

CHALLENGES OF DEFENSE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT: THE COLOMBIAN CASE

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Summary

Defense in Colombia, realized through the actions of its Armed Forces, is the means to guaranty the protection of the territory of the nation as part of the security of the State. In this sense, defense contributes to territorial and decision sovereignty, as well as the well-being of its citizens and institutions, allowing it to meet the national objectives that as a society have been set. That is, both defense and national security are important factors for the development of national interests and the prevention of the evolution of complex challenges affecting the nation. In this regard, strategic planning and its consecutive management are the tools that will allow Colombia to face its risks, threats, and opportunities. To this end, the State has set up a National Security Council, whose task is to carry out the pertinent coordination.

Key words: Security, Defense, Strategic Planning.

Introduction

Currently, Latin America is seen in the international system as one of the most peaceful regions in terms of the development of inter-state conflicts, unlike other regions that maintain a dynamic of constant confrontation between States. However, although this type of confrontation does not occur in this region, there are internal problems, many of them with transnational characteristics, which have affected the national interests of the countries that make up the region. In this sense, it is essential for the State to fulfill its function of creating the necessary conditions for the development of

society, generating institutional and legal bases for such development.¹ Every State must be able to meet its own needs, those of the international regime of which it is a part, as well as those of its citizens; otherwise, there State delegitimization, as well as institutional delegitimization.

Colombia is a resilient nation in the midst of an armed conflict that has demanded the constant implementation of plans to face the different internal and, in some cases, external threats. That response has led to a dynamic and flexible political and strategic management of national security, including defense. In this context, strategic planning is a tool that allows to articulate, fundamentally, the ends, the means and the ways in which action is taken, which entails establishing a point of arrival or Desired End State (DES), as well as the way in which the components of national power will be used for this purpose.

The situation of not having diverse plans articulated from the political-strategic level would have a strong impact on the national decision-making process and the Armed Forces, which would go against the logical proverb that has been coined from what Lewis Carroll points out in chapter VI of *Alice in Wonderland*: “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.” To this end, it is essential to have the appropriate bureaucratic structures. However, in view of the risks and threats that Colombia faces and that today not only affects its security but also its defense, the military instrument has the obligation to manage its capabilities in favor of the integral protection of sovereignty, through “strengthening cooperation, improving capabilities and promoting the export at bilateral and multilateral levels.”²

1 Miguel Ángel Centeno, Blood, and Debt. *Cities, State and Nation-Building in Latin America* (Colombia: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Instituto de Estudios Urbanos, 2014), 39.

2 Ministry of National Defense, “Ciberdefensa”, *Government of Colombia* (2022), <https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/portal/Mindefensa/contenido?NavigationTarget=navurl://7b9925a5c97767f3abfa571ba71d738c> (accessed May 7, 2022)

In this context, the strategic management of national defense³ helps the Colombian State to face different risks and threats that, for the most part, could be called “multidimensional,” linked to transnational crime. To understand the challenges related to the area described, this article will address the context that makes planning of this magnitude necessary, the role of the structure for its management from the perspective of the National Security Council and, finally, the strategic planning process for national security and defense in Colombia, including some military considerations.

Context of Strategic Security and Defense Planning

First of all, it should be noted that strategic planning refers to the creation of solutions where science and art have a place. However, if such planning is to be carried out, the broader process in which this occurs is referred to as strategic management. Strategic planning is a key aspect of security and defense, as it allows convergence between the desired end, the available means, and the way in which the former will be achieved. In other words, strategic planning is the tool that makes it possible to take coherent actions in the short, medium, or long term to achieve a DES.

In this regard, there seems to be a contradiction when talking about short or medium term versus strategic planning. However, to understand this point, it is necessary to consider that the characteristics of the current environment mean the effect of time, in the midst of uncertainty, have increasing weight.⁴ In this sense, when talking about strategic security and defense planning, the focus should be on the process that leads the

3 National Defense is integral and dynamic but flexible and circumstantial, in accordance with resources, threats and circumstances of time, manner and place. It is based on two purposes: The first refers to a structural organization of a permanent nature, endowed with personnel, material and equipment, whose functions and responsibilities are related to the National Interests and the requirements imposed by State Security. The second is circumstantial; it refers to the activities carried out under the responsibility of the Government to deal with threats, (Martinez, 2014), 171.

4 Carlos Ojeda Bennett, “La prospectiva como sustento de la anticipación estratégica en inteligencia,” *Colombian War College* (Colombia: April 11, 2022), <https://anepe.cl/academicos-de-la-anepe-participaron-en-seminario-de-la-cscuela-superior-de-guerra-de-colombia/>

Colombian authorities to determine a course of action or strategy to face a challenge in the country. Therefore, the following question arises: Where does this challenge come from?

The answer lies in operational foresight, which –whether based on projection or anticipatory studies– allows to visualize risk scenarios, threats and opportunities following a holistic analysis of the environment, which “guides the ideas about the dynamics of any current environment and also strengthens the capacity for assessment, analysis and strategic reflection.”⁵ Once the scenario of interest has been determined, in coordination with the other domains of action of the State, it leads to a DES or commonly referred to as target. Therefore, it is from foresight that strategic planning begins.

Having established what is meant by this type of planning and its starting point, some of its central aspects, such as the decision pyramid, will be addressed. In the case of Colombia, security and defense planning focuses on three specific levels: the National Strategic (in charge of the President of the Republic, whose task is within the framework of National Security), the General Military Strategic (whose responsibility falls on the general commander of the Armed Forces, having war as its scope) and the *Operational Military Strategic* (in the hands of the commander of the Theater of Operations, to direct what in the military lexicon is called a campaign).

Returning to the question of the origin of the challenges that this structure must face, it can be said that at present, Colombia –like other countries– is experiencing complex situations of diverse nature and that are perceived as risks, threats or problems of various kinds that indirectly affect the security of the State. Among them are: guerrilla warfare, post-agreement challenges, social protest, corruption, drug production and trafficking, organized crime with its different manifestations, and border problems.

As a way of conceptualizing the most important notions dealt with in this area, a threat to security and defense is considered “when the action is

5 Juan Ricardo Sánchez Hurtado, *En mente de los estrategas* (Colombia: War College, 2012)

produced by a strategic entity that is capable of producing aggression.”⁶ To elaborate on these concepts, Carlos Ojeda points out that a *risk* “is the evident probability that, under certain circumstances, national interests will be affected. Given its variability, it may increase or decrease as the environment is intentionally modified and may become a threat. Its control and management belong to the realm of national security.”⁷ Likewise, Ojeda states that a *threat* “is the consequence of the premeditated action or intention of an adversary, perceived –given the capacity of the latter– as tending to harm one’s own interests. The mechanisms that the State gives itself to deal with it are encompassed by national security.”⁸

In this context, the following instruments have been established in Colombia to determine solutions at this level: (1) the preparation of a National Strategic Political Appraisal, (2) the formulation of a National Strategic Concept, derived from strategic security and defense planning, and (3) the issuance of both governmental guidelines and specific plans and programs.⁹

Structure for Defense Management: The National Security Council

The National Security Council (NSC) is the highest political body whose purpose is “to advise the President of the Republic in decision-making regarding defense and national security, as well as in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of public policies for national security, in order to coordinate the efforts of ministries and other State entities.”¹⁰ Indeed, the missions and challenges facing security and defense in Colombia are embodied by this entity, which is composed of: (1) the President of the Republic (who presides over it), (2) the Minister of the Interior, (3)

6 Ibid.

7 Carlos Ojeda Bennett, “Amenazas Multidimensionales: Una realidad en Suramérica”, in ANEPE Research Collection No. 30, *National Academy of Political and Strategic Studies* (Chile: December 2013), <https://anepe.cl/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/LIBRO-ANEPE-30.pdf>

8 Ibid.

9 Armed Forces of Colombia. “Manual de Seguridad y Defensa Nacional 3-43 (Reservado)”. (Colombia: Imprenta y publicaciones de las Fuerzas Militares, 1996), 70.

10 Republic of Colombia, “Decreto 741 de 2021”, *Administrative Department of the Civil Service* (2021), https://funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma_pdf.php?i=165231

the Minister of Foreign Affairs, (4) the Minister of Justice and Law, (5) the Minister of National Defense, (6) the Minister of Finance and Public Credit, (7) the Director of the Administrative Department of the Presidency of the Republic, (8) the Minister Counselor for Post-Conflict, Human Rights and Security of the Administrative Department of the Presidency of the Republic, (9) the Director General of the National Intelligence Directorate, (10) the General Commander of the Armed Forces, and (11) the director of the National Police.¹¹

While it is true that this body fulfills the vital role of advising the president, it also fulfills the task of ensuring the monitoring and compliance with the different guidelines established in the National Security and Defense Policy. This council also strengthens the mechanisms for implementation, follow-up, and evaluation in its capacity as the State's governing body to direct the National Security Strategy. Therefore, the Security and Defense System uses the NSC to execute and supervise the strategies to achieve the objectives of the nation. Through the NSC, the Colombian State can face not only the security and defense challenges, but also the risks or threats “derived from the mutation and adaptability of criminal organizations and the maintenance of conditions conducive to their multiplication and strengthening.”¹²

Security and Defense Strategy Planning

Once the DES has been determined, the agencies responsible for planning and reporting to the NSC (considering both the capabilities and limitations of the components of national power, as well as the political will) generate a process that correlates the ends with the possible means and ways, in addition to weighing the risks, the strategy of the adversary and the effects of the change in the environment in order to establish the strategy to be used.

11 Republic of Colombia, Official Journal No. 47,932, (December 23, 2010), <http://svrpubindc.imprenta.gov.co/diario/index.xhtml;jsessionid=e95149a6c03900a6a6b7fb75c51>

12 Government of Colombia, “Política de Defensa y Seguridad (PDS)”, *Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Colombia* (Colombia: 2019), 23, https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/Mindefensa/Documentos/descargas/Prensa/Documentos/politica_defensa_deguridad2019.pdf

In this sense, it is necessary to delve into the distinctive characteristics of the aforementioned elements in order to establish under what conditions they are considered by the responsible agency. In the first place, “ends” are understood as a DES or objective, which –having certain differences– comply with the general meaning of the term. An “end” must be a specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and defined within a time horizon. This is related to the achievement of an interest or the generation of a strategic effect, but not simply to the achievement of a tangible result of physical characteristics. On the one hand, an important aspect is its measurability, since it allows national planners and executors to establish to what extent the expected results have been achieved at the end of the planned actions. Due to its transcendence, this matter cannot be subject to a simple human perception. Firstly, the timeframe for achievement or time horizon is related to the concept of opportunity since strategic planning of security and defense is seen as systems within other systems and, therefore, far from a stove piped vision.

Secondly, the “means” that are considered –in Colombian doctrine– are everything tangible or intangible that the nation has at its disposal to advance towards the achievement of its national objectives, including population, infrastructure, moral, financial, and natural resources, as well as the will of the decision-maker, among others. This element must be evaluated as a whole and not in separate parts since the synergy generated by the combination of the use of the parts becomes part of the intangibles, substantially modifying the individuality of the parts. To highlight the above, reference can be made to an African proverb that says: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Thirdly, the “modes” refer to how to use the available means to achieve the DES. That is, the generation of different viable courses of action that will lead Colombia, with acceptable attrition, to a position that will allow it to generate the desired strategic effect. To this end, adequate coordination in the actions in its different fields is of great importance. As stated above,

depending on the different phases included in the designed strategy, the fields of action have a distinctive participation. The same goes for the use of power, influence, and the management of challenges.

Fourthly, for NSC planners, “risk” is calculated from the cost-benefit of actions. That is, the result toward or against something is estimated from the consideration of the possibilities of the adversary and one’s own courses of action. Of course, there is no planning without risk; the point is to know how to calculate it impartially and assess how much of it one is willing to assume. If the risk of loss is greater than that of profit, the goal is unrealistic, or the strategy designed to achieve it is not adequate.

Fifthly, with regard to the “adversary’s strategy,” it can be said that the golden dream of every strategist is to know what the opposing party wants and how it will act. However, since this is difficult to achieve, planners will have to carefully estimate what the adversary could logically do to oppose their own intentions. This is not an easy task, but it is essential to assess the risk of one’s planning and, from there, making adjustments and improvements accordingly.

Finally, the “environment” is the space that forces the strategist (in this case, the NSC) to analyze the geopolitical and geostrategic context in order to establish the challenges and opportunities that arise, as well as the possible changes that will be generated over time. For the sake of clarity, it is worth mentioning that, generally, the environment is characterized by political, economic, social, technological, legal, ecological, and security considerations. This analysis is closely related to the future studies and strategic anticipation required to face what Colombia will have to face in the short medium and long term.

Management of Strategic Planning of Security and Defense

Three intrinsic and synergistic factors are considered in management of strategic planning, which is the phase that mediates between the execution

of the actions conceived in the planning and the achievement of the DES: (1) *control* (which is the action through which the priorities, coordination, design and execution are set), (2) *follow-up* (which should maintain the focus on what is to be achieved, as well as the analysis of the current panorama and the possible scenarios) and (3) *evaluation* (which is the space where results built from decision-making levels is reflected).¹³ These factors must be related to the characteristics of the objective and the aforementioned conditions established for its achievement.

In this phase of strategic action, early correction -from the course of events- requires special attention, since these events will call into question the basic and deep considerations of the plan owing to a series of factors, such as one's own actions, those of the adversary, the effects of the environment and the reactions of the different international regimes, among others.

In this sense, it has a direct impact on bureaucratic structures and their officials, on members of the armed forces, on the population and, especially, on decision-makers at all levels. Despite having the plans to deal with the foreseen situations, these decision-makers must also be capable to overcome the crises that will arise as a result of the actions, stressing all national structures.

Military Considerations

With regard to the effects that political-strategic level planning generates at the levels of defense and the Armed Forces, it can be affirmed that strategic planning allows the defense function, through the Armed Forces, to exercise the necessary contributing actions in favor of national security, reducing risks and facing threats. To this end, national security is generally associated with "any action aimed at preserving the country's institutional legal order, ensuring the free exercise of sovereignty

¹³ Maria Johanna Alarcon Moreno, *Elaboración de una estrategia* (Washington D.C.: William Perry Hemispheric Center for Defense Studies, October 2019).

internally and externally, in accordance with the corresponding national and international standards in force.”¹⁴

In this sense, defense in Colombia is realized based on the aforementioned needs, making use of the distinctive capabilities of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and according to their doctrine. Therefore, the Colombian State, through the Ministry of Defense, articulates the actions of the Armed Forces under a strategic “defensive deterrence” posture. This position is expressed as the “set of measures and activities aimed at achieving and maintaining the State duly protected. In other words, defense is the means that the State uses to achieve one of its ends: security.”¹⁵

For the protection of sovereignty, territory and population, the Armed Forces structure the five mission areas which are: (1) prevent the invasion of the national territory, (2) dismantle the adversary command and control in to gain the strategic initiative, (3) dismantle adversary intelligence, (4) protect critical infrastructure to give continuity to the operation and (5) neutralize the use of air and river routes by the adversary.

Finally, it should be noted that strategic defense planning and management are primary tasks of the government. Although defense is conducted by the Armed Forces, it is directed by the president, who drives the guidelines for strategic planning of the nation’s security and defense.

Conclusions

The action aimed at protecting Colombia against complex situations of various kinds that affect or may affect its security requires that the government structure, through the current government, be able to visualize (in the national and international environment) the risks, threats

14 Carlos Ojeda Bennett, “III Seminario Internacional de Fundamentos para el planteamiento de Seguridad y Defensa Nacional”, *CAEM Higher Military Studies Course and CIDENAL Integral National Defense Course* (Colombia: February 17 to 19, 2022), <https://www.kas.de/es/web/kolumbien/veranstaltungsberichte/detail/-/content/iii-seminario-internacional-de-fundamentos-para-el-planteamiento-de-seguridad-y-defensa-nacional-1>

15 Armed Forces of Colombia, “Manual de Seguridad y Defensa Nacional...”, 25.

and opportunities that will arise in the short, medium, and long term, so as to be able to face them and obtain the best returns through strategic planning. This type of planning makes sense when, on the one hand, the State has been able to capture and express the feelings of its inhabitants (while keeping due legitimacy) and, on the other, when its deep conceptions have the character of a State policy and not a government policy.

Strategic security and defense planning is part of a broader whole and is not a whole in itself since, as when certain vulnerabilities or risk enhancers must be addressed, it involves all the factors of national power under centralized direction from the highest level, and decentralized implementation in the different fields of action. Colombia is a nation proud of its past and present, as well as eager for a peaceful future that will allow it to take on its challenges with the certainty that its authorities are capable of carrying out the tasks demanded of them by its citizens.

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