

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Building Peace Amidst Violence: An Analysis of Colombia's Policies to Address Security and Development Challenges

Manuela Nilsson

Building peace in societies where levels of violence continue to be high is one of today's biggest challenges for countries like Colombia that are emerging from decades of protracted social conflict. The article examines how the Colombian state reasons about the challenges of re-establishing security and development as two core pillars for sustainable peace. It is embedded in the international debates on the security-development nexus within the statebuilding-peacebuilding discourse and based on an in-depth analysis of government policy documents, complemented by field interviews conducted between 2013 and 2017. It evaluates the Colombian government's perception of the nexus between security and development as a first step towards understanding how state actor perspectives in post-conflict societies with high levels of violence compare to international peacebuilding perspectives. The findings underline that while Colombia's national consolidation and reconstruction policies definitely display a belief in the existence of a nexus between security and development, that understanding differs significantly from international peacebuilding perspectives. It places heavy emphasis on a security-first approach that aims at statebuilding and subordinates development concerns to that overall goal, which creates an imbalance that translates as well into actor choices for the peacebuilding policies to be applied locally.

**Keywords:** Colombia; peacebuilding; security-development nexus; state-building; violence

## Introduction

Building peace is one of today's biggest challenges for societies broken by prolonged periods of conflict. The international community stands united behind the consensus that improving both security and development levels are core peacebuilding objectives and vital for achieving sustainable peace (UNDP 1994; UN 2005; WB 2011; OECD 2009). However, while peacebuilding has traditionally been conceived as a phase following a negotiated agreement between warring parties that puts an end to armed conflict, post-conflict societies are often characterized by continued high levels of violence and peacebuilding activities commence even before the peace-making process has concluded (Steenkamp 2011; Bouvier 2009).<sup>1</sup> This poses particular hurdles for all actors involved in security and development activities on the ground. The continued presence of armed actors prevents communities from producing to increase their own livelihood and makes it difficult for state actors to bring their development programs and even basic services to the communities. On the other hand, low development levels fuel recruitment into armed groups and illegal activities as the only way out of poverty for many community members.

Colombia is a prime example of a country currently facing this dilemma. The internal armed conflict in Colombia, which dates from the 1960s, finally concluded in the fall of 2016 with the signing and ratification of a peace agreement between the main conflict actors, the Colombian government and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia, after their Spanish abbreviation FARC). However, other armed groups, in part a result of previous, somewhat unsuccessful disarmament and demobilization efforts, continue to devastate parts of the country. Violence levels are particularly high in the rural areas where the production and trade with marijuana and cocaine has since decades fueled illegal activities, and they are even expected to rise in the implementation period of the fragile peace that has been reached.<sup>2</sup>

How the peacebuilding arenas of security and development are interlinked and should be addressed has been the focus of much academic debate over the past decade and is intimately connected to the discussion on the relationship between peacebuilding and statebuilding (Amer, Swain and Öjendal 2012; Duffield 2010; Chandler 2007; Buur, Jensen and Stepputat 2007; Tschirgi, Lund & Mancini 2010; Spear and Williams 2012; Grävingsholt, Gänzle & Ziaja 2009). However, little empirical research has so far concentrated on how states experiencing high levels of post-conflict violence themselves reason about

addressing both objectives and how security and development are conceptualized in their post-accord policies. This article explores how the Colombian government approaches both challenges by identifying key assumptions about security and development that feed into the country's reconstruction policies. I first present the international and academic debate on the nexus between security and development in peacebuilding and statebuilding as an analytical lens through which to evaluate the perceptions of the Colombian government on how to face the overlapping challenges of improving security and development in the country. The article then outlines methodology and data used before presenting an analysis of the policies, strategies and actors that have dominated security and development scenarios in Colombia during the past 15 years. The final part draws some conclusions from the Colombian case that feed into the larger debate on the security-development nexus paradigm and its importance for peacebuilding.

### The International Debate About the Nexus Between Security and Development

Security and development are contested concepts that have undergone important transformations during the past decades. Before the 1990s, development strategies mainly focused on poverty reduction and economic growth, while security was, at least officially, understood predominantly as the protection of a society from external threat. However, during the early years following the end of the Cold War, and in part as a consequence of the international community's stronger focus on peacebuilding, both concepts were expanded. Today, the new concept of human development also measures indicators such as education, the environment and human rights, while human security was amplified to include economic, health, personal, political, environmental, community and food security (Gómez & Gasper 2013). At the United Nations World Summit in 2005, the international community reached a consensus that all international peacebuilding operations were to include integrated security and development objectives, strategies and programs (UN 2005).

Since then, the international debate essentially has been focusing on the nature of a possible (or several different) nexus(es) between security and development. The international community essentially agrees that both arenas of activities are interdependent, resulting either in a beneficial or in a vicious cycle: improved security and development levels reinforce each other and help bring about sustainable peace; low levels, impact each other negatively and ultimately create or maintain conflict and decrease development levels (UN 2005; WB 2011; UNDP 1994). Academic research, however, questions this cycle truism and underlines that there are many possible connections between both arenas of activities, not just one nexus. Spear and Williams (2012), for example, outline eight different possible relationships, ranging from trade-off and zero-sum over sequential and hierarchical relationships to options where security and development are so conditioned by the local context that the relationship between them is too complex to reduce to one function. Stern and Öjendal (2010: 16) identify six different narratives behind

the security-development relationship and point out that the nexus is 'differently experienced, imbued with meaning and ultimately carried out' by different actors. The nexus is thus perceived as a process, rather than a commodity, which is permeated with the interests of the actors who construct it. Tschirgi, Lund & Mancini (2010) add to the discussion by underlining that the connection between the security and development arenas are intermediated through a country's evolving social and political processes and institutions and call for more locally grounded and differentiated approaches underlining the importance of the state as a key actor for the interpretation and implementation of the security-development nexus.

Furthermore, no agreement exists on how to implement both peacebuilding objectives on the ground. Some international actors tend to place a stronger weight on security before development, arguing that basic security is a condition *sine qua non* for any country emerging from violent conflict before engaging in development work (USIP 2009; JICA 2006). The World Bank's (2000) *Voices of the Poor* project is often used to justify prioritizing security over development. Others underline the importance to implement both objectives in parallel (OECD 2009). Academic research abundantly warns against subordinating development objectives and activities to, and merging them with, security concerns, the so-called securitization of development. Criticism is particularly directed towards favoring exclusive, more short-term oriented security policies intended to regulate and control citizens over inclusive, long-term development policies (Buur, Jensen and Stepputat 2007; Duffield 2010). Even the idea of focusing predominantly on socio-economic reconstruction rather than security has been brought into the discussion (Del Castillo 2013). Adding to the confusion on how to understand the connection between the security and development arenas in peacebuilding is the conceptual expansion of both. The new concepts of human security and human development blur the lines between both arenas of activities that now seem to be increasingly overlapping. It is no longer clear how to define the actors that should engage in development or security activities, or the activities that belong to each peacebuilding objective, which also leads to competition over resources between security and development actors (Chandler 2007; Trachsler 2008; WB 2011).

This discussion on the security-development nexus links with the ongoing debate concerning the relationship between statebuilding and peacebuilding. Statebuilding is the process of building, rebuilding or consolidating the capacities of a conflict-afflicted state while peacebuilding denotes actions beyond mere reconstruction after conflict that strengthen and solidify peace in order to prevent a relapse into conflict (Grävingsholt J, Gänzle & Ziaja 2009). Separate, but overlapping and reinforcing each other (OECD 2010), both processes can be nationally as well as externally driven, but evolved conceptually separately and in different historical circumstances. Statebuilding constituted an important part of peacebuilding in the liberal peacebuilding paradigm of the years following the end of the Cold War, when states who could not control their territory were seen as a security threat to the national and international environment (Stepputat 2018; Andersen 2006).

However, it soon became apparent that efforts to build the state could hinder peace and cause further conflict, as the state oftentimes was part of the security problem and too exclusive a focus on state actors as partners in peacebuilding proved to be contradictory for external actors (Menocal 2009). Thus, in recent years the peacebuilding debate has shifted away from the Western liberal peace model focusing on statebuilding towards pragmatic peacebuilding, a new approach that underlines the need to include bottom-up perspectives of everyday peace in order to achieve an inclusive and contextual peace rather than a one-size-fits-all, state-centric model (Moe and Stepputat 2018; Pouligny 2006; Öjendal, Schierenbeck & Hughes 2015).

In terms of the security-development nexus, statebuilding research essentially underlines the need of a security-first approach, in which the state's capacity to recuperate its monopoly over the use of violence is prioritized over development objectives. This enemy-centric understanding of security stands in contrast to the human security paradigm adopted by the peacebuilding discourse which uses a population-centric approach. The main tension between the traditional and human security concepts and their application to the state as an actor lies in the fact that the state is needed in order to promote and protect human security, while at the same time often being diagnosed as the source of much human insecurity (Persson 2012).

Overall, the debate about the nexus between security and development has been characterized by an absence of the voices of those actors that are directly confronted with the challenge to improve security and development conditions on the ground (Duffield 2010; Chandler 2007; Jensen 2010).<sup>3</sup> How do those state actors that have lived through the conflict and are now commencing the peacebuilding process actually confront the daunting challenge to address both security and development concerns? How do they reason about a possible connection between security and development challenges in an environment where levels of violence are still high? In order to provide this new perspective using the case of Colombia, this research has derived from the above outlined debate a theoretical point of departure that is based on the understanding that any nexus between security and development is dynamically constructed by actors on the basis of specific interests (Stern and Öjendal 2010). That particular construction has consequences that impact the policies providing the basis for peacebuilding and statebuilding and range from the choice of activities to achieve both or either one of the two objectives on the ground to the choice of actors to implement the activities, the resources allotted to the different tasks and the implementation results. With this analytical frame in mind, the article studies the Colombian government's reconstruction policies from 2002 to 2016 in order to identify key assumptions on security and development that guide the country's peacebuilding strategy and actor choices today. Looking at government policies over a period of time enables us to follow the evolution and development of the understanding of a possible nexus between security and development in government thinking. The time frame for this study includes the 15 years from the breakdown of the last Colombian peace negotiations in 2002 to the conclusion

of the latest peace agreement in 2016, a period in which the Colombian state combined enhanced anti-guerrilla warfare with first attempts to commence peacebuilding amidst ongoing violence through, for example, policies aiming at disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating ex-combatants and compensating victims through land restitution (Law 975 2005; Law 1448 2011).

### Methodology

The findings are primarily based on the analysis of six policy documents that are either publicly available or have been made available to this researcher during the field research periods in Colombia. They include the *Policy of Defense and Democratic Security* (PDSO, 2003), the *Policy of the Consolidation of Democratic Security* (2007), the *National Plan of Territorial Consolidation* (2009), the *National Policy of Territorial Consolidation and Reconstruction* (2012), the *Guidelines of the National Policy of Territorial Consolidation and Reconstruction* (PNCRT 2014), and the *Final Agreement to End the Conflict and Construct a Stable and Sustainable Peace* (2016). They constitute the body of policy documents guiding the Colombian government's attempts to regain security over its territory and at the same time and amid ongoing violence begin reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts. These documents were therefore selected as most suitable for the analysis of a nexus between development and security issues. Governmental development plans were also analyzed but do not contribute significantly to the specific analysis of the nexus, as they included security considerations only to a minor degree. Additional documents, such as public laws 995 and 1448 who constitute first legal steps towards peacebuilding, were also taken into consideration. However, as they do not constitute government policies per se, they were not part of the main body of documents subject to analysis. The selected documents were carefully scrutinized for their use of security and development as a) concepts, b) objectives and c) outcomes for the country's national policy as well as in terms of the actors assigned to achieve both objectives.

Furthermore, ten interviews with representatives of different state entities, the Administrative Unit for Territorial Consolidation (UACT, after its Spanish abbreviations), the Agency for Territorial Renovation and the Ministry of Defense, as well as with members of the Colombian military stationed at the headquarters in Colombia's capital Bogotá as well as the Meta and Tolima regions present additional sources to complement the national policy documents and triangulate the information provided by them. The interviews were conducted on site during field research periods in 2013, 2015 and 2017 and recorded with the explicit consent of all interviewees.

### The Emergence of a Colombian Security-Development Nexus: From Consolidation to Reconstruction

Colombia's decades-long internal struggle has been characterized by periods of hope for a negotiated solution and proposals for inclusive development, followed by disillusionment and seemingly exclusive hard power security approaches. As a result, the Colombian government has over the past fifteen years issued a number of policies that



are all characterized by a strong concern for security that not only subordinated development concerns but sometimes even worked in detriment to the latter. After the failure of the last negotiations conducted in the late 1990s, the government under Alvaro Uribe (2002–2010) once again focused on security first. Against the background of the War on Terror that commenced in 2001, the Colombian government rejected the idea of a political conflict and presented the opposing guerrilla groups as terrorist groups financed by a flourishing drug trade. Thus turned into a security rather than a political problem, the illegally armed groups were dealt with through territorial consolidation<sup>4</sup> policies that focused on exclusive security strategies (FIP 2011).

Consequently, the country's national consolidation policies all displayed, at least until 2012, a strong focus on security concerns. Militarizing state presence in the countryside, they were designed and implemented by security actors and the Ministry of Defense. Phased-in institutionalization, in which military action prepared specific conflict areas for democratic take-over by state institutions to strengthen the state's legitimacy, governance and presence, emerged as the overall recipe by the end of Uribe's second term. Colombia's security and territorial consolidation strategy as laid down in the Policy for Defense and Democratic Security (*Política de Defensa y Seguridad Democrática*), for example, clearly established security as the number one priority followed the classical three-step counterinsurgency strategy of clear-hold-build. In a first step, the armed forces were to clear limited territories from counterinsurgencies, followed by a period where the military would still be present to keep the area under control while at the same time allowing police forces to move in and establish themselves. In the third, the consolidation phase, civilian government units were allowed in to support the military efforts with political, economic and social efforts to win over the local population and re-establish government presence (PDSD 2003). However, the local guerrilla group soon internalized the governmental strategies, withdrew to hiding places while the military was not present and returned immediately after the military had declared the territory to be ready for civilian take-over, thereby returning to the original situation of violence. Very little emphasis on providing the necessary conditions for the third phase also contributed to an easy return to power by guerrilla groups once the military had left (FIP 2011).

Learning from the failure of the PDSD, Colombia's Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security (*Política de Consolidación de la Seguridad Democrática*, PCSD) attempted in 2007 to put more emphasis on social and political aspects in order to improve the sustainability of the security measures. As a sequence to that policy, the National Plan for Territorial Consolidation (*Plan Nacional para la Consolidación Territorial*, PNCT), launched in 2009, was still predominantly based on US counterinsurgency and anti-narcotics strategies as a continuation to the US-initiated and financed *Plan Colombia* (Isacson 2012).<sup>5</sup> While previous policies strictly separated between socio-political activities and security issues, civilian state institutions now became participants in security policy. The policy

thus demonstrated a first step towards coordinated action and a reinforced emphasis on strengthening the state of law, human development and the need to increase confidence in the state. However, even in the PNCT regional and social development components remained weak and unclear and consolidation efforts were concentrated on a number of rather isolated focus areas. Security was clearly emphasized as the base condition for development and strongly linked to anti-narcotics policies that displaced large numbers of peasants who in turn were practically driven to join the guerrilla for lack of livelihood options (FIP 2011; interview Director Foundation Ideas for Peace, Bogotá, 15-03-2013). Recognizing that enhanced security policies alone had not been sufficient to cope with the threat to security posed by the armed groups in Colombia, Uribe's successor Juan Manuel Santos demanded a strategic revision of the country's consolidation policy (CONPES 2012). As a result of that revision, a new government plan, the National Policy for Territorial Consolidation and Reconstruction (*Política Nacional de Consolidación y Reconstrucción Territorial*, PNCRT), was drafted. For the first time, this policy included the concept of reconstruction as part of a long-term contribution to the country's development (Interview UACT official, Bogotá, 06-03-2013).

Even though the creation of Colombia's most recent consolidation and reconstruction policy<sup>6</sup> created hopes for a shift towards a more balanced approach to security and development, both the first PNCRT draft issued and debated in 2012 as well as the final version published in 2014 essentially followed two basic underlying parameters. The first was the conceptualization of security along the lines of the traditional national security understanding that prevailed during the Cold War rather than the broader human security concept that emerged in the 1990s. Security threats were understood predominantly as threats towards the borders, the territory, the national economy, the sovereignty of the state and the physical safety of its population. The second understanding was the need to put security concerns first and consequently securitize development (PNCRT 2012; UACT 2014).

Both policy documents show signs of an official shift in thinking away from exclusive security considerations towards a more comprehensive frame for Colombia's reconstruction process. The diagnosis of the underlying causes for the problems that challenge consolidation and reconstruction hints at this shift by placing blame predominantly on the absence or only weak presence of the state in remote and geographically isolated parts of Colombia, rather than on the armed opposition. According to this diagnosis, weak state presence going back decades into history diminished the local population's capacities and willingness to participate in the democratic management of their own affairs, including the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and prevented the areas from connecting to the country's social and economic lifeline. The documents underlined that these conditions created fertile ground not only for guerrilla groups but also for other criminal armed gangs dedicated to illegal economic activities, commonly called *bacrim* (an abbreviation of the Spanish expression *bandas criminales*, or criminal groups). Those groups were considered to be connected

to illicit operations concerning natural resources and the production of illicit drugs and concentrated in those isolated focus areas (CONPES 2012; UACT 2014).

However, while not presenting the illegally armed groups as the original causes but rather the result of the absence of the state, both policy documents are nevertheless explicit in underlining that the presence of these actors prevented state actors from moving in and has contributed to a plethora of interlinking social, economic, political and security challenges. These challenges include a culture of violence and a high level of tolerance of human rights violations as well as the absence of a state of law and public services, the incapacity of communities to manage their own affairs, conflicts over land, low production and commercial activity levels, environmental deterioration, the existence of illegal markets and economic activities, external interference, social fragmentation, a loss of national identity and a general lack of trust between the state and the citizens (CONPES 2012; UACT 2014). The armed opposition groups in the country therefore continued to be regarded as the main obstacles to achieving security and development (Interview military official Army Mobile Brigade 4, Puerto Rico, 13-09-2017; interview military coordinator in the South of Tolima, Ibagué, 13-03-2013; interview members of the Colombian Military, Bogotá, 26-03-2015). The strong emphasis on establishing a state of law and securitizing those actors who are engaged in illegal activities underlined this exclusive approach. In the 2012 policy document, for example, developmental activities, such as youth employment programs, were mostly considered a function of security, namely to prevent youth recruitment into armed groups (CONPES 2012: 33). The policy plan therefore clearly displayed a tendency to securitize development, turning subjects of development into objects of security.

Furthermore, just blaming the illegally armed groups for the existence of a culture of violence hides the fact that many Colombians, particularly in the rural and more remote areas, have equally negative perceptions of state actors, especially security actors. Interviews with UACT personnel engaged in implementing quick-impact peace-building projects in areas with little state presence underlined that the local population had mixed feelings about the presence of the military in their areas: on the one hand they felt that soldiers increased their security concerning threats from other armed actors. On the other hand, they underlined that they still remember the active involvement of members of the military in corruption as well as activities that threatened people's lives and livelihood, often in cooperation with paramilitary groups, therefore actively contributing to the absence of a culture of peace and a state of law themselves (Interview UACT official, Bogotá, 06-03-2013). The PNCRT, however, was completely silent on the issue of security actor involvement in human rights violations and did not touch upon any structural changes or vetting procedures that would acknowledge the contribution of state actors in the creation of insecurity in the country. Illegally armed actors were singled out as the major, in fact, the only threats to security and development, and this discourse essentially prevented a shift

of power from military/security to civilian/development actors, even though President Santos had already in 2013 publicly admitted that state security actors had been perpetrators of human rights violations (Depsky 2013). Only the peace agreement of 2016 finally took a first step towards acknowledging the culpability of state security actors (Final Agreement paragraphs 3.4.3, p. 82, and 5.1.1.1.2, p. 134).

### **The Colombian Strategies to Implement the Security-Development Nexus**

Following the logic of the Colombian state's diagnosis of the causes for the lack of security and development in parts of the country, namely the absence of the state, the overall goal of the new policy on territorial consolidation and reconstruction was to recuperate and then maintain the state's institutional presence and legal control in and over those areas in order to enable them to integrate with the social, economic and institutional fabric of the rest of the country. Development concerns had to follow security prerogatives (CONPES 2012; UACT 2014). Including the concept of reconstruction in the policy's title after 2012 promised a step towards establishing more of a balance between the security and development elements in Colombia's new policy. However, only one single page of the policy documents conceptualized reconstruction (CONPES 2012; UACT 2014). In the graph illustrating 'the concept of consolidation and territorial reconstruction' there is no further mention of the concept of reconstruction, and territorial security is still presented as the *sine qua non* condition for achieving the overall goal of securing a state of law in the country (CONPES 2012, 10; UACT 2013, 23). Furthermore, the new policy showed its continuity with previous strategies by maintaining a phased approach in which military presence enters first and is then gradually withdrawn and replaced by civilian presence: a phase of territorial recuperation (red) with intense military action without civilian presence ushers into a transition phase (yellow) in which police and civilian actors gradually replace the military actors. The expected end result was a final stabilization phase (green) where no more military presence is needed and security tasks are handled exclusively by the police and civilian state community actors (CONPES 2012). However, this traffic-light system was in the process of being phased out already in 2013 – even though it still appeared in the UACT guidelines from 2014 – mainly due to the fact that the division of the territory in red, yellow and green areas caused preoccupation in the local populations. Some of the local communities marked as red tried to present themselves as yellow areas in order to qualify for civilian state actor presence and development-oriented projects, since red areas were considered too dangerous for any development initiative to enter (Interview UACT official, Bogotá, 06-03-2013). While maps dividing the national territory in red, yellow and green areas were hanging on the walls of UACT offices and military offices during the field research of 2013, by 2017 the system had been completely abandoned.

In order to achieve its goal to permanently replace the existing structure implemented by illegally armed groups in the regions, including illegal economic activities,

emphasis was placed rather narrowly on justice reforms, protecting human rights and eliminating the cultivation of illicit drugs. Thus, even though the new policy emphasized the need to establish a functional justice system that reached into all remote corners of the country and included far-reaching human rights improvement, all activities outlined in the document itself were ultimately subordinated to what is seen as the base condition for reaching institutionalization: security, state consolidation and the control of criminal actors and illicit economic activities as their financial bases. In this respect, the problem of youth recruitment into illegal activities was, for example, seen as a security issue rather than a socio-economic problem and illicit drug cultivation was considered a threat against national security rather than a result of the lack of opportunities to employment and economic sustainability (CONPES 2012).

### The Actors of the Colombian Security-Development Nexus

An important indicator of how states perceive the relationship between security and development objectives in their peacebuilding policies is the choice of actors to implement those objectives. Both, international reconstruction framework documents as well as recent peacebuilding research, underline the importance of locally owned peacebuilding processes. Tapping into local capacities and creating actor networks within the local context in order to create sustainable processes with empowerment potential for local groups is also expected to appease fence sitters and potential spoilers (AU 2005; USIP 2009; Rettberg 2013; Pouligny 2006). Donors also demand that military personnel should not continue to engage in any type of reconstruction other than direct security tasks, if civilian state agencies, the communities and civil society are willing and able to step in. According to international reconstruction manuals, economic reconstruction provides major opportunities to fulfil a number of peacebuilding objectives, including reconstructing the social fabric, and if communities are deprived of a role in that undertaking because military actors take over those tasks without local participation, a major development opportunity is lost (USIP 2009; Isacson 2012). The PNCRT's objectives, however, were executed predominantly through government actors, particularly the military, the police, the justice system and a number of different government branches. The National Development Plan 2010–2014 confirmed that strategic direction for national consolidation rested ultimately with Colombia's National Security Council (*Plan Nacional del Desarrollo 2010–2014*, art. 195). Since even the final 2014 version of the PNCRT policy emphasized consolidation over reconstruction, security actors maintained an all-important role in this process.

Initial plans for the new policy combined for the first time top-down with bottom-up initiatives. In the 2012 draft, for example, communities were encouraged to engage in formulating community development plans in cooperation with the government. However, the exact role of the non-state actors in these bottom-up initiatives were not further developed and cooperation with

the communities became most explicit when the latter were needed to achieve security and state control rather than development objectives. Here the draft proposed the creation of local prevention committees consisting of civil governmental actors, representatives of the armed forces and local leaders, to design strategies to combat crime and monitor the status quo of the state of law in the communities. It was also indicated that coordinated action plans to fight illicit drug production need to be based on cooperation with the communities. Still, the fact that the plan also foresaw policies to evaluate and deal with the structural causes of those illegal economies and the development of economic alternatives to remove the incentives to coca production can be interpreted as a first step towards recognizing that security policies needed to be combined with development initiatives (CONPES 2012). The final 2014 version, however, again abstained from more detailed proposals on how to put the policy into action and returns instead to an almost exclusive top-down emphasis on state actors. Focus was placed on the need to coordinate actors from the military, the police and judicial system with 'the rest of state institutions' to achieve consolidation and reconstruction in a sequential way: first the military, then the police and judiciary and finally all other state institutions that will 'provide the conditions and services for economic and social development' and territorial integration (UACT 2014: 23).

The understanding that re-establishing security and development in Colombia required a coordinated effort of different state institutions had already been reached in 2004 and resulted in the creation of the Centre for the Coordination of Integrated Action (*Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral*, CCAI). The CCAI, whose directorate displayed an overwhelming influence of security actors, was to oversee interagency coordination (PNCT 2009). Its predecessor, the Administrative Unit for Territorial Consolidation (*Unidad Administrativa para la Consolidación Territorial*, UACT) became part of the Ministry of Social Action, a major step away from the control by security actors. The UACT was in charge of coordinating the implementation of the state's territorial consolidation policies. However, UACT employees shared office space with police and military liaisons in all regional offices and all of the Unit's programs and activities were planned and coordinated together with the security actors. In fact, it was impossible to conduct interviews with UACT members in private, there was always military personnel present. The securitization-of-development approach was still very much apparent in this cooperative working structure. Security concerns and objectives guided all activities and the UACT's efforts to bring quick-impact peace dividends to the communities emphasized the need to restore confidence in the state as a condition for increased security rather than development. Thus, the National Security Council placed peace dividend projects only in communities who constituted a threat to national security objectives rather than those with the lowest development indicators. Without providing a real contribution to development, the UACT's peace dividends created heightened expectations among the population that could not be satisfied and instead further deepened



mistrust in the state which eventually contributed to the abandonment of those efforts (Interview UACT official, Bogotá, 06-03-2013).

As part of a winning-hearts-and-minds counter-insurgency strategy, security actors in Colombia also pursued an open development agenda in parallel to (but not in cooperation with) the civilian state agencies (Interview UACT official, Bogotá, 06-03-2013; and interview Ministry of Defense official, Bogotá, 05-03-2013). In a number of interviews conducted during 2013, military leaders, including liaison officers with the UACT and representatives of the Ministry of Defense, underlined the need for the military not only to remain in the already cleared (yellow) areas of the country for security reasons but also to undertake development activities such as the construction of schools, roads and even private housing, using military personnel rather than local human resources (Interview Ministry of Defense official, Bogotá, 05-03-2013; interview members of the Colombian Military, Bogotá, 26-03-2015; interview military coordinator in the South of Tolima, Ibagué, 13-03-2013). The army even produced small film clips documenting their social work in the communities as well as the communities' gratitude to the military.<sup>7</sup> These arguments were used by state security actors not only during interviews in 2013, when peace was negotiated and armed conflict still going on, but still in 2017, when the peace agreement had already been signed (Interview military official Army Mobile Brigade 4, Puerto Rico, 13-09-2017; interview member of the planning group for the transformation of the Colombian army for the future, Bogotá, 11-05-2017; interview official of the Colombian Armed Forces, military headquarters Bogotá, 09-05-2017).

In summary, the analysis of Colombia's national policies to consolidate and ultimately to reconstruct its war-torn territory finds that while the Colombian state recognized a nexus between security and development objectives for the country's peacebuilding process, it nevertheless perceived that nexus predominantly as a one-way road: security threats impede development and only if security is restored can development take place. Both the 2012 draft as well as the final 2014 policy stressed that military force is not sufficient to handle security threats. However, this insight did not lead to the conclusion that development deficiencies cause security threats and consequently that development policies might help to improve security levels. In fact, the final policy explicitly underlines the need to 'mobilize in a coordinated way all state institutions for interventions guided by the principles of logical sequence' (CONPES 2012: 4; UACT 2014: 33). The peace agreement that was signed in 2016 continued the same thinking. Even though the concept of human security is mentioned in the preamble and later defined as a 'modern and qualitatively new concept ...that allows for connecting security measures with measures taken to further development and individual and collective well-being laid down in this agreement', allusions to an understanding of a nexus between security and development are refined to the fight against illicit drug cultivation – and the consequent need to provide affected areas with new development alternatives (Final Agreement ch. 3.1: 57 and 77f. and ch. 4: 98 and 109).

This one-way approach justified the heavy emphasis on security actors displayed in all policies and subsequently the securitization of development. Security actors became the primary actors in the strategies to consolidate and reconstruct Colombia. The Colombian policies clearly favored state over local and military over civilian actors. While they proposed that state and particularly security actors engage the help of actors at the community level, control over all activities remained within the hands of state actors. However, the peace process has also presented a silver lining for Colombia's understanding of the security-development nexus. By the time this research was finalized, the UACT had been dissolved (in early 2016) and divided into different state institutions who finally managed to free themselves from military influence and are eager to underline that their work is no longer dependent on the military and its policies (Interview official of the Agency of Territorial Renovation, Bogotá, 28-04-20; interview official of the Agency of Territorial Renovation, Bogotá, 12-05-2017). However, at this point it is still too early to determine if these changes actually constitute a step towards a new understanding of the security-development nexus, after decades of security-first policies and with a military complex that is still very strong.

## Conclusions

This study brings forth two conclusions of interest for the larger debate on the security-development nexus: *firstly*, it underlines that state actors have different understandings of the paradigms discussed by policy debates about peacebuilding at the international level. The Colombian case shows that the predominant understanding of the discourse on the security-development nexus at the international level, namely that security and development are interrelated, was similarly recognized at the state level. However, rather than perceiving that nexus in the form of Menkhaus' (2004) cycle, the Colombian policies understood it as a one-way relationship in which development serves and is determined by the predominant needs of security. The policies' conceptualization of security along the lines of the traditional national security concept, rather than following the human security understanding of overlapping security and development arenas dominating the international discussions since the 1990s, further indicates that the Colombian state's reasoning about development and security in a post-conflict context is still very much determined by principles of national security and state consolidation. Colombia also constitutes an example of how continued high levels of violence even during potential peacebuilding scenarios further unbalance the nexus and undermine the idea of a mutual interdependence between security and development, pushing the security agenda ahead of the development agenda. The policies' emphasis on state as opposed to local actors is another example of differences between the perceptions at the state and the international level. The international debate's call for the turn to the local has so far not resonated in Colombia. Despite expressing the need to secure the confidence and participation of community actors to make consolidation sustainable, the Colombian

policy clearly favors state over local and military over civilian actors. Furthermore, the continued high level of violence that characterizes Colombia's peacebuilding scenario even today enables the country's security actors to remain in many rural areas and even play the role of a development actor instead of turning over the control of those areas to civilian state actors.

*Secondly*, the Colombian case shows a widening gap on the ground between the 'old' emphasis on statebuilding and the new paradigm of pragmatic peacebuilding in post-conflict countries, where more emphasis is placed on including local structures and actors to increase resilience to conflict and violence from the bottom-up rather than through a strengthened state and a top-down approach, thereby adding to the ongoing debate on the relationship between statebuilding and peacebuilding. Colombian efforts throughout the period of time under consideration for this study have been focused on strengthening the state's capacity, legitimacy and control over its territory, rather than on inclusive peace as demanded by the international community. The pre-2010 emphasis of blame placed on illegally armed actors as well as the later acknowledgment that the absence of the state in the rural areas contributed to the increase of control of those actors both essentially strengthen one call – the need for increased statebuilding – and constitutes in that sense no shift towards an emphasis on building peace. The Colombian case underlines that in order to reconcile peacebuilding and statebuilding and to focus on a common goal (Grävingholt, Gänzle & Ziaja 2009) rather than widen the gap between both arenas, we need to engage in a new dialogue that discusses them as complementary, rather than competitive objectives. Both pragmatic peacebuilding's demand to transfer peacebuilding ownership from global to local levels (Öjendahl 2015) and foster endogenous, nationally-driven peacebuilding processes that are facilitated and supported, rather than imposed, by the international community, as well as statebuilding's imperative that a strong and legitimate state is needed to be able to improve security and development levels are essential to obtain sustainable peace. For that, all actors, at the state as well as the community level, need to make their voices heard, listen to each other and use their experiences, structures and capacities to create a society that is capable of withstanding threats to security and development. Despite peacebuilding's disillusionment with statebuilding, state actors need to be taken seriously as important, long-term actors in the construction of sustainable peace. At the same time, they have to include other actors from society in a more meaningful way than has been done in Colombia and is currently done in many cases of post-accord recovery around the world where peacebuilding and statebuilding need to be combined in a complementary way, for example in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, but as well as Myanmar and Sudan. Abandoning one in favor of the other, as Colombia has been doing but as is also currently done at the international as well as the academic level, albeit in opposite directions, denies the fact that all actors are needed to build sustainable peace.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Examples range from El Salvador, Guatemala and South Africa to Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan.
- <sup>2</sup> Negotiations with the second largest guerrilla group, ELN, started in 2017 and are currently ongoing, with occasional interruptions.
- <sup>3</sup> Notable exceptions are Buur, Jensen and Stepputat 2007 and Nilsson and Taylor 2017.
- <sup>4</sup> Consolidation is understood here as a transitional phase within the larger context of state-building after violent conflict that establishes the conditions for development activities to commence, including first and foremost territorial security, the presence of state institutions and basic services and the establishment of a state of law.
- <sup>5</sup> Plan Colombia is a much-debated United States military and diplomatic aid initiative aimed at combating drug cartels and insurgent groups in Colombia, launched in the late 1990s.
- <sup>6</sup> This new policy plan was drafted by the National Council for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES, after its Spanish initials) in early 2012. It was made available to this researcher in its draft and unpublished form in early 2013. In January 2014, a new version was finally published (UACT 2014) which was also included in this analysis. After that date, as to the author's knowledge, no new policy as part of this policy development for territorial consolidation and reconstruction was discussed or published.
- <sup>7</sup> The movie was shown to the author in an interview with Teniente Coronel Pedro Ospina, the military coordinator with the UACT unit in Southern Tolima.

## Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the help of Diana Carolina Puerto, Maria Eugenia Pinto and Hermann Orjuela in organizing the field interviews for this research.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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**How to cite this article:** Nilsson, M. 2018. Building Peace Amidst Violence: An Analysis of Colombia's Policies to Address Security and Development Challenges. *Iberoamericana – Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 47(1), pp. 34–44, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/iberoamericana.411>

**Published:** 23 August 2018

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