

Damascus: The Renewed Doctrine of the National Army of Colombia

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This note from the field is an account of the current Colombian Army's doctrinal reform aimed at transiting into a context of post-conflict. It is a testimony of how we conceived this process in regards to the national and international contexts.

Background

Why was it necessary to review the military doctrine of the National Army of Colombia?

Revisions of military doctrine were mainly motivated by factors and processes that have been taking shape, both in the national (institutional) and international environment over recent years and not by hasty and unplanned decisions. Some of the variables that led to a revision of the current doctrine were:

- The Colombian Army Transformation Plan (launched in 2011).
- Changes in threats to national security.
- The incorporation of new technologies.
- Dynamic operational areas.
- Observed and learned lessons.

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- The need for a common language with other professional armies in the world (interoperability).
- Standardize and upgrade concepts of military science.
- Ensuring effective knowledge and implementation of the legal framework for the conduct of operations.

The evolution of Colombian Military Doctrine

Colombia is no stranger to doctrinal transformation processes. In fact, during its history, the Army experienced a series of restructurings. The first transformation took place during national independence (1819) when the Army transitioned from a royalist to a nationalist one. The Army abandoned the Spanish doctrine of thirds and *coronelía* in favour of Napoleonic wars informed tactics and techniques (French doctrine). This doctrine was dominant during the rest of the nineteenth century.

After the painful experience of the Thousand Days' War (1899-1902), another important process was the military reform led by General Rafael Reyes and Rafael Uribe in 1907. Both of them hired people from the Chilean military mission. This led to the creation of the Superior School of War, the Military School of Cadets and the School of classes. The School of classes was one of the attempts to create a school for non-commissioned officers of the Army. The influence of the "Prussian" doctrine was strong during this period of Colombian history. The process of doctrinal transformation continued during the twentieth century, especially after the Colombian-Peruvian conflict that led to the creation and development of training schools in 1932.

Moreover, I have to mention modernization processes within the Army after the Korean War in 1950. These processes initiated a dichotomy between the Prussian doctrine and the North American doctrine, which persists to this day. During the 1960s, we observed one of the most dramatic changes in the National Army of Colombia. The Army moved from conventional regular capabilities (improved by participating in international high intensity conflicts such as in Korea) to an Army with irregular capabilities. This process was evolutionary and lasted for about 40 years to the point that the Army now concentrates all its power, action and philosophy in a purely counter-insurgent force.

In recent years, the Army acquired a combat capability that few armies in the world have, and perhaps many would like to have in such conflicts. Since 1998, the so-called 'Plan Colombia' drove the modernization process during the Government of President Andres Pastrana from 1998 to 2002. This initiative included receiving North American materials and adopting doctrinal developments with regard to special forces, aviation and intelligence. This initiative performed outstandingly with the policies of democratic security during the Government of President Alvaro Uribe from 2002 to 2010. These policies no doubt influenced the weakening and subsequent change of strategy of the criminal and terrorist structures of FARC, ELN and BACRIM.

In 2009, seeing themselves militarily weakened, the FARC made a change in strategy. They went from concentrating large groups of terrorists to clusters in small cells, returning to their criminal modes of the 1960s with actions perpetrated by small groups in an isolated and continuous way (Plan Renacer FARC). Therefore, the Ministry of Defense needed to rethink its strategy in 2011 so it could fight these groups operating outside the law. That is how the Committee on Strategic Review and Innovation, called CRE-I, was born. It is within CRE-I that the 'Sword of Honour' strategy plan was designed to achieve the final defeat of the narco-terrorist groups through a coordinated, joint and interagency work. The Sword of Honour campaign has been effective and met most of the goals of the Colombian State.

In the years 2012 and 2013, we continued with this trend of institutional reengineering. This trend turned into an improvement in processes performed within the Army. These processes aimed to develop capacity to respond to new challenges and threats looming in an increasingly globalized world. For this purpose, the Army raised a number of initiatives to counter these threats.

The Military Doctrine of the Army and its Interaction with Institutional Plans

CRE-I 2011 (Committee on Strategic Review and Innovation)

The Committee on Strategic Review and Innovation (CRE-I) was an exercise that allowed the development of the Sword of Honour campaign. The CRE-I started from the basis of studying the Comprehensive Policy on Defense and Security Prosperity Plan, the war plan of the General Command of the Armed Forces, the Campaign plans

of each of the Forces and the Strategic Plan of the National Police, and took as reference the Strategic Plan implemented by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan.

A sword called 'Sword of Honour' represented the philosophical basis of the campaign: operations, intelligence and comprehensive action. These three processes are reflected in the cross of the sword. The handle as support and point of contact with the warrior generates the direction, strength and power guided by intelligence and comprehensive action. Four attached hawks embody support processes: human, logistics management, training and force structure. The blade of the sword symbolizes the combination and interaction of each of these elements through a differential strategy, simultaneous, coordinated and interagency. Its brightness reflects excellent strategic communication.

CETI 2012: (Committee on Strategic Transformation and Innovation)

The Committee on Strategic Transformation and Innovation was a process derived from the need to review the current status of all functional components of the Army. Understanding the military institution as a system with subsystems that defines strategies to overcome its own weaknesses. It also aimed at promoting planning in the short, medium and long terms to enhance the capabilities defined and achieving the objectives of the Force by not taking a reactive stance to reality. That proactive stance can reduce uncertainty and minimize risk through anticipation of events that may occur in the future.

CEDEF 2013: (Committee on Strategic Design of the Army of the Future).

The emerging operational environment presents a complex range of threats that are difficult to estimate. They require a force operating under a variety of conditions with a high degree of uncertainty. This uncertainty makes it difficult to formulate a strategy for successful transformation. Nonetheless, the methodology developed in the Committee on Strategic Design of the Army of the Future (CEDEF) allows grasping both complexity and uncertainty by building models of gradual, sequenced and

scalable development in three processing times (short, medium and long term) for the force as a whole and for each of its components.

The purpose of the transformation strategy is to design a roadmap for the evolution and development of the Army into a visible, decisive, lethal, integrated, adaptive and flexible ground force able to fulfill multiple missions in response to any threats or challenge. Structural changes in the organization, technology, personnel management, leadership and doctrine generate capabilities constituting the core of combat power. Capabilities are developed through projects and requirements formulated under the CEDEF. As a whole, the Army's system capabilities are acquired by specific units as needed; so that the Army's units are setup by specialty, capabilities and structure required to fulfill the assigned mission. We determine the force generation process (organization, training, equipment, and maintenance) under the same criteria.

MINERVA 2015 (Improvement of the education subsystem and the Army doctrine)

Minerva is the strategic plan to strengthen military education and doctrine. Minerva highlights guidelines of institutional development by strengthening education, doctrine, lessons learned, instruction and training, science and technology. Thereby, this plan gives tools to meet the challenges and threats of the future. Minerva serves to direct efforts and resources in the service of education and military training. The goal is to guide the development of human talent as an institutional bulwark and implementing a doctrine according to global demands. This plan enhances innovation, development and military research. With this plan, the Army turns into the spearhead of all transformation processes led by the Colombian government in the defense sector.

Damascus Doctrine.

Evolution of the doctrine

The current Army doctrine in Colombia was influenced by internal armed conflict. American influence is clearly visible in the formal part, which is more linked to

the factual development within an asymmetric conflict context. In other words, this last doctrine was built on the vast experience of five decades of internal armed conflict but also on large gaps in its theoretical foundations. Thus, as the previous doctrine focused on irregular operations, it suffered stagnation in comparison to operational principles used today by armies aligned with NATO doctrine. Therefore, review and adaptation of our manuals and regulations were necessary, so that they could be consistent with the national situation, the regional context and international environment.

In turn, our new doctrine supports highly prepared and trained military organizations, educated with teams that are at the same level as the neighbouring countries, with special forces properly equipped and high moral. In addition, military organizations must be versatile to ensure the development of ground operations (offensive, defensive, stability and support to civil authority) by the distinctive capabilities of the Army of Colombia: combined arms manoeuvre, special operations and security in wide area with an integration of information technology and communications to ensure interoperability between them.

In this sense, the doctrine that determines the operational use was built within the framework of a legal order integrating national and international norms (law of security and defense) regulating the methods and means of warfare with full adherence to these standards. This legal order shall be composed of provisions of various origins, but mostly by International Humanitarian Law, with the adaptation of a hierarchical, modern, feasible and realizable doctrinal body to guide the actions of men and organizations and to fulfill the mission effectively.

Where do we focus?

In order to seize this historic opportunity of reforming the Army doctrine, the Project Damascus 1.0 was implemented inside the Army in the second half of 2015. The first phase of development included the construction of Fundamental Army Manuals (MFE) condensing the institutional doctrinal philosophy and vision for the coming years. Therefore, in preparation for the future, we assess the threat by analyzing potential enemies' intentions and criminal ways and by thinking how they would act in certain situations. As military scientific professionals, it is our duty to be the best in

everything we do, that is, a military force managed with cohesiveness, transparency, supremely trained and motivated, so that any potential threat against us will not have any chance of victory.

So what is the best starting point to face the future? First, it is essential to understand that the world is becoming each day more competitive. On several occasions we have referred to the nearly six decades of experience that our Army has in conducting sustained operations, targeting a persistent and hybrid threat. This background gives us a unique opportunity to build on the honour of our past to conceive the vision of the future of our Institution. Any institution that wishes to fulfill its duties and respond to any request (present or future) must have a solid doctrinal basis to guide their operational and intellectual development. This is especially true in the case of our Army. For this reason, the Damascus project is a high quality product built on three previous tasks: to review, prioritize and update the doctrine of the Land Forces of the Nation. The Damascus doctrine is a milestone and will guide our transformation and the victorious future of the institution.

Why Damascus?

Damascus represents a paradigm shift in the way the Army produces and manages doctrine. The name Damascus is inspired by the conversion of a Roman persecutor of Christians, Saul of Tarsus, in the city of Damascus. Believing that he had met the risen Jesus in Damascus, Saul became the Apostle Paul, a defender of the faith, who wrote largely the New Testament, thirty years after Christ's death. Therefore, Damascus represents the conversion of our doctrine, the new vision, awakening and doctrinal transformation of the National Army of Colombia.

Fundamental Army Manuals (MFE)

In this new doctrinal structure, four levels were incorporated for conducting ground operations.

The first level is composed of Fundamental Army Manuals (MFE). These 17 publications were presented in a special ceremony at the Military School of Cadets 'General José María Córdova' in August 2016. They contain fundamental concepts and principles inherent to the ground war of the century, which have passed the test of time and that are the base, the backbone of our knowledge. They also have a common symbol similar to that used by NATO and our closest allies, the US Army, Chile, UK, Spain, among others. The MFE are headed by two extraordinary texts developed during the process of generating Damascus, these manuals are the MFE 1.0 "Army" and the MFE 3-0 "Operations." These publications contain the core concepts that unify and carry the development of other hierarchical categories manuals. They also represent the philosophy and fundamental principles of the institution and contain its democratic DNA.

On the second level are the Fundamental Reference Manuals of the Army (MFRE). Each extends the principles and concepts of other key corresponding MFE and detail the operational concepts that support them. These publications are much more extensive and are also accompanied by graphics and digital resources that illustrate the content in a clear and conspicuous way.

On the third level are the Army Field Manuals (MCE), which encode tactics, and procedures that have been maintained over time and reinforce the content of the MFE and MFRE. They address the functions of warfare and the various steps to develop operational expertise within the Army.

In the fourth and last level we find the Army Technical Manuals (MTE). As implied by the name, they contain techniques and procedures developed in operational theater and training centers. These should be carried out accurately and consistently throughout the Force to unify the operational detail and increase our skills. It should be noted that all these publications will be available in apps, web pages and digital platforms, in order to increase access to the doctrine by all members of the Force, in particular the younger generation, who have grown interacting with these technological advances. To meet the staggering of these levels, the Damascus project was structured in phases in which the MFE are the first doctrinal product. In an estimated time of three years (2018), the doctrine of the Army will be completely revised, updated and with a hierarchy in accordance with international standards.

National Army Operational Concept: Unified Land Operations (OTU)

Under the Damascus doctrine, we incorporate a unique operational concept that guides the performance of the Force. Therefore, the Army adopted a concept called: Unified Land Operations (UTO) which is a natural evolution of our doctrinal thinking.

Given that past doctrines allowed us to fight with honor, Damascus is also built on the heritage of our military culture. It also introduces a new terminology with concepts such as decisive action, unified action, mission command, art and operational design among others. It formalizes a set of distinctive competencies for the Army.

The OTU are executed through the elements of Decisive action, defined as the concept of continuous, simultaneous offense, defense, stability, or defense support of civil authorities. They are running concurrently in order to prevent conflict, prevail in the war and create favorable conditions for the resolution of the conflict. Decisive action is reflected in the execution of their distinctive competencies: Combined Arms Maneuver (MAC), Wide Area Security (SAE) and Special Operations (OE). These doctrinal principles require commanders who are completely familiar with the type of mission command (MTM), as a new feature of the philosophy and conduct of war. Warfighting function consists of multiple tasks, people, processes and technology systems required to make this work. In the Army of Colombia, we understood that when soldiers are speaking of command and control, they focus on communication systems, networks and management bandwidth to transmit information. What has been neglected in our discussion of command and control, is the appreciation of the human aspects of military operations and the central role of the commander in all activities.

Conclusions

Our revised and renewed doctrine explains the importance of the ability of the commander to understand the problems and the design of the operation. Thus, the function of warfighting mission command provides the doctrinal foundation that will allow us to expand our thinking on this important issue. This function synchronizes and integrates all other functions of warfighting. In short, Army leaders, from the General staff to the youngest soldier, recognize that we must exploit the initiative which we

have since we can build on our experience acquired through decades of war. From this effort, we establish the basis for training, organization, education and equipping members of the Force that will be incorporated in the coming decades. The Damascus doctrine manages to improve a better understanding of our soldiers and leaders through increased access to information technology and more appropriate linkages to understand the operational environment and the variables of the mission.

Our fundamental manuals will allow the articulation and unification of our unique operational concept, providing adaptable tools to the needs of each soldier and create suitable products for doctrinal learning requirements of our troops.

For generations, our Force has operated at the speed of war. Now we have the Damascus doctrine that ultimately is for the soldiers, understood as the axis of the Armies, led by competent leaders, ensuring forever the principles of Homeland, Honor, and Loyalty with absolute faith in the cause and always in the hands of the God of armies in all our actions!