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**COLOMBIAN ARMY MILITARY INTELLIGENCE:**
**A SUCCESSFUL MODEL LIVING IN THE PAST**

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# COLOMBIAN ARMY MILITARY INTELLIGENCE:
## A SUCCESSFUL MODEL LIVING IN THE PAST

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# COLOMBIAN ARMY MILITARY INTELLIGENCE:
# A SUCCESSFUL MODEL LIVING IN THE PAST

## AIM

1.      This paper aims to analyze the Colombian Army's human intelligence-centric system to identify the main weaknesses and strengths. By providing a clear explanation for both, I will recommend several ways to improve the collection activities to deter conventional and non-conventional threats.

## INTRODUCTION

2.      Intelligence is a necessity for all decision-makers. Politicians or military, all of them require timely and valuable information to select the best course of action[1]. These leaders work for dynamic institutions hungry for knowledge to reduce as much uncertainty as possible and avoid unnecessary risks. Intelligence is, after all, the raw material that supports the right choices.

3.      A wide variety of collection disciplines can be applied to the same organization/country to collect the information required[2]. From the ancient human Intelligence to the most recent cyber threats, anything is possible and acceptable to gather Intelligence. Generally speaking, conventional ISR platforms can be deterred by traditional means as they are technically detectable. However, covert operations never disclose their real sponsors and are designed to subvert the internal order and stability of countries[3]. This kind of operation represents a real challenge for current nation-states and

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[1] Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949).
[2] US Army, *ADRP 2-0 Intelligence*, 2014.
[3] NATO, "Covert Operation - NATOTermOTAN," accessed October 26, 2019, https://nso.nato.int/natoterm/Web.mvc.

pushes their capabilities to their limit. Without a doubt, covert activities make it harder to defend societies from external threats that operate below the threshold of war.

4.      Every military institution has its organic intelligence service to collect information across the domain it specializes in. As military organizations usually follow a clear hierarchical structure and doctrine, their ISR capabilities generally focus on the detection of threat's assets across any given operational environment. Notwithstanding, the less conventional a threat is, the less exposed to ISR assets will be. Vehicles, airplanes, and ships can be detected, tracked, and targeted easier than other perils embedded in the population[4].

5.      Even though German U-boats attacked Colombian ships, the country did not participate directly in World War II. Afterward, Colombia would join the fight during the Korean War, responding to the United Nations' call. The Korean war represented the last conventional war in which the Colombian military forces participated in. After the 1950s, Colombia, like many other countries, was under the influence of the US and the Soviet Union. The US supported different dictatorships across South America, including one ruling Colombia. The Soviet Union trained and equipped the insurgencies that achieved the Cuban revolution in 1959, and since then, the island became the training camp for Spanish-speaking communist fighters and ideologists[5].

6.      The Colombian conflict started 'officially' in 1964; however, its causes started cooking up in 1948 after the murder of the left-wing political leader Jorge E. Gaitan. When the Colombian was bout to begin, the only knowledge shared across the military

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[4] US Army, *FM 2-91-4 Intelligence Support to Urban Operations* (Washington DC, 2008).
[5] Dennis M. Rempe, "Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics: US Counter-insurgency Efforts in Colombia 1959–1965," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 6, no. 3 (December 1, 1995): 304–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592319508423115.

forces regarding military Intelligence was the one derived from the Korean war. At that time, the Army had no experience in intelligence activities to fight irregular threats. In 1962, MAJ. Ricardo Charry is the first Colombian military officer selected to attend an intelligence course in the US[6]. After MAJ. Charry returned home was tasked to create the intelligence battalion that eventually grew until being the current division-sized Intelligence Command.

7.      MAJ. Ricardo Charry's approach to Intelligence was not conventional but completely clandestine since the creation of the first intelligence battalion. This approach impacted incredibly deep in the culture, organization, growth, and mission of the further intelligence branch. The recently born intelligence unit quickly joined the fight when the conflict started. Its achievements were remarkable as it was possible to collect information by deploying 'agents' right in the territories initially controlled by the insurgencies. Collected information immediately provided situational awareness and support to targeting.

8.      After almost six decades of fighting, the conflict is now ending after signing a peace agreement with the most influential insurgency (FARC). As a result of the good relations with the US, Colombia approaches NATO in 2013, looking for becoming a global partner just like Australia, Japan, or Pakistan did. To be accepted, the most critical commitment Colombia made with NATO is the updating of military doctrine to turn the military forces into real multinational interoperable organizations[7].

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[6] Escuela de Inteligencia y Contrainteligencia, "Brigadier General Ricardo Charry Solano," *ESICI* (blog), April 28, 2019, http://esici.cemil.edu.co/index.php/brigadier-general-ricardo-charry-solano/.
[7] Rojas Guevara and Pedro Javier, "Doctrina Damasco: Eje Articulador de La Segunda Gran Reforma Del Ejército Nacional de Colombia," *Revista Científica General José María Córdova* 15, no. 19 (June 2017): 95–119, https://doi.org/10.21830/19006586.78.

9.      The Colombian Army quickly led the way of updating its doctrine. In 2016, the Colombian Army's Center of Doctrine (CEDOE) set an extraordinary doctrine-development team supported by the US Army Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate (CADD). Doctrine development impacted all the fields of military knowledge, including, of course, Intelligence. The goal of joining NATO as a global partner was finally achieved in May 2018[8].

10.     The Army's intelligence branch updated its doctrine, but not its culture. After so many years of clandestine activities, the Colombian Military Intelligence acknowledged that various of the conventional ISR capabilities were not developed as a consequence of the threats the country was facing. The intelligence branch is now struggling between keeping the clandestine approach to tackle the remaining non-conventional threats or mutate as quickly as possible to face the possibility of war with the Russian-backed Venezuelan regime.

**DISCUSSION**

>   a.      <u>Advantages of a human intelligence-centric approach: an army of spies.</u>
>
>   (1)      Although numerous gathering disciplines are put into practice within the intelligence branch, all of them are considered supporting efforts to undertake successful human Intelligence (HUMINT) operations. Source handling activities are the cultural and operational core of the Army's intelligence branch. Facing efficiently non-conventional threats is a matter of targeting specific people across vast areas. When political or

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[8] "Colombia to Be NATO's First Latin American Global Partner," *Reuters*, May 26, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-nato-idUSKCN1IR0E8.

military leaders of insurgencies established sanctuaries in jungles and rain forests, conventional ISR platforms became useless. A dense layer of vegetation prevented the collection of Imagery Intelligence (IMINT). The extraordinary mobility of small units employing high frequency (HF) radios deterred the accuracy of any Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) asset, including those deployed by the US. However, like any other human group, insurgencies rely on interaction with other people to acquire logistics, gather Intelligence, or even recruit new fighters. Human relations are, and always be, the weakness of any human organization. HUMINT is the only gathering discipline capable of pinpointing one single individual in the middle of the Amazonas jungle, with no civilian population nearby, and communicating by human couriers.

(2)     Another blessing coming for HUMINT is the fact of providing context[9]. Even though technology-based platforms can collect much information, the data must be analyzed by humans to make it understandable. There is always a gap between the data available and the reflections made by naturally biased analysts. Intelligence is produced based on assumptions, probabilities, uncertainty, and predictions. The space filled by analysts' assumptions, could be filled with the truth when human sources provide clear context, personal details, and predictions based on human relations. Human sources inform about personal and

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[9] Department of the Army, *FM 34-52 Intelligence Interrogation*, vol. 3–14, 3–15, 3–16 (Washington DC, 1992).

organizational weaknesses, thoughts under consideration, and slight

details that are impossible to know by deploying ISR capabilities.

(3)     Depending on the environment HUMINT is undertaken, it is

possible to say that in most cases handling human sources is cheaper than

deploying ISR platforms. Maintenance of airplanes or reconnaissance

vehicles, not to mention the political and diplomatic risks of using special

recon units (SOF) abroad, ended up backing the tendency of improving

and increasing the HUMINT approach within the Army.

(4)     In conclusion, HUMINT is perhaps the gathering discipline most

suitable for counterinsurgency. When countries face non-conventional

threats using guerrilla tactics, the 'human' component of the enemy

becomes the most critical peculiarity to exploit[10]. Very small dismounted

units supported by specific auxiliaries across an area of operations are

tackled mandatorily by an accurate targeting process. When a military

force is required to differ fighters from a population in which the former

are embedded in, the fact of pinpointing the right people to apply lethal

force is a critical task. Ultimately, HUMINT prevents collateral damage

from occurring as human sources quickly identify who is friendly, neutral

o foe.

b.     Weaknesses of HUMINT: when lack of information is confused with lack

of human sources**.**

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[10] Christopher P. Costa, "Phoenix Rises Again: HUMINT Lessons for Counterinsurgency Operations"
(Naval War College, May 16, 2006), https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA463402.

(1)      Certainly, HUMINT is a long-term endeavor. Even though it is possible to recruit a source with excellent access to valuable information, the traditional procedure is quite different. Recruiting people that eventually will progress within the targeted organization is the most likely course of action, and clearly, it takes time waiting for it. A single HUMINT operation requires years of labor, patience, and investment. Source handlers typically don't reap the rewards of recruitment new sources, so they are forced to transfer them to other handlers when they are transferred to other units.

(2)      An operational military force demands lots of information to be successful, and indeed, that is a job for intelligence professionals. A HUMINT-centric intelligence system barely can keep up the tempo of ongoing military operations[11]. When Colombian commanders rely on HUMINT to meet their CCIR (Commander's Critical Information Requirements[12]), they often confuse a lack of information with a lack of human sources. Some people could argue that having intelligence professionals within the staff implies that different gathering disciplines could meet certain CCIRs. However, conventional ISR platforms are under the Intelligence Command (CAIMI[13]), not under the Division or Brigade commanders. Formal requirements and waiting lists are often the

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[11] Erik D. Jens, "Human Intelligence Operations in ISAF," *American Intelligence Journal* 31, no. 1 (2013): 21–28, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26202036.
[12] US Department of Defense, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington DC, 2018), http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf.
[13] *Comando de Apoyo de Inteligencia del Ejercito Nacional de Colombia (CAIMI)*

scenarios when satellite imagery, unmanned aerial vehicles, and other conventional ISR capabilities are required. One more time, bureaucracy ended up favoring the HUMINT-centric approach as commanders decide to rely on human sources instead of waiting for a conventional ISR asset to be allocated.

(3)     The most significant impact of HUMINT is the reduction of effectiveness in operations. Intelligence professionals are trained to deal with uncertainty. The gap between available information and the one that the staff needs to conduct an operation is often filled with assumptions. As HUMINT is a long-term endeavor and it collects information so slow, the uncertainty is often too high to deal with the level of accuracy required in counterinsurgency operations. It means that a big chunk of the combat operations is conducted even when the intelligence process is not complete because of the pressure put on the commander's shoulders. It is possible to say that the lack of accurate information endangers military personnel in the field, increasing the number of casualties and in the end, the cost of the operation itself[14].

c.     <u>Finding the balance in the military intelligence: Venezuela vs. insurgencies</u>

(1)     Although Colombian military intelligence officers know that HUMINT is not the best tool when facing conventional high-tempo operations, no change has been made to improve the current ISR

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[14] Richard K. Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable," *World Politics* 31, no. 1 (October 1978): 61–89, https://doi.org/10.2307/2009967.

capabilities. Many concerns arose across the joint intelligence community because of the Army's HUMINT-centric approach to warfare. After decades of fighting insurgencies, the Army is reluctant to change its way of doing Intelligence. Meanwhile, HUMINT is not a problem for other platform-based services like Air Force or Navy in which sensors and technology is usually the only way to gather information.

(2)     Finding the balance is more complicated than stopping to sponsor HUMINT. The core of the mindset of any military force is its doctrine and the way it is taught. Most of the responsibilities of teaching Intelligence procedures and techniques rely on the Military Intelligence school (ESICI[15]), and, like the rest of the Army, it hesitates to change the current academic programs. The Intelligence School permits the students to complete a bachelor's degree in social-political analysis after meeting specific academic requirements based on the intelligence courses taught[16], the problem resides, however, in the fact that the educational programs are tied to the Ministry of Education regulations[17]. Changing the academic programs taught by the Intelligence School means that the approval given by the Ministry of Education to graduate the students will be lost. The courses could be changed, and the professional military education

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[15] *Escuela de Inteligencia y Contrainteligencia "BG. Ricardo Charry Solano"*
[16] Centro de Educacion Militar, "Gerencia de la Seguridad y Análisis Socio-Político," *ESICI* (blog), May 15, 2017, http://esici.cemil.edu.co/index.php/pregrados/gerencia-de-la-seguridad-y-analisis-sociopolitico/.
[17] "Sistema Nacional de Información de la Educación Superior," accessed October 26, 2019, https://snies.mineducacion.gov.co/consultasnies/verPrograma?codigo=10163.

improved, but the school no longer will be able to run undergraduate programs.

**CONCLUSION**

11.     Although the HUMINT approach has been successful in fighting against insurgencies, its collecting tempo is not suitable to tackle an eventual conventional threat. This issue represents the biggest challenge for the intelligence community within the Army. However, changing the current academic HUMINT-centric program implies the loss of the Ministry of Education accreditation. Because of it, the Army is still reluctant to modify the way Military Intelligence is currently taught.

12.     The contemporary Army organization favors the HUMINT-centric approach as conventional ISR assets are under an independent command (CAIMI) and not under Division or Brigade commanding officers. Units have no direct access to ISR capabilities, and they are forced to be reliant on self-sustained HUMINT operators.  Finally, the reliance on HUMINT increases the possibility of having casualties since operations are conducted without having all the Intelligence needed to manage eventual risks.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

13.     As soon as possible, approaching at the highest level the Ministry of Education to address the academic program of the Military Intelligence School to start balancing the Army in support of the conventional ISR approach. Provide professional education within the Intelligence community is essential, but is it, even more, the fact of having an intelligence branch fully capable of facing threats across the spectrum from non-conventional to conventional.

14.     Military Intelligence should stop considering itself as an extension of the civilian national intelligence agency (DNI). The military Intelligence is an essential component that supports the military decision-making process and, it is crucial to start thinking about Intelligence as a real branch of the Army and not as an independent component with a different chain of command.

15.     Conventional ISR assets must be attached to the units in charge of responding to eventual aggressions of Venezuela. These ISR platforms should collect information across the border to provide situational awareness at all times. In other words, the Intelligence Command should adopt a modular organization to deploy ISR capabilities across the border in direct support of combined arms units. While the regular forces task these ISR units, the Intelligence Command should be in charge of providing sustainment and support.

16.     Finally, the Intelligence subculture has to be changed immediately. It is imperative to 'remilitarize' the branch, stop using civilian clothes and fake names. If the rest of the Army considers Military Intelligence as an independent and unreachable component that only supports SOF or strategic decision-makers, staffs at the operational and tactical levels will never trust the Intelligence professionals deployed throughout the units. These professionals not only have to be educated accordingly, but they must have access to ISR capabilities to meet the commanders' CCIR in support of MDMP and planning.

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