding UN involvement in frustrated efforts to promote peace negotiations during

Photo 1

**Preparations for the FARC-EP's last anniversary event as a guerrilla force.
May 27, 2017. La Variante, Tumaco, Department of Nariño.**



Source: José Luis Guzmán.

de 1990s, particularly those sought during President Andrés Pastrana's administration (1998-2002). Due to ambiguity in its developments and lack of results, the image of the UN as a peace facilitator was heavily damaged in Colombia (Ramírez Ocampo, 2004, p. 76; Segura & Mechoulam, 2017, p. 7). Second, as already mentioned, the mandate approved by the UNSC did not follow the prescriptions of a traditional PKO, conditioning and curbing the tasks the mission could carry out. The option for a Political Mission met the apprehension of the Colombian government regarding the "renouncement of national sovereignty." It was essential to avoid the presence of blue helmets, which would represent a *de facto* recognition of the Colombian state's inability to deal with its peace and conflict agenda (bringing it dangerously close to the category of "failed state") and the need to establish a form of international tutelage.

Notwithstanding, addressing the Colombian government's concerns was no easy task. The mission's recruitment process began once the UN Security Council agreed on the creation of the UNMC (UNSC Res. 2261) and established its size and responsibilities (UNSC Res. 2307). While civilian personnel were recruited directly by the UN, military and security forces were provided by the countries interested in participating in the mission based on the foreign policy orientations of each case. As a result, the military and police verifiers provided belonged to the segments prepared for PKOs, having received courses in Training Centers specifically designed for the training of blue helmets. In addition, many of them had already been deployed in previous PKOs. This led to a steep learning curve with respect to the mission's scope, objectives, and real conditions, requiring rapid adaptation to the international component of the MVM once arriving in Colombia.

As a first step in Bogotá, all verifiers were required to participate in a two-week induction course organized by the UNMC and the Colombian government, with Norwegian assistance. In these courses, participants (military, security forces, and civilian volunteers) received lectures on the history of the Colombian conflict, as well as information on particular aspects of the social, economic, and cultural realities of the country, in addition to security measures training. The interviews conducted

reveal that, although the courses were useful in developing a shared basis of knowledge necessary to operate in the context, it was the direct contact with reality on the ground that allowed a better understanding of the complexities their tasks involved. The lack of knowledge of the Colombian context led many of the interviewees to be surprised to find themselves, once in Colombia, face to face with "real guerrilla forces" Military, gendarmes, and police officers who participated in the mission expressed surprise as they learnt about the complex and violent history of Colombia, noting the lack of information they had at the time they applied to the mission..

Military verifiers mentioned their surprise at the levels of poverty and social fragmentation they saw in Colombia, something they believed was no longer part of Latin American reality:

The concept of "campesino" is unknown to us. Poverty in the countryside is a cause of their marginalization. It is a very primitive reality, which has not been seen in Argentina for at least eighty years.

In addition, the fragility of the country's political and social cohesion was palpable from the very beginning, and particularly so with regards to the peace agreement, leading verifiers to understand how uncertain and incomplete the peace process still was despite its evident relevance.

Verifiers interviewed almost unanimously highlighted the stateless conditions they came across, the lack of, services, and public goods -education, health, and justice systems, as well as basic infrastructure- in isolated areas far from large urban centers. In several cases, they expressed their surprise over the "absence of the State", converging with the analyses of many academics (Leal Buitrago, 2017, p. 35-36) and social actors involved in the peace process (Naucke, 2017, p. 462-463). These appraisals led to a certain degree of understanding, and even empathy, towards the rebel groups in rural areas of the country, recognizing the organizational and managerial responsibilities they had assumed in such deprived contexts. They also highlighted their astonishment at the "pro-military" and, to a lesser extent, "pro-guerrilla" stances eventually shared in local communities. A high

level of tolerance towards violence was noted as well; the verifiers highlighted the apparent social acceptance of use of force to address and settle conflicts.

As already underscored, despite the political nature of the mission, the military and security forces participating in the MVM had training based on experiences in peace operations²³. Interviews with members of the Argentine and Uruguayan contingents reinforced this disconnect: “The preparation for the mission followed the requirements of a typical operation that concentrated its responsibilities on peacekeeping, while the tasks in Colombia were conducted according to the rules of political missions.”²⁴

In fact, the distinctions between peace operations and political missions were not always clear to the verifiers.

In the Argentine case, for example, the personnel sent by the Armed Forces and the National Gendarmerie received international training and certifications in the training centers specially created to professionalize the Argentine participation in PKO (Caecopaz²⁵ and Cencapopaz²⁶, respectively). Most interviewees perceived a sense of continuity between the expectations for the mission Colombia and previous participations in other UN missions (missions in Kosovo, Guatemala, Haiti, and Cyprus being the most frequently cited). From the point of view of Latin American military forces, the mission in Colombia had similarities with previous missions in the region, particularly Minusal (United Nations Mission in El Salvador), Minigua (United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala), and Minustah (United Nations Stabiliza-

tion Mission in Haiti), as well as operations outside Latin America, such as Untac (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) and Monusco.

In the case of the Argentine Gendarmerie, its hybrid nature –being a militarized security force– provided a degree of versatility to its members. According to their own testimonies and those of members of other forces, the *gendarmes* felt they had sufficient tools to build dialogue, both with the Armed Forces of different countries and with “hostile audiences,” thanks to their direct experience in de-escalating tensions and building trust in high-conflict urban areas in Argentina (Frederic, 2020).

Yet, in spite of the blurred conceptual distinction –and despite it not significantly affecting the institutional response of the state actors involved–, following the rules set for SPMs by the UN Department of Political Affairs meant the roles assumed in the MVM were those of observation, verification, coordination, and facilitation of the dialogue. This was an innovative approach to post-conflict, incorporating some of the elements of the UN missions in Nepal, El Salvador, and Guatemala, as well as incorporating new contributions designed specifically for the case. For many, the evaluation of the UNMC is highlighted as a “unique” experience, clearly distinguishable in their minds from other peacekeeping missions.

Those who experienced the UNMC as their first international deployment shared the expectation of applying for new international missions in the future. A high percentage of interviewees expressed the hope that multilateral deployments would become a central part of their professional careers, with some even considering pursuing work opportunities under direct UN contracts as a possibility for their professional careers. For many, the experiences abroad were a turning point in their careers, opening the way to new fields of action.

The experience narrated by one of the Argentine *gendarmes* illustrates this kind of expectation. As head of intelligence affairs at the Joint Operations Center of the UNMC, in Bogotá, she was in charge of monitoring the implementation of the gender, ethnic, and political agendas for the mission. Her tasks were focused on the

23 For Uruguayan formation and performance, see Guyer (2013).

24 Interview with Javier Pérez Aquino.

25 *Argentine Joint Training Center for Peace Operations*, which operates under the Operational Command of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Argentine Armed Forces.

26 *Training Center for Police Operations for Peace*, under the Argentine National Gendarmerie. Although the Gendarmerie is a militarized corps, it operates under the Ministry of Security and performs domestic security tasks. Cencapopaz is a unique institution in Latin America, which focuses its work on the training of personnel for the development of strictly police tasks in the context of PKO.

area of data collection and analysis of the operational deployment of the mission, thus consolidating her personal career path in the area of intelligence and deepening the training received in Argentina on topics such as human rights and gender. This was positively valued by the interviewee, who recognized the relevance of these issues for the Colombian peace process and was able to level the training received with that of other forces in the region. The work carried out on the gender, ethnic, and political agendas was, in turn, perceived as an opportunity to strengthen the institutional heritage of the Argentine Gendarmerie. This gendarme has presented her experience at Cencacopaz, with the intention of passing on and institutionalizing lessons learnt in the field.

Participation in the UNMC has had a unique meaning for many of the Latin American verifiers. It was a mission with an unusual normative framework and mandate, which implied performing tasks for which there was no previous experience. To what has already been said about the absence of weapons and uniforms in the international component, it must be added that the forces sent by each country did not work in national units or battalions, but were dispersed and mixed in different campsites, regional offices, and command centers throughout Colombia. Additionally, there was often a mismatch between the rank achieved in the country of origin and the responsibilities assigned in the context of the MVM, an anomalous situation for those who have been trained and socialized to respect the rigid hierarchical structures of the armed and security forces.

One of the UN trainers interviewed highlighted that “Not all forces behave in the same way in terms of their ability to put aside their national identity.” Their interpretation is that military officers, commonly socialized in cultures with strong nationalistic perspectives, found it more difficult to let go of their national and institutional belonging than members of police/security forces. One of the Argentine military personnel interviewed reinforced this interpretation, arguing that for the Armed Forces, “[...] being unarmed and out of uniform did not erase our nationality and rank.” However, the professional background of the mission participants also served as a bridge to generate affinities, allowing to establish links with the Colombian forces and with the de-

mobilized FARC-EP combatants on the basis of common elements in their military training and trajectories. In the same vein, military from countries with strong defense cooperation ties, such as Argentina and Chile, found it particularly easy to bond and work in collaboration due to their shared history of mutual trust building²⁷.

The dominant presence of Latin American forces in the mission, as well as the voluntary participation of civilians from the region, facilitated communication and mutual understanding. Given that the FARC-EP were particularly meticulous about the terms and concepts used in the peace agreement and the mission, Latin American countries were in a unique position to ensure that these lexical demands were met.

Interviews with the verifiers reveal a very positive assessment of the peace process, which they saw as the beginning of the end of one of the longest and most traumatic conflicts in the region. All the participants interviewed stated that the particular conditions of the mission constituted a personal and professional learning opportunity, from which they developed new skills and a deeper understanding of the complex security dynamics affecting the region. However, we were not able to ascertain a particular interest for the Colombian conflict prior to their assignment to the UNMC.

For many of those who applied, the UNMC represented an opportunity to fulfill the desire to participate in an international mission, but with the unusual condition of doing so in a context in which they expected to have linguistic and cultural affinities with the local population. The fact that the Latin American background of the UNMC team was valued and that the official language of the mission was Spanish played an important role.

27 Argentina and Chile have developed an extensive bilateral military and defense cooperation agenda over the last decades, building Mutual Confidence Measures in different operational environments. Mention should be made of the Joint Peace Force “Cruz del Sur,” a combined binational force designed to work within the Unsas (UN Stand by Arrangement System).

Carrying out day-to-day tasks alongside verifiers from other countries, demobilized members of the FARC-EP, and representatives of the Colombian government represented a stimulating challenge and, at the same time,

a source of tensions. Altogether, it is acknowledged as an experience that left important lessons which ought to be incorporated into the regional acquis.

6

THE UNMC ON TRACK

6.1 PAYING THE DUES

Upon arrival in Colombia, the UN delegation responsible for launching the mission encountered a number of unforeseen difficulties. Preparatory work, setting up the infrastructure for many of the campsites, and putting the necessary logistics in place to keep them running started out two months behind schedule.

According to negotiations in Havana, the Colombian state would assume full responsibility for the security of the demobilized combatants and local populations during the peace process, while the international component would establish the presence of the MVM in the twenty-seven jurisdictions stipulated, which implied structuring the necessary logistical support for each campsite and setting up the necessary facilities (housing, work, and sanitary) in each case. Not only was this delayed, but the mission also had to allocate more resources and time than expected seeking the support of local communities, under the premise that the lack of social legitimacy of the ex-combatants' reintegration process could impose serious obstacles to the full implementation of the agreement later on. This represented a difficult obstacle to overcome, given the longevity of the conflict, the multiplicity of actors involved, and the local opposition to the peace process.

At this stage, collaboration with regional organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union (EU), and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was crucial. The information provided by the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process (MAPP, as per its Spanish acronym), played a central role in the planning tasks, providing data to assess the social, economic, and political reality of each

of the regions where the MVM would be deployed²⁸. This mission gathered information on 280,000 km² of Colombian territory, focusing on four main aspects: 1) intensity of the conflict in the area, security conditions and concerns about respect for human rights; 2) presence of organized crime, dissident armed groups, paramilitaries, and other threats; 3) underlying social conflicts (e.g. disputes over resources); and 4) problems directly affecting the capacity to implement and control peace measures, as well as the results of any previous initiatives in the same area that served as a precedent.

Yet, the first UNMC contingent had to navigate its initial months of deployment in Colombia in a context of low enthusiasm over the peace process and its presence in the country. In addition to an unfriendly environment, the UNMC encountered with a confusing universe of stakeholders involved in the post-conflict, including a multiplicity of domestic actors in combination with a tangled web of UN agencies and other international organizations. While, at first sight, having an established presence of UN agencies could have created the expectation for easier access to local actors and entities, testimonies collected indicate that this was not the case. The large number of agencies with dispersed and compartmentalized responsibilities represented an additional challenge, mainly due to the bureaucratic hurdles they created and the delays they imposed on decision-making process-

²⁸ MAPP/OAS has been operating in Colombia since 2004. Formed at the request of the national government, its main tasks are to monitor and accompany tasks related to peace policies in Colombia, often presenting public policy recommendations to state agencies that would eventually become law or procedural modifications. MAPP/OAS was particularly active and efficient during the presidencies of Juan Manuel Santos.

es and the implementation of actions approved by the MVM. In order to move forward, it was necessary to create a network of contacts and foster the best possible predisposition among the local stakeholders. In addition, it was essential to establish good ties and channels of dialogue with the many NGOs that had been committed to peace-building in Colombia for many years (Alther, 2006)²⁹. Some interviews show that these tasks were hindered by a context in which the Colombian state was not yet in a position to fulfill its promise to guarantee the security of demobilized combatants, local populations, and the international component. As a result, it took no less than six months to get the mission fully operational.

6.2 THE DESIGN

The MVM started out with a team of 1,136 persons, including 323 delegates for each of the local parties and 490 international verifiers –military and civilian– representing the UN (MVM, 2017, p. 3). Together, the contributions made by South American countries represent more than 50% of the military and security forces, as well as 44% of the total group of verifiers in the UNMC (Argentina, 92; Chile, 70; Paraguay, 38; and, Uruguay, 22). Colonel Fleitas, from Uruguay, was the Head of Operations and General Pérez Aquino, from Argentina, was the Head of the Verification Team. Also noteworthy was the presence of Central American and Caribbean verifiers and observers, including the participation of thirteen Cuban officials in what represented Cuba's first experience in UN missions. It is important to mention that the mission was not allowed to include military or police participants from neighboring countries (Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela). These could only participate as UN-recruited civilian volunteers, to

fulfill tasks for which they had extensive preparation and qualifications, obtained from previous experience in the UN system or from contact with the Colombian conflict.

The territorial organization of the MVM mirrored the geographical presence of the FARC-EP; it was comprised of nineteen Transitory Areas of Normalization and seven Transitory Points of Normalization (see maps 1 and 2). Each of these units contained and coordinated a diverse number of campsites. With a separation between men and women's living quarters, the working and living spaces reproduced the tripartite mechanism's design.

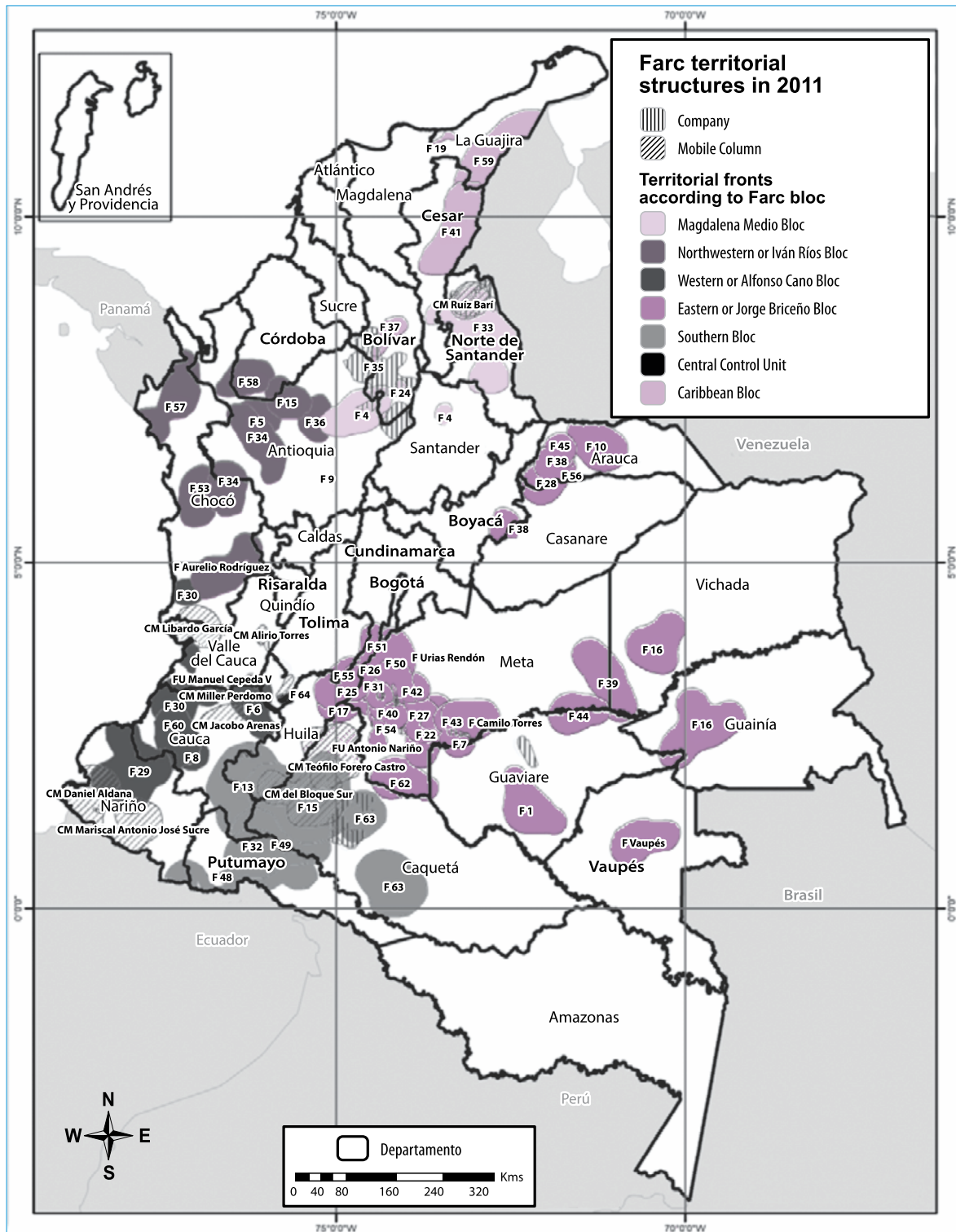
The campsite areas were protected by law, and their perimeters guarded by Colombian authorities. As of mid-2017, approximately 9,200 ex-combatants had been sheltered in these campsites (MVM, 2017, p. 4-5), out of a total of over 13,000 previously registered.

Recognizing a shared "Latin American style" when working in UN missions, Argentine and Uruguayan military personnel agree in differentiating a "Southern Cone's own way of doing things" (Guyer, 2013; Sotomayor Velázquez, 2013). The implementation of the gender and human rights agendas seem to be two of the points on which this "Southern Cone way" distinguished itself from other Latin American UNMC participants.

In terms of the distribution of functions in the campsites, the Colombian military and security forces would be in charge of providing perimeter security, establishing boundaries that could not be crossed by former FARC-EP combatants who had already begun their demobilization, registration, and laying down of weapons. The FARC-EP organized and maintained order among demobilized combatants, collaborating with the other parts of the MVM in assessing abnormal situations and enforcing the disciplinary measures whenever rules were broken. The international component of military and security forces would be in charge of tasks related to the verification of the ceasefire, security and control measures associated with the laying down of arms, security inside the campsites, and the registration of demobilized combatants. One of the most sensitive tasks

29 According to Patricia Abozaglo (2009), four fundamental roles can be identified in the participation of NGOs in peace initiatives in Colombia: 1) linking, networking, and joint construction of agendas; 2) lobbying and promotion of agendas; 3) capacity building and accompaniment of civil society peace initiatives; and 4) mediation and facilitation. However, according to Angelika Rettberg (2006), despite a long history of work on these issues, the lack of cohesion and coordination has led to a reduced impact of peace-building actions promoted by Colombian civil society.

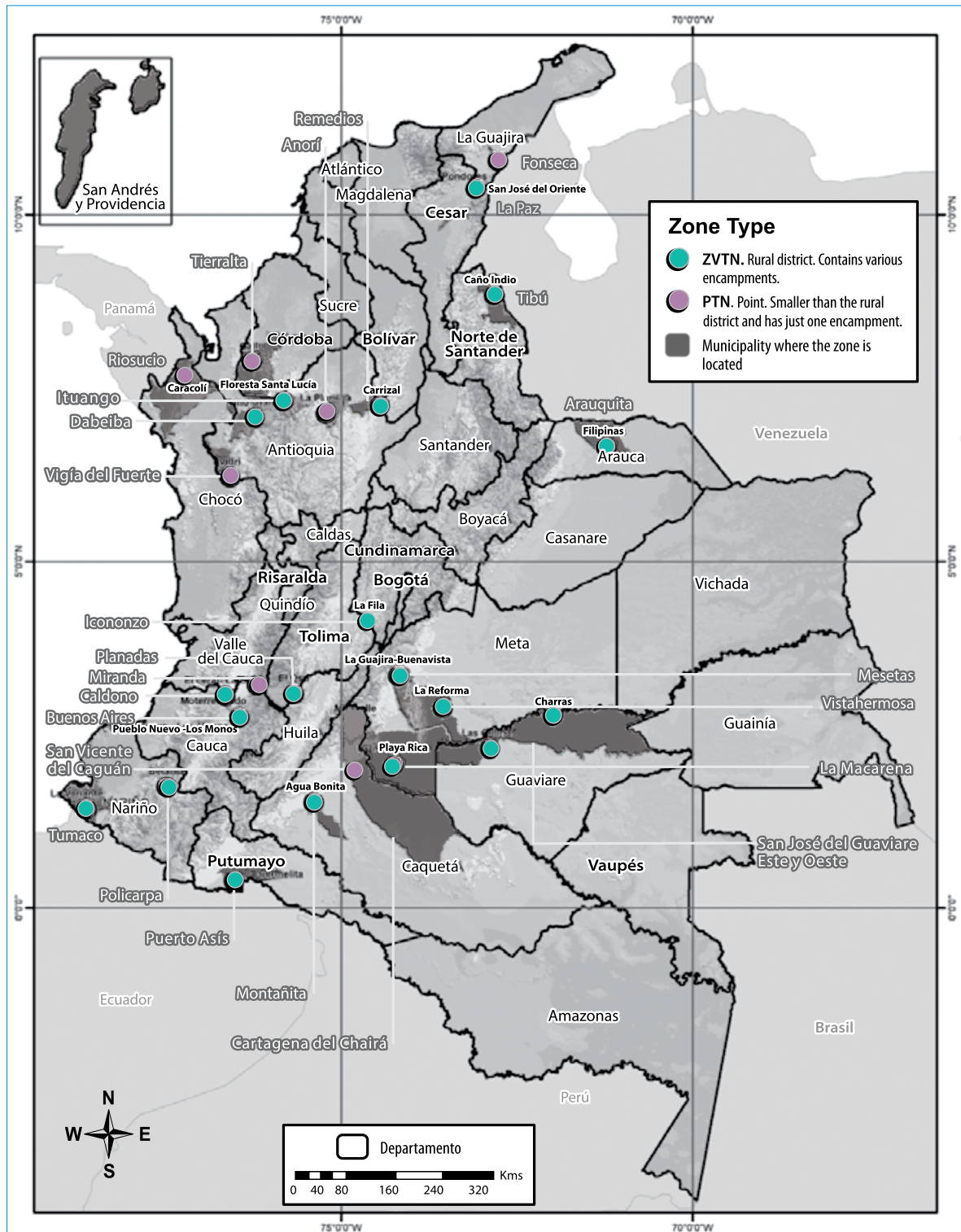
Map 1
Farc territorial structures, 2011



Source: Office of the High Commissioner for Peace. 2018. Library of the Peace Process with the FARC-EP. Volume X, p. 166. Presidency of the Republic. Bogotá. Available at <http://www.altcomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/Documents/tomo-10-proceso-paz-farc-zonas-veredales-deja-cion-armas.pdf>

Map 2

Location of the twenty-six Transitory Zones for Normalization (ZVTN) and Transitory Normalization Points (PTN)



Source: Office of the High Commissioner for Peace. 2018. *Library of the Peace Process with the FARC-EP*. Volume X, p. 166. Presidency of the Republic. Bogotá. Available at <http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/Documents/tomo-10-proceso-paz-farc-zonas-vereda-les-de-jacion-armas.pdf>

faced by the MVM was to deal with situations that could hinder or even derail the functioning of the tripartite mechanism, especially the verification and classification of events that could be interpreted as contrary to the peace agreement and its protocols. To this end, shared criteria and concepts were established to ensure uniformity in the reporting and evaluation of each event, distinguishing between those that constituted “relevant incidents” but did not violate the agreement from those that should be classified as minor or serious violations. Establishing these mutually agreed criteria and the veri-

fication role played by the tripartite mechanism in such cases helped support mutual trust between the parties. In total, the MVM assessed 491 events: 331 events that did not constitute incidents; 78 relevant incidents not constituting violations; 54 relevant incidents constituting minor violations; 10 relevant incidents constituting serious violations; and 18 events pending classification at the time of the final report (MVM 2017, p. 11-12).

The civilian volunteers, a majority of whom were female, were assigned the tasks of building bridges of

Photos 2 and 3

International observers in the process of reception, control, packing, weighing, and storage of arms left at local headquarters in La Variante, Tumaco, by the Western Bloc, Commander Alfonso Cano. Bogotá, July 2017





Source: José Luis Guzmán.

trust and support with local communities, as well as accompanying the demobilization process and contributing to conflict resolution. As will be discussed in further detail, in practice, this division of labor within the international component existed only on paper. With the sole exceptions of expeditions to recover armament hidden in secret stashes and the classification of weapons laid down –left exclusively to military personnel–, all members of the UNMC took part in most tasks in the campsites regardless of their professional background.

According to one of the verifiers, the presence of armed groups in the vicinity was a cause of anxiety and lack of sleep for the Colombian military. Within the campsites, safe spaces were established so that ex-FARC-EP members could take part in the DDR process, laying down their weapons, undergoing personal registration, and gradually being reincorporated into society. Before this could happen, however, the challenge was often to move the combatants to the campsites in the first place. Traveling for several hours, caravans of vehicles

would make their way to FARC-EP hideouts, where the results of interactions between the rebels and the MVM were always unknown. While, in some cases, contact could be initiated amicably, in other instances the MVM was met with distrust and even hostility. For the verifiers, not having their weapons to defend themselves if needed was particularly stressful.

The narrative put forward by the UNMC's leadership underlined the importance of always keeping in mind the ultimate goal of the process was securing a lasting peace, and that the tasks of observation and verification should never be disassociated from it. For this reason, and because it would otherwise have been extremely difficult to accomplish their tasks, the military and security forces focused their attention on building trust in the UNMC rather than taking strong stances.

One of the essential tasks in the demobilization process was the provision of documentation by the National Civil Registry to ex-combatants, to ensure their transi-

Photo 4

Army General Javier Pérez Aquino (Argentina), head of the International Observers, greeting one of the guerrilla fronts as they move from the jungle to one of the Transitory Normalization Zones to begin the process of demobilization and laying down their weapons.



tion to “life in society.” The verifiers who participated in this process report having encountered a large number of complex situations regarding the definition of identity, particularly when dealing with the youngest demobilized members of the FARC-EP, who may not have had accurate personal information or were reluctant to give it to the authorities out of fear for their future. By May 2017, eighty-six minors had been identified among the ex-rebels and sent to campsites co-managed by UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

6.3 THE TRUST FACTOR

The characteristics of the mandate under which the UNMC was deployed and the diversity of actors involved demanded that efforts be made to increase the social acceptance of the peace process, an indispensable condition for the success of the mission. The control and compliance with the rules established around the mission required a “subtle” approach, based on the construction of spaces for dialogue and shared under-

standing. For this, greater importance was assigned to negotiation and mediation skills than to forms of law enforcement based on the use of force.

For military and police verifiers, relating with the Colombian Armed Forces eventually presented complications. On the one hand, they recognized their Colombian counterparts as highly professional, well equipped forces, with excellent training in intelligence gathering tasks. Based on their interactions in the context of the MVM, a consensus of sorts emerged among international verifiers that such conditions were the result of the intense security and defense collaboration with the United States. Various interviews highlight the perception of the Colombian military holding a defensive position vis-à-vis their foreign counterparts, as well as a subtle disagreement with the government regarding need for and objectives of the UNMC. Various interviewees report having developed positive ties with their local peers, particularly grounded by the empathy that arose from internalizing the human impact the conflict had for the Colombian forces. “Out of every generation, only 55% will reach

the rank of lieutenant colonel; the rest will have died or been sent home due to disability.”

Reaching a certain degree of mutual understanding, building trust and developing empathy were crucial factors for the success of the MVM, and the international component played a central role in bridging the gap between local stakeholders. This involved efforts and creativity to overcome the mistrust and fear that initially marked the relationship between the parties. While many of the difficulties identified may resemble those faced by other UN missions, the particularity of the tensions in Colombia was invariably highlighted by interviewees. Few instances made the tension more palpable than the expeditions to secret stashes (*caletas*) where the FARC-EP hid explosives, weapons, and ammunition. According to one interviewee, representatives of the Colombian Armed Forces and the FARC-EP would recognize the anxiety caused by these tasks only occasionally, and only when mutual trust with members of the international component was cemented enough after months of coexistence.

The success of this first stage of the mission serves as a testament to the willingness of all parties to carry out the important tasks entrusted to the MVM, for which the formation of bonds among the participants was crucial. It is also worth reminding that the design of the mission—in which civilian, military and security personnel from different countries shared work and living spaces—led to unforeseen tensions. As mentioned above, in many cases there was no correlation between the ranks that each of them had achieved in their country of origin, and the roles and tasks performed in the campsites. This led to clashes that required the intervention of authorities, particularly in the early stages of the UNMC.

Different international verifiers sustained that only after sustained daily interactions helped dissipate the climate of distrust, they were able to identify the positive overview the FARC-EP had of the mission's presence in the peace process. They also showed surprise over how much information the demobilized rebels had on the Latin American reality, as well as about their eagerness to discuss political issues and the empathy they expressed for the situation of other countries in the region.

Most interviewees from the Southern Cone expressed a positive view of the FARC-EP as a social, political, and military organization. They emphasize their sense of teamwork, the level of preparation and training, and the discipline they maintained throughout the post conflict process. Some verifiers mention having developed an understanding for the very existence of the rebel group, as well as the roles it played in the face of an almost complete absence of state institutions in large parts of the Colombian territory.

6.4 THE GENDER AGENDA

The peace process in Colombia has gained a prominent visibility as a gender-sensitive post-conflict reconstruction experience. The incorporation of a gender perspective in the peace agreement, which included the needs of the LGBTI community, was a political achievement of the FARC-EP driven by a female contingent that exceeded 30% of the organization's members. In turn, this agenda was underpinned by the prolonged and representative presence of Colombian feminist NGOs in the territory. In addition to highlighting the innovation that this agenda constituted for the trajectory of peace negotiations in Colombia and the region, it is worth noting that its relevance also resides in the positive impact the provisions incorporated had for victims and perpetrators (Soares de Aguiar, 2020). As shown by the approval of Security Council Resolution 1325/00, over twenty years ago, the endogenous gender/peace agenda is also part of an international trajectory, within which UN agencies grant increasing relevance to the availability of gender-sensitive measures in order to build the prospects for lasting peace.

Addressing this dimension in this research implied focusing on two aspects: 1) the important presence of a range of local and international organizations dedicated to tying peace with the gender agenda in Colombia; and, 2) the place occupied by gender relations within the tripartite mechanism. Yet again, the first issue brings to the forefront the imperative need for the MVM to establish bonds of trust and collaboration with local non-state actors, including community leaders and civil organizations with territorial work on gender agendas.

In turn, the lack of a broad consensus among different actors regarding the scope and depth of the gender approach in the peace process adds an extra layer of difficulty. The second issue, on the other hand, refers mainly to the incorporation into the design of MVM verification activities of a sensitivity to the differentiated needs and impacts among different stakeholders arising from their gender-related differences.

The first significant step towards the presence of the gender agenda in the peace agreement is the incorporation of women in the negotiations in Havana, supported by UN Resolution 1325³⁰. The creation of the Gender Subcommittee in the negotiations ensured the inclusion of a gender sensitivity into the peace process, which in fact became one of the pillars of the agreement (Mejía Duque, 2017).

The above table summarizes the steps followed towards the incorporation of a representative gender agenda to the Colombian peace negotiations, ensured in the Havana negotiations. In addition to the cross-cutting presence of gender as a specific concern in the agreement, an element of governance was incorporated in the MVM through the creation of a specially designated division responsible for the dialogue with the Colombian NGOs and movements involved with gender. This was an issue that opened an assortment of challenges and concerns in the Colombian peace process. There were two major challenges: addressing trust and gender empathy among the women in the tripartite mechanism; and the inevitable set of adjustments in male/female relations among demobilized ex-combatants in the post-conflict.

Figure
Incorporation of women in the Havana negotiations



Source: Mejía Duque, 2017, p. 4.

30 <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/105>

Several of the issues covered by the peace agreement affected gender roles in the campsites and the need to promote egalitarian relations. The political dimension of gender relations and its potential reflection on the actors involved in the MVM could turn out to be source of pressure for the implementation of the agreement. As an example, a “zero tolerance” principle was enforced for violence and sexual exploitation since the bilateral ceasefire, leading to a notable decrease in the number of registered cases. Yet, while extreme situations were under control, other sorts of flaws were difficult to avoid. Such was the case of more subtle ways in which *machismo* would operate within the mission, which was repeatedly highlighted by military/police verifiers and female civilian volunteers.

The implementation of the gender parity criterion in the formation of the MVM faced a first difficulty: neither Colombia nor the other participating Latin American states had a sufficient number of women in a position to be assigned to the MVM. This contrasts with a 30% presence of women in the FARC-EP contingent, but also helps partially explain the absence of women among the UNMC high ranked officials. Indeed, the incorporation of women into the military and security forces of several Latin American countries represents a recent development, that which explains the prejudices regarding the roles that women “can fulfill.” In fact, it is still exceptional to find women in the middle or upper ranks of these public forces. In the case of the Colombian peace process, this deficit had been dragging on since the negotiations in Havana, when the Santos government found it difficult to match the gender balance achieved by the FARC-EP, who appointed thirteen women out of a total of thirty negotiators.

For the Latin American verifiers, the gender parity demanded in the agreement constituted a distinctive element of the UNMC and a valued contribution to UN missions, in general. The low number of women among the Latin American military/security forces deployed was partially offset by the incorporation of European personnel, especially from Spain, Portugal, and Sweden. But, the most significant contribution to gender parity came from the female civilian volunteers, among whom women accounted for more than 70% of the participants.

On the ground, addressing gender sensitivity towards women and LGBTI people did not depend solely on the percentage of women who participated in the UNMC, nor on the design and structuring of the activities. Relevant differences in the training received and the tools available to address this agenda were immediately evident between European and Latin American members of the UNMC, as well as between different Latin American countries. Institutional and cultural contrasts were noted by several interviewees, some of whom emphasized the gap between the overcoming of gender bias among Scandinavian forces and the persistence of *macho* and discriminatory perspectives among Central American forces.

Each campsite had a UN Focal Point, responsible for verifying the incorporation of gender agendas in the daily activities of the MVM. These focal points were responsible for identifying the main points of tension, but also for making political and pedagogical efforts to bring about the necessary readjustments. Dealing with this reality and mediating tensions was one of the tasks of the MVM. According to one of the UN representatives interviewed, progress in this regard required a gradual learning process that demonstrated its progress in moving from the UNMC (stage 1) to the Verification Mission (stage 2).

Despite the efforts and achievements, gender biases operated in the MVM, generally intertwined with other forms of discrimination, including: biases within and between forces (particularly in the ways military men treated policewomen, but also in the treatment of female civilian volunteers); the rank and age of the women participants; and, the country of origin. In fact, the distribution of roles and tasks in the campsites was traversed by these gender constructions. Female military, police, and volunteers denounced archaisms in the treatment received from their superiors, such as being assigned to tasks of lesser responsibility and not being authorized to drive the vehicles used by the UNMC.

According to one of the female civilian volunteers interviewed, although there is ample room for improvement, awareness of UN principles and the way of approaching actions linked to the gender agenda evidenced a better

position of the Southern Cone's military forces compared to their Central American peers. Argentine *gendarmes* even extended this sense of identity established with the other Southern Cone contingents, referring to a "sense of brotherhood" that would have contributed to strengthen the shared commitment to the mission.

One of the main challenges perceived by demobilized women was the difficulty in translating to the peace context the gender parity standards experienced during the conflict. In a recent seminar coordinated by the Verification Mission³¹, Victoria Sandino even reflected on the regression observed among male ex-combatants in terms of gender relations, who upon entering the campsites began to show more discriminatory behavior and inequality in the perceived rights of men and women.

Socialization among female members of the FARC-EP with the female verifiers and volunteers proved to be more profound than that observed in male groups. In some campsites, between six and ten women from the MVM -FARC-EP, UNMC, and Colombian military- would share tents, establishing guidelines for coexistence and dialogue based on sharing their daily life. This made it possible to compare and contrast aspects of their feminine identity, as well as behavioral patterns inside and outside the campsite. One of the verifiers stated, "While we were painting each other's nails, new forms of mutual knowledge and closeness were emerging," noting that the gathering of Colombian military/police women and their female counterparts in the FARC-EP was extremely meaningful. Up to that point, they had not had a chance to meet. In turn, according to one of the female civilian volunteers interviewed, "Learning about conflict from the point of view of a former female combatant in the campsite was totally different from what a history teacher could achieve from a classroom in Bogotá." Gender solidarity, trust, and mutual understanding built on the basis of coexistence were central elements in fostering this exchange. Both civilians and

members of the armed and security forces participating in the MVM describe sharing everyday experiences with the ex-combatants as "fascinating."

Pregnancy became frequent among ex-combatants; almost 70% of women pursuing motherhood immediately after demobilization³², with implications for the UNMC throughout its mandate. This created new responsibilities and challenges, that involved the coordination of obstetric check-ups and registration of ex-combatants in the cumbersome Colombian health system, tasks which were particularly challenging for the male members of the MVM.

A civilian interviewee indicated that, despite the prejudices and shortcomings in the equitable distribution of responsibilities, over time, the day-to-day tasks were assigned equally to military, police, and female volunteers from all participating countries. With some exceptions, such as during the process of laying down arms and tours to the secret stashes to recover hidden arsenals, the civilian volunteers had to participate in activities that did not correspond to their job description, including patrols, guards, campsite logistics, and other daily tasks. The job description indicated that the female volunteers would have two main tasks: to communicate with local civil society groups, in which women are the majority; and, provide recommendations to guide the process of reintegration into society.

All the female volunteers interviewed agreed that they felt their presence in the MVM brought some uneasiness to other members of the team, particularly to the military officers with prominent positions in the mission. Partly because of this, and partly due to shortcomings in the coordination of reintegration activities, the volunteers consider their professional experience and training largely wasted. In their view, there was an under-utilization of the volunteers' knowledge and potential contributions. In light of the difficulties faced in advancing the implementation of reintegration since August 2017, not

31 UN Verification Mission in Colombia. "Lanzamiento del estudio: De las palabras a la acción" (Study Launch: From Words to Action), October 20, 2020. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4ku5Akvkcs>

32 Motherhood has been a long-standing and contentious issue within the FARC-EP. See: Herrera and Porch, 2008; Katzman, 2019.

having attributed greater relevance to the abilities and knowledge these professionals could have contributed to facilitate latter stages of the DDR process seems like a lost opportunity. The idea that having been chosen to participate in the UNMC was simply a means used by the parties to comply with the gender balance demands of the agreement became a shared conclusion and an inside joke among female volunteers. Their condition as women and civilians implied a facing a two-fold differentiation –if not discrimination–, against which it was necessary to respond by “standing up strongly”, as one of the volunteers explained.

Besides the aforementioned training, professional experience and background of civilian volunteers, a development specific to the UNMC should be added. In several sites, female volunteers embodied critical and independent voices, largely thanks to their relative lack of concern over military ranks. Military interviewees acknowledged turning to their fellow female volunteers to discuss their needs and dissatisfactions with the mission, so that they could raise certain complaints with the mission authorities without fear of reprisal.

While the contributions of the female volunteers to the mission are undeniable, this presence also opened up

gray areas that were difficult to manage on a day-to-day basis regarding roles and responsibilities. Possibly due to their training, their professional backgrounds, and the fact that they were not always perceived as part of the UNMC, the dialogue that the civilian volunteers were able to establish with the populations near the transition areas and campsites became a valuable asset. As one of our female interviewees explained, “Local populations were afraid of the stigmatization that could come from socializing with demobilized FARC-EP, which reduced interactions to a minimum and made their reinsertion more difficult.”

Yet trust was not a given in the Tripartite mechanism. According to different interviewees, demobilized members of the FARC-EP rejected the psycho-social support offered by trained volunteers³³, arguing that they did not wish to be “brainwashed” (*sic*).

Among female civilian volunteers, generally more familiar with the Colombian conflict than the military/security forces in the mission, the regional relevance that the peace process entailed was generally acknowledged. As one of our interviewees put it, “I understood that [the peace process] was something good and necessary for Latin America.”

33 Most of the female volunteers had undergraduate and graduate degrees in areas such as social work, sociology, or psychology, and many also had direct experience working with refugees and displaced persons from the Colombian conflict.

7

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

In the second stage of deployment, the UN Verification Mission in Colombia incorporated several of the lessons learnt during the UNMC. According to a UN representative, the style of consultation, debate, and coordination developed during the MVM were largely preserved, as “it became a ‘good practice’ of the Colombian peace process.” Despite the difficulties and risks that were faced, the synergies produced by the tripartite mechanism during the first stage of the MVM led it to be widely considered a success worthy of replication. To a large extent, the MVM experience became a stimulus for the subsequent stages of the mission. As conveyed in the opinion of one interviewee: “Even though it no longer exists, the spirit of the tripartite mechanism still exists.”

However, achieving the same level of success became increasingly difficult for the Verification Mission. While the UNMC had fulfilled its role as a useful instrument to bring positions closer and build the grounds for mutual trust, it failed to counteract the persistent rejection of ex-combatants by broad sectors of the Colombian society and the political elites, especially of those sectors that won the 2018 presidential elections. Hence, though the first stage of UN presence in the Colombian post-conflict was marked by novel governance mechanisms based on trust- and consensus-building, most of the second stage has been characterized by developments increasingly hostile to the reinsertion process previewed in the peace agreement.

Although some transition areas and transitory points for normalization were closed as of August 2017, twenty-four of them were transformed into territorial spaces for training and reincorporation (ETCR, as per its Spanish acronym). This conversion required ensuring correct

sanitary conditions, access to medical care, supply of resources, and transportation and communication systems. Each of these points involved complex political negotiations and the definition of a detailed distribution of responsibilities. An example of the difficulties faced was provided by a verifier in charge of organizing the logistics of supplies for the ETCRs. The distribution of responsibilities in the provision and use of consumables implied the Colombian state would provide produce to the campsites, but it would be the ex-combatants who administered these resources and prepared their own meals. On the other hand, unlike the UNMC, members of the Verification Mission would not share the same sanitary infrastructure with the ex-combatants, thus multiplying the efforts needed to maintain the separate facilities and reducing spaces for cohabitation. As a result, despite the ground covered during the UNMC, mediating tensions and misunderstandings arising from the new distribution of tasks and spaces became -yet again- the main task UN representatives had to address in the beginning of the second stage.

Commonly, one of the major difficulties faced by DDR processes is the transition from the demobilization to the reincorporation phases. By no means was this a surprise in the Colombian case. From the outset of the UNMC, many of its members identified the prospects of FARC-EP reincorporation as one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome. The main challenge for peace in Colombia currently lies here, not only because a slow and inadequate implementation of the agreement’s provisions in this sense may very well bog down the entire peace process indefinitely, but also because this would put the achievements already made at risk of crumbling. The aforementioned historical context and the political polarization around the peace process made achieving the goals set for the Verification Mission even more dif-

ficult, especially after President Iván Duque's election in 2018. Adhering to the political wing led by Álvaro Uribe Vélez, Duque openly opposed several of the points stipulated in the peace agreement (Segura & Stein, 2018) and curtailed the resources for its implementation.

The reincorporation of former FARC-EP combatants was conceived as a multifaceted process, but difficulties experienced by the state in providing for their security during reintegration have undermined expectations that progress is possible. From the moment the UNMC was designed, it was known that the sustainability of peace depended on the presence of concrete opportunities for social, economic, political, and cultural reincorporation. However, the implementation of this agenda has been lacking, at best. The Verification Mission has had to face a severe loss of trust in the peace process among ex-combatants and communities, even those who initially viewed the end of violence with relief and expectations. In rural areas, the local population and ex-combatants who remained in the ETCRs have found themselves in situations of increasing vulnerability due to the emergence of new disputes over control of the territory³⁴ and a decreased flow of resources since the UNMC.

The FARC-EP's transition to lawful political activity and its insertion into democratic government institutions

has also been limited. The political party created, Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC), has not received the expected popular support, presenting a challenge for future debates regarding the agendas surrounding the rights and responsibilities of ex-combatants.

Undeniably, the "revisionist" position of the peace agreement defended by President Duque's administration has become an obstacle to the reinsertion of ex-combatants, largely due to the slow mobilization of resources needed to advance this process and shortcomings in the security provided. Compliance with the provisions agreed in Havana aiming to facilitate the reinsertion of former FARC-EP has been undeniably low³⁵. In terms of access to and use of land by ex-combatants, for example, only 13% of the measures needed are at an intermediate or advanced stage of progress, while only 6% of the reforms needed to advance comprehensive rural reform fall into that category (KIIPS, 2020). Likewise, actions aimed at enabling the participation of ex-combatants in Colombian politics have had low effectiveness.

It is worth reiterating that the many difficulties that implementing the reintegration process would face was highlighted by UNMC participants early on in the mission's deployment, particularly by the civilian volunteers deployed in the first phase of the Mission. Most of the verifiers interviewed expressed great concern regarding the continuity and consolidation of peace in Colombia. Based on testimonies from the connections they maintained in Colombia, verifiers share the impression that

34 According to data from the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), between November 2016 and March 2021, more than 250 murders of ex-combatants were recorded, evidencing the insufficiency of the efforts made by the state for the protection of their physical integrity (JEP, 2021b). In turn, Indepaz (2021) records 1,134 social leaders and human rights defenders murdered in the same period, most of whom worked in the territories left by the FARC-EP.

35 See, for example, peace process monitoring report prepared by the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies (KIIPS, 2020), University of Notre Dame.

“the tasks of implementing the second mission have proven to be complex and uncertain.” The lack of early work to facilitate reintegration and acceptance by the communities in the transition areas is often cited as one of the key failures of the UNMC.

Although the peace agreement has domestic and international legal protection, its implementation could definitely be hindered. Moreover, after President Duque's inauguration, negotiations between the previous government and the ELN, yet another of Colombia's historic insurgent groups, came to a complete halt. Similarly, little has been done during this period to contain the expansion of armed groups linked to organized crime and drug trafficking. Thus, in addition to the aforementioned difficulties for the implementation of the peace agreement, there is a lack of state actions to fill the power and institutional vacuum left by the FARC-EP. New dissident groups have emerged among the ex-combatants, who have renounced the leadership of the group committed to peace in order to resume the armed conflict. State neglect of the power vacuum left by the FARC-EP strongly contributed to making it viable for these sectors and other armed actors (drug traffickers, paramilitaries, crim-

inal gangs, etc.) to expand operations and recruitment areas (Ramírez, 2017, p. 50). Consequently, Colombian territory today is distributed among three types of areas: areas in which the state has effective and legitimized territorial control; areas in which the state and ex-combatants cooperate in maintaining order; and, areas in which non-state armed groups compete with each other over territorial control.

Based on the above, the absence of internal consensus and the current government's lack of political will to move the peace process forward are identified as the main obstacles for the full implementation of the final agreement. In turn, the delay and ineffectiveness of measures adopted by the Colombian government in the second stage of the MVM have been the main causes of the setbacks experienced in the mutual trust between the parties to the agreement. By failing in the reintegration of ex-combatants into society and guaranteeing their security, the Colombian government has been responsible for setbacks to the advances made during the UNMC. Among others, this is one key reason that explains the current free fall of the peace process in Colombia.

CONCLUSION

This research project has sought to portray the Latin American participation in the UNMC, the institutional and individual background of its participants, the meanings ascribed to the experience in Colombia, the lessons learnt, and their implications for the subsequent Verification Mission. The performance of the international component of the MVM in Colombia is of utmost importance to assess not only the work done by the UNMC itself, but also to try and extrapolate lessons for future political missions.

Testimonies collected in this research indicate diversity in the experiences of the UNMC participants, depending on the location and timing of their deployment. Aspects such as previous professional training and experience, gender, and the roles fulfilled also help explain the specificities of these experiences. With these caveats, the present document has sought to identify, understand, and present an analysis of the narratives of those who embodied the mission with commitment to contribute to peace in Colombia. The intention of this research has been to contribute to the understanding of the initial phase of implementation of the Colombian peace agreement, a time in which this process moved forward with a clear regional and international impetus.

From an ethnographic perspective, our research has made use of a significant number of testimonies from direct participants, from which we have traced personal and institutional trajectories, contextualizing the dominant narratives. We have aimed to link these particular experiences with the norms and practices carried forward in UN peace Missions. In a broad sense, this research draws attention to the ways in which some countries of the Global South, and more specifically Latin American countries, participate in regional security governance.

We understand the UNMC to be an experience “conspicuous for its absence” in the existing literature on the Colombian post-conflict. The contribution of this document lies in having focused on the direct and daily experiences of the mission and MVM participants, interpreting them in the light of their respective trajectories, the characteristics of the mission, and the challenging context they faced. We understand that the approach proposed here analyzes some important nuances regarding the implementation of the peace agreement, developing a perspective of the process “from the field.” Addressing these issues by looking specifically at the Latin American participation in the UNMC still remains a tangential issue in the limited ongoing debates on the peace process, making the issues addressed here a relevant starting point to expand the discussions and enable the development of a critical balance of what has happened. We note that, from an epistemological prism, the intersection between an anthropological approach and the field of regional security studies can also help stimulate multidisciplinary applied research on issues of peace and conflict in Latin America.

We find ourselves with a real Pandora’s box in terms of the topics and perspectives of analysis that the subject matter raises.

First, it is worth noting the political simultaneity and articulations between the Colombian peace process and the Latin American regional developments in security and defense, particularly in South America. The negotiations in Havana coincided with a particularly active context of regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the presence of the Union of South American Nations (Unasur), and its South American Defense Council (CDS), as well as the CELAC. Moved by the initial impetus of the UNMC and the commitments assumed

with Colombia, the region's participation in the MVM would prove to be a successful experience of regional/international deployment. Although its numbers have been reduced due to the lower demand for personnel in the Verification Mission, the commitment assumed with Colombia and the UN is still maintained today. However, important changes in the foreign policy strategies of several Latin American countries since the second half of the 2010s led to a setback in this regionalization of peace governance. We understand the retraction of this cooperation as an expression of the generalized crisis of regional multilateralism. Neither the last part of the DDR process, nor mass killings of ex-combatants, social leaders, and human rights activists has called for the regional attention they deserve. Latin America has not shown interest in promoting forms of accompaniment of the reintegration process in Colombia. At the same time, the progressive abandonment of the peace agenda within Colombia itself betrayed, at least partially, the trust built during the negotiations of the peace agreement and the MVM, strongly conditioning the context in which the Verification Mission's mandates are developed and the expectations that what was committed to in the agreement will be fulfilled.

Second, our research also indicates that there is still much to be done in the field of comparative regional studies, both in terms of identifying the roles played by subregional variations and of understanding the dynamics that make up such subregions in the first place. The interviews conducted reveal significant cultural and institutional differences between the Central and South American militaries, which gained visibility in the context of the UNMC due to the cohabitation and daily life shared between nationals of various Latin American countries. A good example of this are the particular traits of Southern Cone verifiers, many of which can be traced to the reforms made to the formation of military/security forces in very specific post-dictatorial political and pedagogical contexts seen there since the 1980s. This produced a gradual but sustained incorporation of norms and principles aligned with the respect for human rights and democratic institutions. Interestingly, the effects of these institutional traits on the individual attitudes of military/security personnel can be seen even in cases where their respective families had been direct-

ly affected by the violence that characterized the years just prior to and during the military dictatorships of the 1970s-80s.

Thirdly, another issue that came to the forefront of our research refers to the consequential distinction between Peacekeeping Operations and Political Missions. The necessary metamorphosis when passing through an "institutional door" designed for functions other than those demanded by the field acquires an almost magical sense, crossing the threshold with capacities that do not match the demands of the reality one has to assume. The meanings of and conditions for developing such skill, as well as its impact on the training of verifiers, constitutes a necessary field of research, with potentially important conceptual and applied results. This experience will undoubtedly prove crucial in refining future training and performance evaluation programs. In order to turn the UNMC experience into "lessons learnt" that actively help better prepare military/security forces adaptable to different international missions, individual and collective experiences must be collected, interpreted, incorporated into curriculums, and further institutionalized.

Fourthly, we cannot fail to mention the horizon that this research showed for the link between gender and peace studies in the context of multilateral missions, in general, and in the Colombian case, in particular. We believe that incorporating this perspective from the point of view of external verifiers is an important contribution to evaluate the implementation of this agenda. We are aware that the information and observations included in this document represent only the tip of the iceberg regarding post-conflict conditions experienced by females and the LGBTQI community. We hope that our analysis will stimulate further fieldwork and analysis, both with similar methods and with other tools to provide even more nuanced arguments for the active incorporation of gender agendas into peace negotiations and DDR processes, as well as to cement the relevance of this agenda in International Security studies. In order for this to happen, cultural and institutional sensitivities for gender-related issues in the conduct of war and peace must be strengthened among international organizations, states, and domestic actors alike.

Finally, it is worth highlighting again the role played by the female civilian volunteers who took part in the UNMC, introducing a civil-military component to its development. Their presence, professional trajectories, and contributions to the UNMC stimulates a specific research agenda linked to the role of international, civilian, non-state actors in stabilization and peace-building processes. The tensions and difficulties often expressed by the volunteers reveal the need for improvement in the coexistence with military/police verifiers, as well as the

incorporation of mechanisms that encourage the complementarity of the skills provided by each. Additionally, though it remains to be further investigated, we would expect the problematic dynamics observed in the working relation between civilian volunteers and military/security personnel of the UNMC may well relate to the still unsatisfactory realities of the civilian control *vis a vis* the autonomy of the military and security forces in the Latin America.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Colombia/Farc-EP. 2016. Final Agreement to End the Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace. November 24. Available at https://www.jep.gov.co/Marco%20Normativo/Normativa_v2/01%20ACUERDOS/N01.pdf

UN Security Council. 2016. Resolution 2261/16. Creation of the United Nations Mission in Colombia (UNMC). Available at [https://undocs.org/sp/S/RES/2261\(2016\)](https://undocs.org/sp/S/RES/2261(2016))

------. 2016. Resolution 2307/16. Acceptance of the recommendations made by the UN Secretary General regarding the formation of the UNMC. September 13. Available at [https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=es/S/RES/2307\(2016\)](https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=es/S/RES/2307(2016))

------. 2020. Resolution 2545/20. Extension of the mandate granted to the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia. [http://undocs.org/es/S/RES/2545\(2020\)](http://undocs.org/es/S/RES/2545(2020))

Policy and Mediation Division. 2012. *Special Political Missions (SPMs) Start-up Guide*. United Nations. Available at <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/629>

UNMC. 2021a. "Statement before the Security Council by Carlos Ruiz Massieu, Special Representative of the Secretary General and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia." January 21. Available at <https://colombia.unmissions.org/declaraci%C3%B3n-ante-el-consejo-de-seguridad-de-carlos-ruiz-massieu-representante-especial-del-2>

------. 2021b. "Security Council Press Release on Colombia." January 28. Available at <https://colombia.unmissions.org/comunicado-de-prensa-del-consejo-de-seguridad-sobre-colombia-3>

MVM. 2017. *Report on the closing of activities of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism*. Bogotá, September 22. Available at https://unmc.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/informe_final_publico_221530r_sept_17_v_final_-_prensa_i.pdf

Office of the High Commissioner for Peace. 2018. *Library of the Peace Process with the FARC-EP*. Volume X. Presidency of the Republic. Bogotá. Available at <http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/Documents/tomo-10-proceso-paz-farc-zonas-veredales-dejacion-armas.pdf>

Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations. 2016. "Identical letters dated January 19, 2016 addressed to the Secretary General and the President of the Security Council." Letter from President Juan Manuel Santos requesting the formation of a Political Mission to accompany the peace process in Colombia (S/2016/53). Available at <https://undocs.org/es/S/2016/53>

UN Secretary General. 2016. Report to the Security Council on the United Nations Mission in Colombia (S/2016/729), August 18. Available at <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=es/S/2016/729>

REFERENCES

- Abozaglo, P.** 2009. *The role of NGOs in Peacebuilding in Colombia*. Kimmage Development Studies Centre, Research and Perspectives on Development Practice Series. Dublin.
- Acharya, A.** 2011. "Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World". *International Studies Quarterly*. 55, pp. 95-123.
- Aguirre, M.** 2016. "Pathways to peace-A challenging road ahead for Colombia". Available at <https://www.thebrokeronline.eu/pathways-to-peace-d26/>
- 2020. "More pressure on the peace agreement in Colombia." Available at <https://www.esglobal.org/mas-presiones-sobre-el-acuerdo-de-paz-en-colombia/>
- Alther, G.** 2006. "Colombian peace communities: The role of NGOs in supporting resistance to violence and oppression". *Development in Practice*. 16 (3-4), pp. 278-291.
- Arnault, J.** 2006. "Good Agreement? Bad Agreement? An Implementation Perspective". *Centre of International Studies Paper*. Princeton University. Available at <https://gs-drc.org/document-library/good-agreement-bad-agreement-an-implementation-perspective/>
- Autesserre, S.** 2014. *Peaceland. Conflict resolution and the everyday politics of International Intervention*. Cambridge University Press. New York.
- Borda Guzmán, S.** 2012. *La internacionalización de la paz y de la guerra en Colombia durante los gobiernos de Andrés Pastrana y Álvaro Uribe: búsqueda de legitimidad política y capacidad militar*. (The internationalization of peace and war in Colombia during the governments of Andrés Pastrana and Álvaro Uribe: search for political legitimacy and military capacity). Ediciones Uniandes. Bogotá.
- Cortés, O. & J. Millán.** 2019. "The role of the Armed Forces in the Colombian peace process". *Report*. NOREF Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution. September. Available at <https://noref.no/Publications/Regions/Colombia/The-role-of-the-Armed-Forces-in-the-Colombian-peace-process>
- Dalponte, B.** 2019. "Strategic culture and regional security governance: The agency of regional secondary powers in the creation of the South American Defence Council". Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham. Available at <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/8886/>
- De Melo Rosa, Renata.** 2018. "Orden público, seguridad internacional e (in)justicia social: comparando Brasil y Haití" (Public order, international security, and social (in)justice: comparing Brazil and Haiti). *Saskab. Revista de discusiones filosóficas*. Book 12. Available at <http://www.idealz-institute.com/sp/CUADERNO12/C121.pdf>
- Fernández Matos, D. C. & M. N. González Martínez.** "La paz sin las mujeres ¡No va! El proceso de paz colombiano desde la perspectiva de género" (Peace without women is a no go! The Colombian peace process from a gender perspective). *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*. 121, pp. 113-133.
- Frederic, S.** 2020. *La Gendarmería desde adentro. De centinelas de la patria al trabajo en los barrios, cuáles son sus verdaderas funciones en el siglo XXI (The Gendarmerie from the inside. From sentinels of the homeland to work in the neighborhoods, what are their real functions in the 21st century)*. Siglo XXI Editores. Buenos Aires.

Frederic, S. & M. Hirst (coord.). 2016. *La presencia de Argentina en Haití. Contexto global, regional y experiencia militar (2004-2015)* (*The presence of Argentina in Haiti. Global and regional context and military experience (2004-2015)*). Teseo. Buenos Aires.

Gentes del Común. 2020. *Los acuerdos son para cumplirlos, Compromisos de las FARC EP y su organización política sucesora con el Acuerdo de paz* (*Agreements must be fulfilled. Commitments of the FARC-EP and its successor political organization of the Peace Agreement*), Comisión de Seguimiento, Impulso y Verificación de la Implementación del Acuerdo Final (CSIV), Centro de Pensamiento y Diálogo Político, May.

GMH. 2013. *¡BASTA YA! Colombia: Memorias de guerra y dignidad. Informe General Grupo de Memoria Histórica, Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación* (*ENOUGH! Colombia: Memories of war and dignity. General Report, Historical Memory Group, National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation*). Available at <https://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2013/bastaYa/basta-ya-colombia-memorias-de-guerra-y-dignidad-2016.pdf>

Grabendorff, W. & Gudiño Pérez, D. (eds.). 2017. *Proceso de paz y posacuerdo en Colombia: efectos en la región* (*Peace process and post-agreement in Colombia: effects on the region*). Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES-Ildis). Quito.

Guyer, J. G. 2013. "Punching above its weight: Uruguay and UN peace operations". In K. M. Kenkel (ed.). *South America and Peace Operations*. Routledge, pp. 111-131.

Harig, C. 2015. "Synergy effects between MINUSTAH and public security in Brazil". *Brasiliana. Journal of Brazilian Studies*. 3 (2), pp. 142-168.

Herrera, N. & D. Porch. 2008. "'Like going to a fiesta' – The role of female fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP". *Small Wars & Insurgencies*. 19 (4), pp. 609-634.

Hirst, M. 2017. "Thinking Regional on Peace Missions in Latin America". *Journal of International Peacekeeping*. 21, pp. 177-196.

Indepaz. 2021. "Listado de homicidios líderes/as sociales y defensores/as de derechos humanos desde la firma

del Acuerdo de paz" (List of homicides of social leaders and human rights defenders since the signing of the peace agreement). January 31. Available at <http://www.indepaz.org.co/pazparaliderar/>

JEP. 2021a. "La JEP hace pública la estrategia de priorización dentro del Caso 03, conocido como el de falsos positivos" (The JEP makes public the prioritization strategy within Case 03, known as the false positive case). Press Release 019. Available at <https://www.jep.gov.co/Sala-de-Prensa/Paginas/La-JEP-hace-pública-la-estrategia-de-priorización-dentro-del-Caso-03,-conocido-como-el-de-falsos-positivos.aspx>

-----, 2021b. "La JEP advierte que persiste la desarticulación entre entidades del gobierno para evitar los asesinatos de firmantes del Acuerdo final de paz" (The JEP warns that the lack of coordination between government entities to prevent the murders of signatories of the final peace agreement persists). Press Release 027. Available at <https://www.jep.gov.co/Sala-de-Prensa/Paginas/JEP-advierte-que-sigue-desarticulaci%C3%B3n-entre-entidades-del-Gobierno-para-evitar-asesinatos-de-firmantes-del-Acuerdo-de-Paz.aspx>

Kazman, M. 2019. "Women of the FARC". *Perry Center Occasional Papers*. William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies. May. Available at <https://www.williamjperrycenter.org/content/women-farc>

KIIPS. 2020. "Punto por punto, así va la implementación del Acuerdo final de paz en Colombia. Informe 4" (Point by point, this is how the implementation of the final peace agreement in Colombia is going. Report 4). Keough School of Global Affairs, University of Notre Dame. Available at <http://peaceaccords.nd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Informe-4-Punto-por-Punto.pdf>

Krause, J. 2021. "The ethics of ethnographic methods in conflict zones". *Journal of Peace Research*. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343320971021>

Leal Buitrago, F. 2017. "Finalización del conflicto armado y expectativas de paz en Colombia" (End of the armed conflict and peace expectations in Colombia). En W. Grabendorff & D. Gudiño Pérez (eds.). *Proceso de paz y posacuerdo en Colombia: efectos en la región* (*Peace process and post-agreement in Colombia: effects on the region*). Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES-Ildis). Quito.

Medeiros, S. E. & A. Panno Beirão. 2017. "Reputation and Peacekeeping Missions: Brazil and Middle Powers in challenging times". *Rev. Esc. Guerra Nav.* 23 (2), pp. 328-352.

Mejía Duque, C. (org.). 2017. *Equidad de género y derechos de las mujeres en el Acuerdo final de paz. 5 claves (Gender equity and women's rights in the final peace agreement. 5 keys)*. Bogotá. Humanas. Available at <https://www.humanas.org.co/equidad-de-genero-y-derechos-de-las-mujeres-en-el-acuerdo-final-de-paz/>

Naucke, P. 2017. "Peacebuilding upside down? How a peace community in Colombia builds peace despite the State". *Social Anthropology*. 25 (4), pp. 454-469.

Ramírez, S. 2017. "Paz en Colombia: miedos y riesgos" (Peace in Colombia: fears and risks). En W. Grabendorff & D. Gudiño Pérez (eds.). *Proceso de paz y posacuerdo en Colombia: efectos en la región (Peace process and post-agreement in Colombia: effects on the region)*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES-Ildis). Quito.

Requena-Casanova, M. 2017. "La aplicación de la agenda Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad en los procesos de paz" (The application of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in the peace processes). *Revista Electrónica de Estudios Internacionales*. 34, pp. 2-37.

Rettberg, A. 2006. *Buscar la paz en medio del conflicto: un propósito que no da tregua (Seeking peace in the midst of conflict: a purpose that gives no respite)*. Ediciones Uniandes-UNDP. Bogotá.

Ramírez Ocampo, A. 2004. "The role of the international community in Colombia". *Accord. An international review of peace initiatives*. 14, pp. 74-79. Available at <https://www.c-r.org/accord/colombia/role-international-community-colombia>

Segura, R. & D. Mechoulam. 2017. "Made in Havana: How Colombia and the FARC decided to End the War". International Peace Institute. New York. February. Available at <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/IPI-Rpt-Made-in-Havana.pdf>

Segura, R. & S. Stein. 2018. "The Colombian Peace Process with the Farc: A mapping of vulnerabilities". *Report. Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC) - Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum (CPPF)*. July. Available at <https://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/the-colombian-peace-process-with-the-farc-a-mapping-of-vulnerabilities/>

----- 2019. "The Farc's collective reincorporation project: Its impact on Colombia's DDR". *Report. Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC) - Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum (CPPF)*. July. Available at <https://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/the-farc-s-collective-reincorporation-project-its-impact-on-colombia-s-ddr/>

Soares de Aguiar, B. 2020. "Sociedade civil organizada na cooperação internacional: A atuação do movimento feminista na negociação do Acordo de Paz colombiano" (Organized civil society in international cooperation: The performance of the feminist movement in the negotiation of the Colombian peace agreement). IESP/UERJ Doctoral Program, Rio de Janeiro. Unpublished manuscript.

Sotomayor Velázquez, A. 2013. "Democratization and commitment to peace: South America's motivations to contribute to peace operations". In Kai Michael Kenkel (ed.). *South America and Peace Operations. Coming of age*. Routledge. Abingdon, pp. 45-63.

Tickner, A. 2007. "Intervención por invitación. Claves de la política exterior colombiana y de sus debilidades principales" (Intervention by invitation. Keys to Colombian foreign policy and its main weaknesses). *Colombia Internacional*. 65. January-June, pp. 90-111.

----- 2014. "Colombia, the United States, and Security Cooperation by Proxy". *WOLA Report*. Washington D. C. Available at <https://www.wola.org/analysis/colombia-the-united-states-and-security-cooperation-by-proxy/>

Tokatlian, J. G. 2000. *Globalización, narcotráfico y violencia*. Siete ensayos sobre Colombia (Globalization, drug trafficking, and violence. Seven essays on Colombia). Grupo Editorial Norma. Buenos Aires.

----- 2008. "La construcción de un 'Estado fallido' en la política mundial: el caso de las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y Colombia" (The construction of a 'failed state' in world politics: the case of US-Colombian relations). *Análisis Político*. 64. September-December, pp. 67-104.

- Zucatto, G. E.** 2020. "20 anos da Resolução 1325: Implementação e desafios à Agenda mulheres, paz e Segurança na América do Sul" (20 years of Resolution 1325: Implementation and challenges of the women, peace, and security agenda in South America). *Boletim OPSA*. 3. July-September, pp. 16-30.

ACRONYMS

Caecopaz	Centro Argentino de Entrenamiento Conjunto para Operaciones de Paz (Argentine Joint Training Center for Peace-keeping Operations)	Minigua	United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala
Celac	Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States).	Minurso	United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
Cencapopaz	Centro de Capacitación para Operaciones Policiales de Paz (Training Center for Police Operations for Peace)	Minusal	United Nations Mission in El Salvador
DDR	demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration	Minustah	United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)	UNMC	United Nations Mission in Colombia
ETCR	Espacios territoriales de capacitación y reincorporación (Territorial spaces for training and reincorporation)	Monusco	United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Farc	Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común	MVM	Tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism
Farc-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army)	OAS	Organization of American States
JEP	Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz (Special Jurisdiction for Peace)	IOM	International Organization for Migration
MAPP	Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz (Mission to Support the Peace Process)	PKO	Peacekeeping Operations
		UN	Organization of the United Nations
		EU	European Union
		Unamsil	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
		Unikom	United Nations Observer Mission for Iraq and Kuwait
		Untac	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Monica Hirst. Historian with a doctorate in strategic studies. Visiting Professor at the Universidad del Estado de Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) and Professor at the Universidad Torcuato di Tella (UTDT), Buenos Aires. She has researched and published numerous academic articles on Latin American regional security, the participation of Latin American countries in the Minustah, dynamics of international cooperation, among other issues.

Bruno Dalponte. Internationalist and PhD in International Studies (University of Birmingham, United Kingdom). Assistant Professor at the Universidad Nacional de San Martín (UNSAM), where he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in international security and foreign policy analysis. Associate Researcher of the International Relations Area at Flacso/Argentina. His research focuses on South American regional security, specifically on domestic and regional conditions for cooperation processes in the area of defense.

PIE DE IMPRENTA

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)
Calle 71 n° 11-90 | Bogotá-Colombia

Responsable

Kristina Birke Daniels
Directora del Proyecto Regional de Seguridad
y representante de la FES Colombia

Catalina Niño
Coordinadora de proyecto
catalina.nino@fescol.org.co

Bogotá, April 2021

SOBRE ESTE PROYECTO

Este documento es un producto del proyecto de la Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Red Latinoamericana de Seguridad Inuyente y Sostenible, formada por expertos

internacionales provenientes de los ámbitos de la política, la academia, la diplomacia, el sector de seguridad y organizaciones de la sociedad civil.

Para más información, consulte

<https://www.fes-colombia.org/fes-seguridad/>

THE LATIN AMERICAN PRESENCE IN POST-CONFLICT COLOMBIA



The text analyzes Latin American participation in the United Nations Mission in Colombia (UNMC), identifying and evaluating its main characteristics in the months extending from December 2016 to June/July 2017, the stage with the greatest deployment and participation of regional actors, both those belonging to military and security forces and civilian volunteers. Chapter 3, section 1.3 of the peace agreement establishes that the mission should be made up of mostly personnel from Latin American countries, entrusting them with a leadership role in coordinating the actions of the Tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM) formed between the United Nations, the Colombian government, and the FARC-EP.



The ability of the forces deployed in the international component of the Tripartite Mechanism to adapt their training and experience to the specific demands of the Colombian context are of utmost importance when assessing how the United Nations Mission in Colombia worked. The testimonies collected indicate a diversity in the experiences of participants in the mechanism, depending to a large extent on their specific deployment location during the mission. Aspects such as previous professional training and experience, gender, the particular moment of deployment, and the roles fulfilled also help to explain these differences. With these caveats, this working paper seeks to identify, understand, and analyze narratives in which a certain consensus was found regarding the development of peace-related actions in Colombia and the degrees of commitment shown by the parties.