The Democratic Security Policy (DSP) of Colombia and the development of citizenship.

Can security be the foundation of an enlarged democracy?\(^1\)

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ABSTRACT: Colombia is a country where, for more than half a century, violence cohabited with limited democracy. In 2002, after winning the presidential elections, Álvaro Uribe presented a plan whose main aim was to enforce security as a precondition of democratization. The plan was a novelty in as far as previous intents to put an end to war seek to attain peace through prior democratization. Here democratization was understood as the opening of conversations with the armed groups in order to establish, together, a new really democratic polity. Uribe’s project represented exactly the opposite view and was called Democratic Security Policy (DSP). This policy explicitly connected security, the guarantee of safety, with the development of citizenship. To sum up, this policy was aimed to the re-establishment of internal order and to the protection of the population from terrorists and perpetrators of violence, within a framework of rights and protections under the rule of law. The revolutionary idea was that putting security first, democracy will follow. In this paper I will asses the DSP from the point of view of democracy and citizenship.

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The Office of the Sovereign, (be it a Monarch, or an Assembly,) consisted in the end, for which he was trusted with the Sovereign Power, namely the procurement of the safety of the people; to which he is obliged by the Law of Nature, and to render an account thereof to God, the Author of that Law, and to none but him. But by Safety here, is not meant a bare Preservation, but also all other Contentments of life, which every man by lawful Industry, without danger, or hurt to the Commonwealth, shall acquire to himself. (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. xxx, part. II.).

The 20th of February 2002 the peace process between President Andrés Pastrana and the FARC collapsed and during that very date, the Colombian Armed Forces recovered the control of the so called “zone of appeasement”. As Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez notes, there was an unexpected result in all this: the electoral victory of the only presidential candidate that was against the peace process, Álvaro Uribe. For him, and for the vast majority of the Colombian population, the peace process was instrumental for the guerrilla in order to gain time and space to reinforce its fire capacity (Pizarro, pp. 297ff.) Uribe was able to connect with the feelings of the Colombian population not only in the diagnosis but also in the remedy proposed. The Colombian people were in favour of a restoration of order and security.

The arrival of Uribe to the presidency was a political turmoil in the sense that for the first time in history the official candidate of the Liberal Party was defeated. Nonetheless, in the way of conducting its security policy, Uribe was a revolutionary. In order to tackle the endemic problem of political violence in the country, he developed a radical change in the conceptualization of the conflict. Whereas in the past Pastrana tried to internationalize the peace process opening room to the participation of the international community in the negotiations, Uribe internationalized the armed conflict in order to get military support. For him, there was no longer
room for a peace policy; on the contrary, peace will be the expected result of an open and frank war policy. This new war policy was composed by two basic elements: foreign policy and internal policy, but both were tightly connected.

After September 11, 2001, the USA launched its “Global War on Terrorism” (GWOT), and it opened an opportunity window for Uribe’s war policy. The GWOT has been seen by many as a “metaphor for a protracted and difficult struggle” and others see it as “a real war but a war with no clear definition of an attainable victory”. The consequence nonetheless is the same: “to the billions of dollars spent on military action and necessary security must be added millions more spent on worthless measures that create a temporary sense of well-being without making people safer” (Mockaitis, p. XIII).

The point was that Colombia was waging a real war: a war for the control of territory that can be assessed in terms of effective control and casualties. The GWOT meant for Colombia, thanks to the American aid, enhanced fire capacity, and, above all, amazing transportation and technological military superiority. To sum up, it opened for the first time in almost fifty years of war, the possibility of a feasible and total military victory over the insurgent groups. Thus, the international dimension of the war policy was directed to the solution of the internal problem of Colombia: internal insurgency, now termed terrorism.

To deal with the domestic dimension of this war policy, Uribe created his Democratic Security Policy (DSP). The objectives of the Democratic Security Policy were: 1. Consolidate the state control of the territory; 2. Protect the citizens; 3. Eliminate the business of illicit drugs in Colombia; 4. And to support a dissuasive capacity.

Colombia, given its size, population and topography, was a country were the scope of the state was very limited, in fact was a country full of “ungoverned spaces”. Thus, to convert Colombia from a weak state into a
strong one by spreading the state (National Police, Army and “Peasant Soldiers”) to all the national territory was priority one; To protect the citizens, target two, seek to legitimize the state action by the sheer performance of the basic state provision: security. Thus, security is seen as a consequence and as a precondition of the strengthening of the state. The underlying assumption is that democracy is not feasible in the absence of security. Target three, is directed to undermine the foundations of non-state powers in Colombia because insurgents, terrorists and criminals, all depend on drug trafficking to challenge the state monopoly of violence. And target four, to support a dissuasive capacity points to the basic fact that by 2002 the Colombian Army had 191,000 soldiers and the National Policy had 97,000. Apparently, these numbers are very low according to the geographical complexity of Colombia (Pizarro, p.307). Uribe, in order to grant security to the whole territory, expects to raise these numbers to 400,000. So the DSP is also oriented to the creation of a huge army. But this project is complemented with limited negotiations in order to get a dramatic diminution of the enemy. Both things together, a bigger army and a smaller enemy, make military victory feasible. Thus, Uribe negotiated with the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, paramilitaries) and more than 31,000 members were already demobilized by 2008. The goal is concentrate war on the FARC, the only group defined as the enemy.

In a nutshell, DSP reflects a Hobbesian vision of politics, were the strengthening of the state is seen as the basic foundation of social order. Thus, in this vision, the roots of the Colombian conflict are not social inequality, class conflict, or a culture of violence. The problem of Colombia was state weakness. Given this very weakness of the state, past Colombian governments tried to handle the conflict through appeasement and negotiation, trying to find a modus vivendi between the state and the armed groups. But, for the first time, the conjunction of the GWOT and a failed peace process provided
Uribe with both military and democratic power to try total victory. The DSP incarnates this new vision.

Although the plan was under severe criticism in its first years (from the point of view, among others, of democracy and human rights), the DSP proved effective enough to gave Uribe a second mandate as president with a landslide popular support. And, after persistent military success against perpetrators of violence, it created, for the first time in decades, the expectative that a post-war democracy was possible.

In this paper I want present the context in which the DSP was formulated, as already seen; I will analyse the criticism that the DSP received from the point of view of democracy and human rights; I will assess the realisation of the DSP during these years; and, finally, I will present a prospective vision on the constrains and opportunities that the DSP poses to a new democratic articulation of Colombia. The three former points provide the context that makes relevant the main topic of my paper: the DSP and the constrains an opportunities for democracy in a post-war Colombia. To deal with this last topic I will concentrate on the relation of citizenship and security. As I will argue, democracy means rule of the people under some qualifications. First, it is a rule limited by citizenship rights; Second, the people that rules is not a collective entity with a unified will but a nation understood as a community of citizens. So, in order to deal with the prospects of democracy in post-war Colombia, I will concentrate in the relation between citizenship and security. Thus, we will realize that the DSP, by linking democracy and security has radically altered the concept of citizenship in Colombia:

*First, because the national dimension of political violence can not be longer defined as a civil war. From the point of view of the DSP, Colombia faces a war between citizens, on one side, and terrorists and perpetrators of violence,
on the other, and not a war between citizens of the same country. The implication of the DSP is that no political arrangement is feasible because citizenship will be compromised.

*Second, under the DSP, security is the first right of citizenship, and this creates, in fact, a new hierarchy of rights with strong implications on the life of persons in a democratic setting. For instance, in the bargaining process of protecting rights, security comes first. This can be detrimental to civil and political rights although can be connected with a new vision on the preconditions of civil, political and social rights. Security can also be a fruitful tool in highlighting and assessing the degree of rights enforcement.

* And Third, under the DSP, citizens are not only the recipients of security but also the government expects a "more actively engaging of the civilian population" in its deployment. In fact, "the Government has encouraged the voluntary cooperation of citizens with authorities". This again transforms radically the basic democratic link between the citizens and the State. The provision of security was an obligation of the State and a right of the citizen within the borders of the country. The citizen’s contribution to national security was limited to external-foreign threats. Again, the DSP modifies this assumption and redefines the concept of citizenship.

To sum up, the DSP provides a new definition of WHO are the citizens; The DSP, creates a new hierarchy of citizenship rights, with SECURITY as a precondition; the DSP creates a new social compact with new obligations on the part of citizens.

When and how was the DSP formulated?

“We can no longer have a country [threatened] by the guerrillas or defended by paramilitaries groups. We need central control” (Uribe, BBC, 2004)
In understanding why the DSP was so easily accepted by the majority of the Colombian population we can not forget that during more than twenty years, the state negotiated without preconditions with the armed groups. This means that the negotiations were carried out under war conditions and without a ceasefire. This also entails that the state didn’t demand on the part of the armed groups a proof of commitment with peace, on the contrary, the state granted the FARC an army free territory of 42,000 square kilometres (as big as Switzerland) with a population of 80,000 (Makenzie, p. 513). By April 2002, the FARC declared their will to divide the country in two parts, an of getting control of a seceded south part of Colombia. In order to accomplish this plan, they threatened the local politicians by demanding their resignation and by killing and kidnapping them. Thus, two main factors underlie the DSP: first, the total failure of more than twenty years of peace negotiations with insurgency; second, the challenge posed by the FARC of dividing the country in two states. After more than two decades of non-productive dialogue under war, war without dialogue was seen as a desirable alternative. Or, at least, the population was so tired of the dead end of negotiations that enthusiastically applauded the change. Second, for the first time in its history, the FARC presented a political program that was directly directed against the integrity of Colombia as a single state. These two factor mobilized the electorate giving to Álvaro Uribe Vélez a landslide victory on May 26, 2002 (53% of the votes). Here it is important to point to the fact that Uribe’s father was killed by the FARC. The basic slogan of this presidential campaign was “We have the right to live in a country in peace, and we have the duty to help to achieve it”. One of his first decision as President was to declare the “estate of exception”, as a precondition to launch a total war on insurgency. The opposition and human rights movements denounced these measures as the greatest threat ever to Colombian democracy. But Uribe’s popularity raised subsequently till the 80%.
Why was the DSP criticised from the point of view of Human Rights?

“Colombia: The “democratic security” policy is not a human rights policy” (Amnesty International, December 2002)

In 2002, when the DSP was discussed in the Colombian parliament, Amnesty International published a document strikingly entitled “Colombia: the Democratic Security Policy is not a human rights policy”. That document states that “at the end of a week-long visit to Colombia, an Amnesty International delegation has confirmed the organisation’s deep concerns with regard to President Álvaro Uribe’s security policy”. Although AI recognized Uribe’s “right and duty to re-establish public order” it showed its concern by pointing that “the democratic security policy (...) does not constitute a human rights policy but will, on the contrary, lead to a worsening of human rights in Colombia”. Interestingly, in this same document, AI provides its own definition of what should be a Democratic Security Policy: “Democratic security implies nothing more and nothing less than the defence of human rights and not a weakening of key institutions such as the Attorney General’s Office, the Constitutional Court and the Ombudsman’s Office (...) In addition, human rights defence cannot be conceived without directly attacking past, present and future impunity”. Thus, AI proposal of Democratic Security presents a totally opposed vision on how to lay the foundations of a just society. AI’s document is so demanding on the preconditions to put an end to the conflict that the precedent proposal of a negotiated peace between the armed groups and the state was also discredited: according to AI, the “resolution of the conflict requires negotiation but the terms of this negotiation cannot be imposed on the victims of human rights and international humanitarian law violations by the authors of those violations”. In a nutshell, according to AI, the Colombian conflict will be settled by the deliverance of justice to the victims and punishment to the perpetrators of
violence. It is interesting to note that there is certain agreement between Uribe and AI. According to the President of Colombia, the state can not negotiate with criminals without compromising the rights of citizens. Criminals should be defeated and punished. But who are the criminals/perpetrators of violence? According to AI (Colombia –Amnesty International Report 2008) they are the Security Forces, the Paramilitary Groups and the Guerrilla Groups. According to Uribe, although there are members of the Security Forces that committed abuses, and should be punished, the military and the policy are part of the democratic state. The paramilitary, in as far as they performed the task of the state in the “ungoverned spaces”, should be reintegrated to civil life. Thus, the perpetrators of violence that should be punished and with whom negotiation is no possible without compromising democracy are the terrorists, i.e. the FARC.

Finally, the AI report on the DSP of 2002 predicted a worsening of Human Rights in Colombia but in the Amnesty International Report of 2008 it is stated that “fewer civilians were killed than in recent years (...); People continued to be kidnapped (...) but there were fewer reported cases than in previous years (...); Fewer people were killed by paramilitary groups than in previous years. However, reports of killings of civilians by the security forces rose”. As expected, the violence of the state is growing and, at the same time, the enemies of the state are weakening.

To sum up, the DSP was criticised for not being a Human Rights policy. As we have already seen, human rights are the expected result of the DSP according to Uribe, and not its precondition. In order to have rights granted, the state must be able to provide security to the citizens. When the state has the monopoly of the use of violence, then peace reigns. But Colombia has not yet reached peace; it is in a war against terrorism. And given that Colombia is in war, one has to know who the allies of the state are
and who are the enemies. According to the DSP, the allies of the state are the security forces and the demobilized paramilitaries; the enemies are the FARC.

**How can the DSP be assessed?**

As mentioned, the DSP, can be assessed from the point of view of human rights. In sheer quantitative terms, the DSP can be seen as an improvement given that there was, since its inception, a roughly 50% diminution of the total number of killings and other abuses. Nonetheless, this assessment should be qualified in the sense that extrajudicial executions by the members of the security forces are prominent and also, in the sense, that dissidents and oppositionists (politicians, human rights activists, community activists, trade unionists) are growingly victims of state or para-state violence.

The DSP can also be assessed according to democratic standards by asking the question, does the quality of democracy improved with the DSP?

Contrary to other countries in the region, Colombia had only a brief authoritarian episode in the 1950s. The term that defines today the quality of its democracy is *partial democracy*. All along the XX century Colombia was precisely that, a partial democracy, with a competitive civilian regime dominated by the contending Liberal and Conservative parties. Since 1940s the country entered in civil war, suffered a military intervention in 1953, and returned to the *normalcy* of civil war and restricted political competition. Contrary to other countries in the region like Chile or Venezuela, Colombian democracy neither improved nor deteriorated. But today, as in the past, has a poor record on civil and political liberties. Thus, by the moment, the promise of the DSP of an improved democracy is not yet fulfilled. It should be added also that there is a new threat in the Colombian democratic landscape: populism. Given that Uribe has a so strong popular support, the democratic accountability of the executive is, under present conditions, beyond reach; and
worst, the temptation on the part of the Presidency of changing the democratic rules is growingly stronger (for instance, the elimination of the constitutional limits to Presidential re-election).

Thus, in terms of human rights we can point to a limited improvement and in terms of democracy to stagnation and even democratic weakening. But we should remember that the first goal of the DSP is security. And security defined as the capacity of the state to control violence in the totality of the Colombian territory. To put it bluntly, the first goal of the DSP is to win the war against insurgency and this means that this policy should be assessed in military terms. Thus the success of the DSP is linked to military victory and in order to achieve it, the Colombian Army must re-establish (in fact establish because in its whole history as an independent country, the state never controlled the totality of the national territory) full control of the territory. As mentioned, this strategic goal demands a huge investment in the army in order to double the number of soldiers; demands also a huge investment in very expensive military technology (e.g. Sikorsky Black Hawk helicopters); demands a participation of the peasant population in defence activities (thus, a militarization of rural population) and finally, demands the military and economic weakening of the FARC prior to its total defeat. Given the complexity of Colombia, this military mission is very complex, expensive, and uncertain. By the moment, it seems for the first time in more than 50 years that the state is winning the war, but the game is not yet over.

In the same way that the original peasant insurgent movements turned into criminal gangs thanks to the drug business, the temptation on the part of the FARC to became a mere terrorist group is growing. If the FARC are spelled out of the rural areas, urban terrorism is their option.

The DSP and the prospects and constrains of a New Democracy in Colombia.
As said, the DSP has not changed the poor quality of Colombian democracy, but in fact it was not devised to produce such result. The DSP was a policy of war against the enemies of the state and the underlying assumption was that democracy will follow when peace will be achieved through military victory. In fact, for the DSP full democracy in the absence of security was senseless because that was the experience of the last twenty years. Nonetheless, there are strong implications for citizenship and democracy in the DSP.

The nation as a community of citizens. Friends and foes in democracy.

If a democratic nation is, by definition, a community of citizens, it is important to know who is a member of that community and who is not. To put it bluntly, if one is a member, it deserved to be treated as a citizen (has rights that should be granted) but if one is not, then is a foreigner (with limited rights) or an enemy (with no rights). Given that the DSP is a war policy waged in a domestic setting, what kind of war is supporting the DSP? War is a human activity that consists in the employment of armed forces violence against a foreign nation or state but also against an opposing party inside the same state. The former activity is regular war, whereas the later is called civil war. Civil war is a slippery term because *civil* tends to elicit the meaning of something valuable, or desirable when contrasted with savage or barbaric. It is entrenched in the word civil the meaning of an improved condition that permits the good life between humans. But here it is exactly the opposite. A civil war is the worst type of war, not only because it is indeed savage and barbaric but also, especially in this age, because tends to target civilians.
Before the DSP, the Colombian conflict was seen as a civil war but now the conflict was redefined: Colombia is waging a war against terrorism. Terrorism is defined, according to the U.S.A military as “the calculated use of unlawful violence or the threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological” (quoted in Mockaitis, p. 2). The FARC intended to control the state power in the past, thus they were an insurgent group. But now what they want is to conduct their illicit business by limiting the capacity of the state, thus they are terrorists. Note that, by defining the insurgency as terrorism, the very idea of a conflict between members of the same community evaporates. And also, by defining a group as a terrorist group, then their claims are illegitimate and their means fear and terror should be addressed not by dialogue but a powerful response.

The FARC were an insurgent group organized to take over the state through a combination of propaganda, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism that has converted in a mere criminal terrorist group (insurgent groups make a limited use of terror and do not engage in criminal activities). Thus, there is a certain rationale for the change of the Colombian public opinion in relation to the kind of war waged in the country. And this perception change of the war by the population is what underlies the DSP. As Mockaitis stated, the FARC is no longer an insurgent group: “The FARC in Colombia now controls a major cocaine producing region and behaves in a manner that makes it almost indistinguishable from the country’s other drug cartels. When being in opposition pays so well, why accept the responsibilities of government that inevitably follow an insurgent victory?” (p. 15).

In the past, civil war was considered the worst type of war for another reason: civil war was seen as the worst illness of a polity because entailed its weakening and the subservient conquest and destruction of the community. So, when a given society defines its internal violence as civil war it is showing,
at the same time, the willingness of reconciliation. That is, it is showing that there are two parties trying to control the state but, at the same time, that the two parties form a single community. This is no longer the case in Colombia.

Amalendu Misra points to the “poverty of nationalism” as the single most important cause underlying civil war: the incapacity to see the other party as forming part of the same community. Thus, according to Misra, nationalism is a political principle that, in its positive version, integrates societies but when it fails, when there is little sense of a unified political community, conflict follows: “much of the history of contemporary civil war-afflicted societies is a history of failed nationalism” (p. 43). Interestingly, nationalism is the cure and the illness of civil war. If it is integrative “modern”, then it creates a state powerful enough to curb internal violence. But, if nationalism is not strong enough or is not of the modern type, then it is oriented to state disintegration and “the results of this are a miasma of civil strife over large swathes of the non-western world (ibid.)”. But, as suggested, the problem of Colombia is not a lack of nationalism, the problem that the DSP wants to solve is the lack of a state congruent with its territory (on the strength of Colombian nationalism see Posada).

The DSP redefined the Colombian conflict as war but not as a civil war, and deployed all the tactics of contra-insurgency: military efficiency plus a commitment with the population. The result is an enemy that is seen as a criminal, the enemy of the nation. In a civil war, reconciliation is the precondition of peace, under present circumstances; only military victory can reconcile Colombia with itself.

The Janus Face of citizenship. Does the DSP create new citizenship obligations?
Citizenship refers to a specific link between an individual and a State. We use the word citizenship when this link is built on a contract establishing rights and duties. In ancient polities, the status of citizen was reached, for those that didn’t born as citizens, through the military contribution to the defence (or to the conquests) of the polity. And, of course, the basic civic virtue was to die for love of fatherland. Thus, on the side of the obligations that gave rights granted by the state, military contribution was the essential ingredient of citizenship. Nonetheless, in the West, after World War II, citizenship was growingly associated with rights granted by the state, whereas duties were limited to the financial contribution through taxes. In this sense, Marshall’s famous article, “Citizenship and social class” (1959) is paradigmatic. For him, citizenship can be seen as a process of steady development along time (civil rights, political rights, social rights...) that, in the end, will abolish class inequalities and, thus, class conflict. Interestingly, Marshall’s liberal view (citizenship as individual rights) is understood as a ladder to reach social justice. The foundation of the social compact, in post-war Western Europe was individual rights, including social rights, granted and provided by the state.

But this is far away from the DSP. As said, the Democratic Security Policy states that citizens are not only the recipients of security but contributor to security. They should play an active role in contributing to security by actively collaborating with the armed forces and the police, and even, in the rural areas by contributing to the peasant militias. Thus, by rescuing the old meaning of citizenship, the notion of the people in arms as the basis of citizenship rights, the DSP is closer to a classical republican concept of citizenship than, of course, to the liberal one.

**Conclusion: the promise of a new post-war Colombian democracy?**

“Of course we need to eliminate social injustice in Colombia...but what is first? Peace” (Uribe, BBC, 2004).
On the one hand, the DSP is the result of failed experience of appeasement as the main tool to settle the internal conflict of Colombia. On the other, it is also the result of the opportunity that the GWOT provided to internationalize this war. On these two pillars, President Uribe launched a democratic program that made security its foundation. But, underlying this words, democracy and security, democratic security, was a strong commitment with war. For the first time in the whole history of the Colombian conflict, the state contemplated the possibility of a total military victory against insurgency. What we are witnessing now is the development of that scenario, but it is still too early to predict the result in democratic terms. If the war is gained by the state, then, in the future, the immense cost of security could be diminished, and the social question could be tackled and society democratized. But, if the end of the war is postponed, then citizens will see a growing commitment with military duties, an enlargement of citizen duties, accompanied with a greater limitation of citizen rights, impoverishment and terrorism.

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