

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Homologies and modelling in Colombian South–South security cooperation

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Abstract

This article analyses Colombian South–South security cooperation. Drawing upon empirical research findings and by focusing on Colombian security engagements with other Latin American countries in the realm of military transformation, we identify the role of epistemological constructs as key drivers of Colombian South–South security cooperation. We demonstrate that Colombian policy and security actors intentionally created comparability between their own country and its security challenges, and the conditions existing in other countries of the region. This portrayal of idiosyncratic (in)security features as shared attributes across otherwise-different country contexts enables the transfer of security models rooted in Colombia's expertise and experience. We show how such security-driven homologisation efforts enabled Colombian security practitioners to navigate international hierarchies, particularly unequal US–Colombian relations in their favour, allowing them to secure continued US support and position Colombian security expertise as a blueprint for addressing contemporary security challenges across the region and beyond.

Keywords: Colombia; convergent threats; homologies; Latin America; military; police; security; South–South security cooperation; United States; Western hemisphere

Introduction

This article analyses how Colombia exports security expertise and practices through South–South security cooperation (SSSC) to other Latin American countries. It identifies the role of epistemological constructs, such as security homologies and models, in shaping perceptions of shared regional security challenges and the appropriateness of ‘Colombian solutions’ as key drivers behind the emergence and consolidation of SSSC, as well as the role of wider international hierarchies in influencing these processes.¹

At the beginning of the 21st century, imagining an article focusing on Colombia as an exporter of security expertise and practices to explain the dynamics of SSSC would have been difficult. In fact, around the beginning of the new millennium, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (FARC-EP) were waging one of the world's longest insurgencies. Their advances and attacks put growing pressure on Bogotá, Colombia's capital city. Exploiting the country's thriving drug trade, the FARC-EP had enhanced their military capabilities by acquiring

¹We follow the Special Issue editors' definition of SSSC, understood as ‘a power-laden form of international cooperation, situated within wider, multi-scalar, global hierarchies, involving, but not limited to, at least two actors that historically share a position of marginalisation in the global order, and can therefore be classified as “Southern”’ (original emphasis). Tobias Berger and Markus-Michael Müller, ‘South–South cooperation and the (re)making of global security governance’, *European Journal of International Security* (this issue).

weapons and intensifying recruitment, putting increasing pressure on Colombia's security institutions.² Mounting crime, particularly drug-related criminal activities, and paramilitary violence accompanied these developments.³ Accordingly, for many national and international observers, Colombia's entry into the 21st century was overshadowed by prospects of the country becoming a 'failed state'.⁴

Since then, Colombia has undergone a dramatic transition. From a counter-example of successful state-building and mired in perpetual internal violence, a growing number of commentators have started presenting the country as a model of how to achieve peace and security in the Western hemisphere, if not beyond. The following statement by Kirsten D. Madison, former US assistant secretary of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, captures this perceptual change.

In the past two decades, Colombia transformed from a near-failed state to a vibrant democracy with a stable, market-oriented economy. Joint efforts through Plan Colombia produced security gains that led to the end of the longest conflict in the region's history. Colombia's police and military now have model units for the region that export their security expertise to other partners, acting as a force multiplier of U.S. counternarcotics investment.⁵

And indeed, in policy circles worldwide, Colombia has increasingly been regarded as an exemplary case of security achievements 'made in the Global South' in interconnected domains such as counterinsurgency, stabilisation, peacebuilding, demobilisation, anti-drug policing, and counterterrorism.⁶ On this footing, symbolically underscored by former Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos being awarded the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize for signing a landmark peace deal with the

²Russell Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars: Irregular Warfare from 1776 to the War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 344–50; Mark Peceny and Michael Durnan, 'The FARC's best friend: U.S. antidrug policies and the deepening of Colombia's civil war in the 1990s', *Latin American Politics and Society*, 48:2 (2006), pp. 95–116; Jonathan D. Rosen, *The Losing War: Plan Colombia and Beyond* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), pp. 23–6.

³Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez (eds), *Violence in Colombia, 1990–2000: Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); Kent Eaton, 'The downside of decentralization: Armed clientelism in Colombia', *Security Studies*, 15:4 (2006), pp. 533–62; Alejandro Gaviria, 'Increasing returns and the evolution of violent crime: The case of Colombia', *Journal of Development Economics*, 61:1 (2000), pp. 1–25.

⁴David Kilcullen and Greg Mills, 'Colombia: A political economy of war to an inclusive peace', *PRISM*, 5:3 (2015), pp. 106–121 (p. 107); Ann Mason, 'La crisis de seguridad en Colombia: causas y consecuencias internacionales de un estado en vía de fracaso', *Colombia Internacional*, 49/50 (2001), pp. 82–102; Phillip McLean, 'Colombia: Failed, failing, or just weak?', *The Washington Quarterly*, 25:3 (2002), pp. 123–34; Juan Carlos Pinzón, 'Colombia back from the brink from failed state to exporter of security', *PRISM*, 5:3 (2015), pp. 3–9.

⁵Kirsten D. Madison, 'U.S.–Colombia relations: New opportunities to reinforce and strengthen our bilateral relationship', testimony, Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues, Washington, DC, 19 September 2019, available at: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-colombia-relations-new-opportunities-to-reinforce-and-strengthen-our-bilateral-relationship/>. See also Dickie Davis et al., *A Great Perhaps? Colombia: Conflict and Convergence* (London: Hurst & Co. 2016); Kilcullen and Mills, 'Colombia'; Michael E. O'Hanlon and David Petraeus, 'The success story next door', *Politico* (24 September 2013). Available at: <https://www.politico.com/story/2013/09/general-david-petraeus-michael-ohanlon-the-success-story-next-door-097316>; Michael Miklaucic and Juan Carlos Pinzón, 'Partnership: The Colombia–U.S. experience', in Alexandra Kerr and Michael Miklaucic (eds), *Effective, Legitimate and Secure: Insights for Defense Institution Building* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, Center for Complex Operations, 2017), pp. 273–87; Pinzón, 'Colombia back from the brink'.

⁶Jerome Afeikhena, 'Lessons from Colombia for curtailing the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria', *PRISM*, 5:2 (2014), pp. 95–105; Alexander L. Fattal, *Guerrilla Marketing: Counterinsurgency and Capitalism in Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Ashish Kumar Sen, 'Lessons from Colombia's peace process', The Atlantic Council blog entry (29 August 2016), available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/lessons-from-colombia-s-peace-process/>; Louise Wiuff Moe and Markus-Michael Müller, 'Counterinsurgency, knowledge production and the travelling of coercive realpolitik between Colombia and Somalia', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 53:2 (2018), pp. 193–215; Ted Piccone, *Peace with Justice: The Colombian Experience with Transitional Justice* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2019); Abigail Poe and Adam Isacson, 'Stabilization and development: Lessons from Colombia's "consolidation" model', Washington, DC: Center for International Policy (April 2011); Manuela Trindade Viana, *Post-Conflict Colombia and the Global Circulation of Military Expertise* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

FARC-EP, Colombia has become a globally recognised exporter of security expertise and ‘best practices’. Countries such as Thailand, Nigeria, and Rwanda have drawn doctrinal inspiration from the Colombian Armed Forces’ Damascus Doctrine, which incorporates lessons learned from the country’s domestic conflict. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Macedonia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Serbia have looked to the counternarcotics expertise of the Colombian National Police (CNP), a force integrated into the Ministry of National Defense, to improve their own law enforcement approaches.⁷ And between 2010 and 2017 alone, over 36,000 soldiers coming from 73 countries have received Colombian military training, making security one, if not the most important, item of the country’s South–South cooperation portfolio.⁸

This growing interest in Colombian SSSC is particularly pronounced in Latin America. Colombia has supplanted the US as the primary police and military trainer in the region and has served as a model for police capacity-building and military doctrinal renewal processes in Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru.⁹

Much of this cooperation has been actively supported, and often financed, by Washington. Unsurprisingly, scholarship has recognised the vital role of US assistance in Colombia’s transformation from failure to model, as well as the broader economy-of-force reasoning behind Washington’s interest in supporting Colombia’s export of Southern security solutions to Southern problems in times of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and beyond.¹⁰ Many related studies, however, tend to present one-sided, top-down interpretations of Colombian SSSC, somewhat reducing Colombia to Washington’s ‘super-client’, a security ‘laboratory’ for American imperialism, or a ‘proxy’ for US geopolitical and security interests.¹¹ Undeniably, there is some truth to this. However, these perspectives tend to ignore how Colombian actors navigate and shape these processes, notwithstanding the obvious power hierarchies and dependencies vis-à-vis the United States.¹²

In fact, SSSC does not occur in a vacuum of power and politics. Accordingly, all actors engaged in such endeavours seek to pursue specific interests through this mode of security cooperation. Since SSSC is a relational form of intentional engagement, such pursuit of interest implies working with and through the very hierarchies that place one participant in a lower position of power. This includes the potential for seemingly marginal actors to alter these hierarchies and negotiate,

⁷Pedro Javier Rojas Guevara, ‘201 años de renovación: La Doctrina Damasco representa una transición doctrinal en proyección y un pensamiento militar renovado’, *Experticia Militar* no. 10 (2020), p. 33; Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Colombia, ‘Cooperación sur-sur y triangulación Sur–Sur’ (Bogotá: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2022), n.p.

⁸Lianne Guerra Rondón, ‘Experience with South–South cooperation: The case of Colombia’, in Enrique Oviedo (ed.), *Evaluating South–South Cooperation in Six Latin American and Caribbean Countries: Shared Challenges for Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (Santiago de Chile: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021), pp. 55–108 (p. 71).

⁹Jan Eijking, ‘Why does Colombia export security expertise? Security cooperation between status and bureaucracy’, in Carlos Solar and Carlos A. Perez Ricart (eds), *Crime, Violence, and Justice in Latin America* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023), pp. 152–71; Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Exportación de la seguridad y política exterior de Colombia’, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Colombia: Análisis 12/2016, available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kolumbien/12773.pdf>; ‘Colombia, the United States, and Security Cooperation by Proxy’ (Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America, 2014), available at: http://www.wola.org/publications/colombia_the_united_states_and_security_cooperation_by_proxy; Mateo Morales and Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Narrando la “historia de éxito”: exportación en seguridad y política exterior de Colombia’, in Arlene B. Tickner and Sebastián Bitar (eds), *Nuevos enfoques para el estudio de las relaciones internacionales de Colombia* (Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes, 2017), pp. 239–60. Rojas Guevara, ‘201 años de renovación’, p. 33.

¹⁰Carlos G. Berrios, ‘Critical ingredient: US aid to counterinsurgency in Colombia’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28:3 (2017), pp. 546–75; Miklaucic and Pinzón, ‘Partnership’; Moe and Müller, ‘Counterinsurgency’; Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Associated-dependent security cooperation: Colombia and the United States’, in Jana Hönke and Markus-Michael Müller (eds), *The Global Making of Policing: Postcolonial Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 96–113.

¹¹Tickner, ‘Colombia, the United States, and Security Cooperation by Proxy’. For ‘super-client’ and ‘laboratory’, see John Lindsay-Poland, *Plan Colombia: US Ally Atrocities and Community Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 9 and Fattal, *Guerrilla Marketing*, chapter 5, respectively.

¹²But see Álvaro Méndez, *Colombian Agency and the Making of US Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 2017).

contest, appropriate, and/or ‘refine’ the discursive, epistemological, institutional, and/or practical components of SSSC.¹³ Colombian SSSC with Latin America, as we will demonstrate in the remainder of this article, is a case in point.

Our study is informed by a combination of desk research and fieldwork data collection over more than a decade (2014–24). We conducted 140 semi-structured expert interviews across two research projects, speaking with police and military officers, defence/security bureaucrats, politicians, and security advisors in Colombia, Central America, the Caribbean, Israel, the United States, Europe, and online. These interviews provided first-hand accounts on political contexts, competing visions on security and international cooperation, and institutional transformations of the key actors at different stages of Colombia’s constitution as a regional security provider since the early 2000s.¹⁴ The interviews were coded in NVivo and analysed using methodological insights from qualitative content analysis. Interview data was triangulated with documents from the Colombian security forces, academic studies, NGO reports, and newspaper coverage on SSSC.

Drawing on these data, we assess how Colombian actors shape the dynamics of security-driven South–South cooperation with other Latin American countries and vis-à-vis Washington. Our analysis emphasises the crucial role of epistemological constructs, such as *security homologies* and *security models*, and the professional networks involved in their production and circulation as key drivers of Colombian SSSC. We argue that Colombian policy and security actors intentionally drew comparisons between their country’s security challenges and those faced by other Latin American states, which were seeking ways to improve their security capacities. This portrayal of idiosyncratic (in)security features as shared attributes across contexts has been a precondition for the travelling of Colombian security expertise and practices, facilitating the transfer of security models ‘made in Colombia’ to places rendered legible as homologous. Engaging in security-driven homologisation, we further argue, also enabled Colombian actors to secure US support and allowed them to brand Colombian security expertise and practices as a model capable of addressing contemporary security challenges throughout the region – and elsewhere.

We will execute this argument as follows. We first introduce our analytical framework including the key concepts of security homologies and security models. Next, we trace the emergence and unfolding of Colombian SSSC by following the trajectory of different security homologies produced by Colombian policy and security actors, and their impact on the modelling of Colombia as a successful case of security governance ‘made in the Global South’. This trajectory evolves from portraying Colombia as a failed state to its self-positioning as a Global South actor and partner for South–South cooperation. It culminates in the portrayal of Colombia’s security approach as a blueprint for countering ‘convergent’ security threats in a complex and interconnected world.

Our analysis begins by unpacking the role of threat-evoking homologisation work in the context of Plan Colombia, a US–Colombian security cooperation programme that enabled a new quality of bilateral security engagements, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11. Plan Colombia laid the foundations for a new joint reference frame, grounded in a multilayered homologisation strategy that placed Colombia’s security challenges in a global context. We then illustrate how Colombian foreign policy and security actors leveraged South–South homologies to enhance Colombian South–South cooperation, capitalising on security achievements resulting from Plan Colombia. Zooming in on the Colombian National Army’s (ENC) transformation process by discussing the development of the Damascus Doctrine, we highlight how practitioner networks between Bogotá

¹³Eva Magdalena Stambøl and Tobias Berger, ‘Transnationally entangled (in)securities: The UAE, Turkey, and the Saharan political economy of danger’, *Security Dialogue*, 54:5 (2023), pp. 493–514; Jana Hönke and Markus-Michael Müller, ‘Governing (in)security in a postcolonial world: Transnational entanglements and the worldliness of “local” practice’, *Security Dialogue*, 43:5 (2012), pp. 383–401; Adam Sandor, Philippe M. Frowd, and Jana Hönke, ‘Productive failure, African agency and security cooperation in West Africa: The case of the G5 Sahel’, *European Journal of International Security* (this issue).

¹⁴For a similar approach to unpacking the crime–development nexus, see Jarrett Blaustein, Tom Chodor, and Nathan W. Pino, *Unraveling the Crime–Development Nexus* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), pp. 17–20.

and Washington created homologies centred on ideas of convergence and complexity, and how their local embrace turned Colombia's new military doctrine into one of its prime SSSC export commodities. Throughout Latin America, governments and security actors, recognising the success of the Colombian model as well as the similarities between Colombia's past and their countries' present security challenges, eagerly bought into the doctrine's underlying security homologies. This resonance, in turn, became a key driver behind their interest in engaging with Colombia through SSSC, with the promise of incorporating the 'tested' strategies of the Colombian model into their own approaches for addressing protracted domestic security challenges. In the conclusion, we summarise our findings and highlight their implications for future research on SSSC.

Analysing South–South security cooperation

The key element of SSSC is the construction and travelling of security expertise and practices, often involving also money and material artefacts, such as equipment and technologies, from one place in the Global South towards another.

The central role of the Global South in the circulation of security expertise and practices has received increasing attention from a nascent body of interdisciplinary scholarship, highlighting the constitutive role of the Global South in global security governance. These studies emphasise how territories targeted by Western security interventions have become sites of security-driven experimentation and testing, often referred to as 'laboratories'. Regularly contributing to the development of new, and/or the refinement of existing security knowledge, practices, and/or hardware, the products of such experimentation tend to circulate beyond the initial testing grounds, reshaping the ways in which security is governed – and not only in other sites of Northern power projection in the Global South, but also within the metropolises of the Global North.¹⁵ Put differently, these studies underscore that much of what is commonly regarded as 'Northern' security governance actually has 'Southern roots' of some sort.

While the bulk of this research has focused on North–South entanglements, South–South engagements have received comparatively little attention.¹⁶ Moreover, while studies within this tradition have identified the resulting 'cross-fertilisations' and 'boomerang effects' as central outcomes of these entanglements, the mechanisms through which such braiding occurs and unfolds have remained understudied.¹⁷

One noteworthy exception has been the recent attention paid to the importance of *homologies*, particularly by scholars who have assessed the lasting colonial and/or imperial imprints of global security governance. Homologies are epistemological constructs through which initially unconnected people, places, or processes are linked against the backdrop of pre-constructed categories, allowing for their identification, grouping, and comparisons on grounds of structural similarities.¹⁸

¹⁵Alexander D. Barder, *Empire Within: International Hierarchy and Its Imperial Laboratories of Governance* (London: Routledge, 2015); Julian Go, *Policing Empires: Militarization, Race, and the Imperial Boomerang in Britain and the US* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); Hönke and Müller (eds), *The Global Making of Policing*; Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019); Georgina Sinclair, and Christopher Williams, 'Home and away: The cross-fertilisation between "colonial" and "British" policing, 1921–85', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 35:2 (2007), pp. 221–38.

¹⁶Stambol and Berger, 'Transnationally entangled (in)securities', p. 497. But see Laleh Khalili, 'The location of Palestine in global counterinsurgencies', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 42:3 (2010), pp. 413–33; Moe and Müller, 'Counterinsurgency'; Markus-Michael Müller and Andrea Steinke, 'The geopolitics of Brazilian peacekeeping and the United Nations' turn towards stabilisation in Haiti', *Peacebuilding*, 8:1 (2020), pp. 54–77; Adam Sandor, 'Border security and drug trafficking in Senegal: AIRCOP and global security assemblages', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 10:4 (2016), pp. 490–512; Tickner, 'Associated-dependent development'.

¹⁷Go, *Policing Empires*; Sinclair and Williams, 'Home and away'.

¹⁸Colleen Bell, 'Hybrid warfare and its metaphors', *Humanity*, 3:3 (2012), pp. 225–47; Go, *Policing Empires*; Markus-Michael Müller, 'Enter 9/11: Latin America and the global war on terror', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 52:3 (2020), pp. 545–73;

As Julian Go has summed it up regarding the feedback effects of the military tenets of US imperialism on domestic policing:

When domestic fields are more homologous with the structure of peripheral fields, the methods developed in the latter are more likely to be transferred to the former. Homologous field structures lead would-be imperial importers to construct implicit or explicit analogies between colonized and domestic populations and likewise between the colonial and domestic situations. Imperial importers see domestic populations just like peripheral populations: as a threat to order. Therefore, under these conditions, imperial importers will be more likely to import the methods developed in peripheral fields. If militarized methods are appropriate for colonies, they are also appropriate for domestic fields because the latter seem similar to the former.¹⁹

These insights are important as they allow us to understand why certain forms of security expertise and practices resonate across borders and circulate between sites with perceived analogous security challenges. While most studies on homologies have focused on the resulting feedback effects on Global North countries, the construction of security homologies can be considered as an equally important element in shaping SSSC dynamics. It enables the emergence of itinerant *security models* that countries seek to export to other states rendered comparable by security-driven homologisation.

Through the making of homologies, security practitioners construct similarities across places. Within the context of both North–South and South–South security cooperation, security homologies imply that one place stands out as having successfully addressed the security challenges places appearing as similar are confronted with. In this process, security-driven governance innovations from one site, in our case Colombia, turn into security blueprints with wider geographic applicability. In other words, they become *security models* – analytical representations and abstractions based on asymmetrical comparisons intentionally designed to intervene in and shape certain aspects of reality for particular purposes, in our case to govern security.²⁰

As studies on the mobility of policies have highlighted, these analytical representations have an important spatial ingredient, making them appear as place-tested yet potentially generalisable ‘best practices’. ‘Models that (appear to) come from somewhere’, Peck and Theodore summed up, ‘travel with the license of pragmatic credibility, and models that emanate from the “right” places invoke positive associations of (preferred forms of) best practice.’²¹ And in fact symbolic local security success stories (such as Colombia’s transition from a potentially failing state towards a globally recognised peacemaker) are key reference points for elite actors ‘shopping’ relevant security models to address pressing security challenges.²²

Underlying narratives of success need to be told and listened to. Such ‘storytelling’ occurs within multi-scalar socio-institutional networks of bureaucratic and policy-making actors. These actors and institutions are connected by overlapping ideological and epistemological orientations, shared aspirations, and, to some extent, coherent political projects, including visions on how to govern

Lou Pingeot, ‘A postcolonial practice theory? (Post)colonial fields and the global circulation of policing practices’, *Global Cooperation Research-A Quarterly Journal*, 3:1 (2021), pp. 13–15.

¹⁹ Julian Go, ‘The imperial origins of American policing: Militarization and imperial feedback in the early 20th century’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 125:5 (2020), pp. 1193–1254 (p. 1212).

²⁰ Andrea Behrends, Sung-Joon, and Richard Rottenburg, ‘Traveling models: Introducing an analytical concept to globalization studies’, in Andrea Behrends, Sung-Joon, and Richard Rottenburg (eds), *Travelling Models in African Conflict Management: Translating Technologies of Social Ordering* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 1–2.

²¹ Jaime Peck and Nick Theodore, ‘Mobilizing policy: Models, methods, and mutations’, *Geoforum*, 41:2 (2010), pp. 169–174 (p. 171).

²² Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, Sophie Didier, and Elisabeth Peyroux, ‘Circulation of security models in Southern African cities: Between neoliberal encroachment and local power dynamics’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 36:5 (2012), pp. 877–889.

security and for whom, thereby promoting particular security models while marginalising others.²³ As South–South cooperation is driven by an interest in sharing and learning from successful Southern models, such selective promotion of security blueprints can be regarded as a key driver of SSSC dynamics.²⁴

Summing up these reflections in more abstract terms, the connections between homologisation, modelling, and SSSC can be understood as an analytical sequence: homologisations serve as the foundational step in creating or ‘recognising’ similarities and establishing analogies across initially unconnected places. Modelling builds upon these homologies, allowing for asymmetric comparisons that evaluate one context as superior to other places in certain security-related attributes. This, in turn, forms the basis for developing interventionist blueprints to govern security in places deemed ‘inferior’ regarding their ability to address security challenges. Finally, SSSC, influenced by these models, involves the practical application of underlying security expertise and practices across Global South contexts.

In the remainder of this article, we will apply this sequence to the analysis of Colombian SSSC dynamics, focusing on how Colombian actors’ engagement in homologisation and modelling enabled them to navigate international hierarchies, particularly in US–Colombian relations, to their advantage.

Laying the foundations: Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia, a joint US–Colombian security initiative, is widely regarded as a game changer concerning Colombia’s capacity to address domestic security challenges, laying the foundations for the country eventually becoming a security model. Consequently, Plan Colombia provides a meaningful starting point for our analysis.

Initiated in 1999, Plan Colombia emerged from negotiations between the Colombian and US governments, who shared the conviction that the Colombian state and its security forces lacked the capacity to counter the FARC–EP insurgency and escalating violence in the country. This was largely due to the inefficiency of the country’s police and military forces, which also were implicated in serious human rights violations, including forced displacements and extrajudicial killings – and collusion with paramilitary groups.²⁵

²³Bénit-Gbaffou, Didier, and Peyroux, ‘Circulation of security models’; Trevor Jones and Tim Newburn, *Policy Transfer and Criminal Justice* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007); Louise Wiuff Moe and Markus-Michael Müller, ‘Knowledge production at the environment–security nexus: Between orthodoxy and transformation’, *Environmental Science & Policy*, 151 (2024), p. 103597; Tim Newburn, Trevor Jones, and Jarrett Blaustein, ‘Policy mobilities and comparative penalty’, *Theoretical Criminology*, 22:4 (2018), pp. 563–81; Peck and Theodore, ‘Mobilizing policy’, p. 171; *Fast Policy: Experimental Statecraft at the Thresholds of Neoliberalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). On ‘storytelling’, see Christiane Wilke, ‘“Law on a slanted globe”: Traveling models of criminal responsibility for state violence’, *Social & Legal Studies*, 24:4 (2015), pp. 555–76.

²⁴E.g. Paul Amar, ‘Global South to the rescue: Emerging humanitarian superpowers and globalizing rescue industries’, *Globalizations*, 9:1 (2012), pp. 1–13; Valeria Lauria and Corrado Fumagalli, ‘BRICS, the southern model, and the evolving landscape of development assistance: Toward a new taxonomy’, *Public Administration & Development*, 39:4–5 (2019), pp. 215–30; Anita Mathur, *Role of South–South Cooperation and Emerging Powers in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2014).

²⁵On these issues, see Patricia Bibes, ‘Transnational organized crime and terrorism: Colombia, a case study’, *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 17:3 (2001), pp. 243–58; Soledad Granada, Jorge A. Restrepo, and Alonso Tobón García, ‘Neoparamilitarismo en Colombia: una herramienta conceptual para la interpretación de dinámicas recientes del conflicto armado colombiano’, in Jorge A. Restrepo and David Aponte (eds), *Guerra y violencias en Colombia: Herramientas e interpretaciones* (Bogotá: Editorial Javeriana, 2009), pp. 467–99; Abbey Steele, *Democracy and Displacement in Colombia’s Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017). Even the US Department of State, in its 1999 Colombia country report on human rights practice, recognised the violence emerging from state–paramilitary alliances; see United States Department of State, *1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 2000), available at: https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/colombia.html].

Responding to this situation, Colombian President Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998–2002) reached out to Washington to get the attention of the administration of President Bill Clinton (1993–2001). Pastrana depicted Colombia as being ‘on the verge of collapse’, stressing the country’s incapacity to address mounting domestic challenges without US support.²⁶ In portraying Colombia as a hemispheric problem and issue of shared responsibility, and crafting an image of the Colombian state’s vulnerability for a US-based policy audience, the Pastrana government, with significant lobbying support from the Colombian embassy, invited Washington to intervene in domestic security affairs.²⁷ Due to fears ‘that President Pastrana might be losing control’, the United States accepted the invitation to support Latin America’s oldest, yet threatened, democracy and to counter potential negative hemispheric spillover effects. Consequently, ‘More high-level U.S. diplomats, congressional delegations, CIA officials, and military officers visited Colombia in 1999 than at any other time in recent history’, a contemporary Human Rights Watch report observed.²⁸ Recognising the ‘high priority’ Washington placed on assisting ‘Colombia’s democracy as it faces these interrelated challenges of narcotics, guerrillas, paramilitaries, and poverty’, then US under secretary for political affairs, Thomas R. Pickering, emphasised that security assistance was central to this support. Consequently, Colombia became ‘the largest recipient of U.S. counter-narcotics aid in the world.’²⁹

Once a shared understanding of the ‘Colombian problem’ was established through intense exchanges between practitioners, bureaucrats, and politicians of both states, prominently involving US SOUTHCOM commander Charles E. Wilhelm, Plan Colombia became the centerpiece of bilateral cooperation. A policy proposal crafted and refined by Pastrana and his close advisors to seek external assistance to tackle Colombia’s ‘internal weakness’ epitomised the success of Pastrana’s interventionary activism.³⁰

Accordingly, the Pastrana government’s proposal depicted Colombia’s unresolved internal conflict as a hindrance not only to the development of modern statehood, but also to the country’s pursuit of peace and protection of its democratic institutions. The Colombian government called for the ‘solidarity and aid of our international partners’ to join Colombia’s ‘fight against the plague of drug trafficking’ – a challenge it portrayed as aggravating ‘the symptoms [of the weakness] of a State that has yet to consolidate.’³¹

While the document, intentionally published in both English and Spanish, proposed 11 combined strategies to achieve these goals, focusing significantly on economic and wider development issues, negotiations with Washington pushed Plan Colombia’s strategic outlook towards a counter-narcotics and counter-guerrilla profile.³² This was not least because of the feared spillover effects of Colombia’s security challenges. In the words of the Clinton administration’s national

²⁶Rosen, *The Losing War*, p. 24.

²⁷Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Intervención por invitación: Claves de la política exterior colombiana y de sus debilidades principales’, *Colombia Internacional*, 65 (2007), pp. 90–111 (p. 99); Méndez, *Colombian Agency*, p. 9.

²⁸Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch World Report 2000: Events of 1999 (November 1998–October 1999)* (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, 2000), p. 122.

²⁹Thomas R. Pickering, ‘U.S. Policy toward Colombia’, Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 6 October 1999,

available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-106shrg61871/html/CHRG-106shrg61871.htm>.

³⁰Méndez, *Colombian Agency*, p. 91. On the role of Wilhelm in this, see Dean A. Cook, ‘U.S. Southern Command: General Charles E. Wilhelm and the shaping of U.S. military engagement in Colombia, 1997–2000’, in Derek S. Reveron (ed.), *America’s Viceroy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 127–62; For a personal account, see Charles E. Wilhelm, ‘A view from Washington’, in Gabriel Marcella, Charles E. Wilhelm, Alvaro Valencia Tovar, and Ricardo Arias Calderon (eds), *Plan Colombia: Some Differing Perspectives* (Carlisle: United States Army War College, 2001), pp. 9–14.

³¹President of the Republic of Colombia, ‘Plan Colombia: Plan for peace, prosperity, and the strengthening of the state’ (Bogotá: Presidency of the Republic, 1999), p. 2, 5.

³²María Clemencia Ramírez, Kimberly Santon, and John Walsh, ‘Colombia: A vicious circle of drugs and war’, in Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin (eds), *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005), pp. 99–142 (pp. 106–7). This can already be observed in the revised, and extended, version of Plan Colombia as it was discussed in the Hearing, *Crisis in Colombia: U.S. support for peace process and anti-drug efforts*, Committee on United States Senate, Committee on

security strategy, the Colombian problem had ‘implications for regional peace and security’, with an explosive mix of ‘insurgency, drug trafficking and a growing paramilitary movement’ challenging Colombia’s democracy. US support was, therefore, crucial for waging ‘a comprehensive effort to promote the mutually reinforcing goals of peace, combating drug trafficking, economic development, and respect for human rights.’³³

While the White House’s national security strategy still emphasised the importance of democratic strengthening, Washington’s overall focus shifted towards the security terrain in increasingly narrowly defined terms, meaning counternarcotics and counterinsurgency. Accordingly, the resulting security assistance package that became known as Plan Colombia, signed into law by President Clinton in 2000, officially aimed ‘at keeping illegal drugs off our shores’ by enabling the Colombian government to ‘push into the coca-growing regions of southern Colombia, which are now dominated by insurgent guerrillas.’ Facilitating the Colombian security forces to switch towards an offensive posture would include the training specialised counternarcotics battalions, procuring 30 Blackhawk and 33 Huey helicopters, and offering additional military support.³⁴ Beyond helicopters, the United States eventually also provided Lockheed C-130 Hercules aircrafts to improve the Colombian armed forces’ airpower capabilities.³⁵ All of this came with an estimated price tag of \$7.5 billion, with Colombia having promised to cover in 65 percent of this, but ultimately failing to live up to this promise.³⁶

US support increased even further after 9/11, extending Plan Colombia’s time span and coercive outlook while laying the basis for Colombia’s embrace of SSSC to promote what began to increasingly be seen as a security model. Shifts in homologisation strategies were key to this.

Despite increased US engagement, things were not going well in Colombia. Two years into Plan Colombia, the FARC-EP amassed sizeable troop numbers around Bogotá, and the country witnessed an upsurge in kidnappings, prominently including presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt in February 2002. With rising civilian fatalities from FARC-EP operations, Colombians voted conservative presidential candidate Álvaro Uribe Vélez, who had been running on a militant anti-guerrilla ticket, into office in 2002.³⁷

The Uribe administration (2002–10) aimed to fully capitalise on Plan Colombia’s potential. Recognising the need for broader external support and moving beyond Plan Colombia’s counternarcotics focus, the administration seized a strategic opportunity that opened up after 9/11. Continuing Pastrana’s interventional entrepreneurialism, the Uribe government framed Colombia’s security challenges within the George W. Bush administration’s (2001–9) GWOT-revamped security agenda. This was accomplished through a homologisation strategy that allowed for situating Colombia’s security problems within a wider post-9/11 security landscape.

Key to this has been Uribe’s discursive redefinition of the FARC-EP as a *terrorist organisation* funded through *drug trafficking*.³⁸ The framing capitalised on US security discourses that regarded the FARC-EP rebels as ‘narcoterrorists’ and classified them as a Foreign Terrorist Organization since 1997.³⁹ With this move, Colombia’s internal conflict was geographically upscaled. Through

Foreign Relations, One Hundred Sixth Congress, 6 October 1999 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2000), Appendix.

³³The White House, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1999), p. 39.

³⁴The White House, *Fact Sheet: Colombia Assistance Package* (Grand Canyon: Office of the Press Spokesman, The White House, 11 January 2000).

³⁵Interview with US defence advisor, Bogotá, July 2022.

³⁶Joseph R. Biden Jr, *Aid to ‘Plan Colombia’: The Time for U.S. Assistance Is Now. Report for the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000), p. 5. Gobierno de Colombia, Contraloría General de la República. *Plan Colombia, Primer Informe de Evaluación* (Bogotá: Contraloría General de la República, 2001), p. 3. Since 2000, Plan Colombia and its successor programmes amounted to over \$13 billion in US assistance. See June S. Beittel, *U.S.–Colombia Security Relations: Future Prospects in Brief* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2023), p. 1.

³⁷Crandall, *America’s Dirty Wars*, pp. 344–50; Rosen, *The Losing War*, pp. 23–6.

³⁸Rosen, *The Losing War*, p. 50; Tickner, ‘Associated-dependent security cooperation’.

³⁹Müller, ‘Enter 9/11’; Roberto Toledo, ‘How Congress has legitimated Latin American counter-insurgency’, *Peace Review*, 16:4 (2004), pp. 497–504 (p. 503).

homologisation, Colombia was now situated in a global context of analogous states where terrorists, like al-Qaeda or the Taliban in Afghanistan, exploited governance deficits and engaged in criminal activities such as drug trafficking to enhance their transnational operations. As decision-makers and policy analysts in Washington (and the Global North more widely) increasingly assessed such states from the perspective of their potential to 'fail', Pastrana's earlier self-fashioning of Colombia as a 'weak state' added further credentials to the post-9/11 narcoterrorism homology.⁴⁰

Gabriel Marcella, a former international affairs advisor to SOUTHCOM's commander-in-chief, sums up the contemporary *zeitgeist* and the (re-)location of Colombia on Washington's post-9/11 global terrorism landscape:

From the context of the post-9/11 world's heightened security consciousness, Colombia's internal weakness represents a formidable threat. ... Colombia belongs to a class of countries that threaten the international community not with their individual or collective strength but with their weaknesses. A 'broken windows theory' of international relations would argue that the decline of the regional neighborhood threatens the international community in untraditional ways: international organized crime, the violation of sovereign borders, contraband, the illegal shipment of arms, chemicals, laundering of dirty money, suborning of public officials (members of the police, military, legislative bodies, judiciaries, and so on), the corruption and intimidation of the media, displaced persons, and the formation of an international *demi monde* that sustains terrorism.⁴¹

The Bush administration positively responded to Uribe's homologisation-driven invited intervention to counter what now appeared as 'an exotic variant of al-Qaeda' in the Western hemisphere, not at least as this offered an opportunity to demonstrate that Washington's war on terror was not primarily about Islamic terrorism but about terrorism in general.⁴²

Colombia's invitation was underpinned by a strategic 'self-orientalisation', depicting the country as lacking the military and state capacity to tackle the criminal-terrorist-insurgency threat to the Western Hemisphere.⁴³ Responding to this, the Bush administration erased the distinction between counternarcotics and counterinsurgency/counterterrorism support for Colombia. Assistance under Plan Colombia, now refashioned along GWOT lines, was redirected to enhance the professionalism and modernisation of the Colombian armed forces in their struggle against leftist insurgents, within the framework of Uribe's 'democratic security' policy.⁴⁴

By the mid-2000s, Uribe's leadership combined with US support seemed to have turned the tide. Summing up Plan Colombia's achievements, Jonathan D. Farrar, then US Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, announced that Colombian 'drug seizures and crop eradication are at record levels. Kidnappings, massacres, and murders are down significantly. The Colombian people are now talking about peace as something that could really happen in their lifetimes. All of these success stories create a powerful argument for continued assistance to Colombia.'⁴⁵ Colombia's official *Plan Colombia Progress Report 1999–2005* echoed these statements. It highlighted 'considerable' military efforts related to 'the fight against the terrorist threat'. In addition to a 52.1% increase in the size of Colombia's security forces (military

⁴⁰For a concise discussion of the post-9/11 debates on state 'failure', 'weakness', etc., see Daniel Lambach and Thomas Debiel, 'State failure and state building', in Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Security Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 159–68.

⁴¹Gabriel Macella, 'The U.S. engagement with Colombia: Legitimate state authority and human rights', Red de seguridad y defensa de América Latina online (1 March 2002), available at: {<https://www.resdal.org/Archivo/d0000208.htm>}.

⁴²Rosen, *The Losing War*, p. 50. For quote, see Robert D. Kaplan, *Imperial Grunts: The American Military on the Ground from Mongolia to the Philippines to Iraq and Beyond* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), p. 43.

⁴³Tickner, 'Associated-dependent security cooperation', pp. 99–100.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 100; Michael L. Evans, 'U.S. drug policy & intelligence operations in the Andes', Institute for Policy Studies, available at: {https://ips-dc.org/us_drug_policy_intelligence_operations_in_the_andes/}.

⁴⁵Jonathan D. Farrar, 'Plan Colombia: Major successes and new challenges', Statement before the House International Relations Committee (Washington, 11 May 2005), available at: {<https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rm/46214.htm>}.

and police), 'the main indicators for violence in Colombia have shown significant improvement in the period P[lan]C[olombia] has been executed. The 33.3% decrease in the national homicide rate, the 85.4% decrease in the number of kidnappings, and the 71.4% fall in the number of massacres are all worth emphasizing.' Plan Colombia's 'support to the Armed Forces and the Police', the report underscored, 'has been a crucial element in breaking the perverse tie between the growth and production of illegal drugs and the activities of the criminal and terrorist groups throughout Colombian territory and on its borders.'⁴⁶

Such official praise reflects a widespread shift in perception among think-tanks, international media outlets, and regional and international financial institutions that began portraying Colombia as a country that, with 'some' US support, turned the tide in its prolonged struggle against insurgency and its path to state failure.⁴⁷

Operational and tactical successes notwithstanding, critical voices among practitioners, behind closed doors, point to the high price Colombia's population paid for these gains. This includes escalating violence in rural areas and human rights violations, in addition to an absent strategic end state and limited achievements in territorial control and state governance.⁴⁸

The growing international praise for Plan Colombia's achievements reflects that, as argued earlier, more often than not, it is the symbolic policy purchase of particular security efforts whose successes, far from being objective 'facts', are selective representations produced through interested engagements among actors and institutions keen on promoting a specific security governance approach while marginalising alternatives. And it was this selective, and in many ways benevolent, success narrative surrounding Plan Colombia that was decisive in allowing Colombia to engage in SSSC. Deepening its homologisation strategy, this undertaking paved the way for a veritable modelling exercise of Colombia's security achievements.

Embracing South–South (security) cooperation

By entering the global security marketplace, Colombia added a new component to its South–South cooperation (SSC) portfolio, which dates back to the late 1960s, when Colombia participated in regional cooperation efforts facilitated by the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean. Initially focused on technical cooperation with other countries in the region, these initiatives gained additional institutional support with the establishment of the Colombian Agency for International Cooperation (ACCI) in 1996.⁴⁹ Around the same time, Colombia also initiated various forms of SSC with Latin American police forces, with intelligence sharing playing a crucial role in these collaborative endeavours.⁵⁰

In the new millennium, both types of South–South engagements took on a new quality. In 2005, the ACCI merged with the Social Solidarity Network to establish the Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation, commonly referred to as *Acción Social*. In 2011, during the first Juan Manuel Santos administration (2010–14), *Acción Social* was replaced by the Presidential Agency of International Cooperation of Colombia (APC-Colombia). Exclusively managing all matters of Colombia's international cooperation, and operating under the presidency's coordination, the creation of APC-Colombia signalled a shift towards a more apparent institutionalisation of SSC and underscored the acknowledgement of its strategic and (geo)political importance.⁵¹ Said

⁴⁶National Planning Department (DNP) and Department of Justice (DJS), *Plan Colombia Progress Report 1999–2005* (Bogotá: DNP and DJS, 2006), pp. 17–19.

⁴⁷Isaline Bergamaschi, Arlene B. Tickner, and Jimena Durán, 'Going south to reach the north? The case of Colombia', in Isaline Bergamaschi and Arlene B. Tickner (eds), *South–South Cooperation beyond the Myths: Rising Donors, New Aid Practices?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 245–269 (p. 248).

⁴⁸See also Lindsay-Poland, *Plan Colombia*.

⁴⁹Guerra Rondón, 'Experience with South–South cooperation', pp. 62–3; Bergamaschi et al., 'Going south to reach the north?', pp. 249–51.

⁵⁰Interview with CNP Colonel, Online, March 2022.

⁵¹Bergamaschi et al., 'Going south to reach the north?', pp. 249–51.

recognition implied engaging with what Cezne and Hönke termed the ‘multiple [discursive] uses’ of the category of the ‘South’ by actors engaged in South–South relations to pursue their goals. Such multiple usage, as well as related strategising, in turn, is made possible by different associations, and (geo)political placements, of what ‘South’ means and for whom.⁵²

Recognising Colombia’s ongoing dependency on aid provided from traditional Global North donors, while seeking to leverage geopolitical opportunities in a changing global landscape characterised by the perceived ‘rise of the Global South’, APC-Colombia pursued a dual homologisation strategy. This undertaking aimed to navigate international hierarchies in transition to Colombia’s advantage, with the goal of establishing the country as a regional middle power within the context of an emergent reconfiguration of global (trade and development) relations, symbolised prominently by the creation of BRICS, the group that represents five of the world’s emerging economies, in 2010.⁵³

This dual homologisation strategy made Colombia palatable as a country facing challenges analogous to many other Global South ‘developing’ nations, such as inequality or violent conflicts, the tackling of which requires traditional Northern donor support. Simultaneously, Colombia depicted itself as a thriving ‘Southern’ model of technical governance innovation, showcasing its achievements and willingness to share Colombian experiences with other Global South countries through horizontal *partnerships*. In this context, donors became ‘providing partners’, while recipients were elevated to the status of ‘partners’, aiming – at least rhetorically – to address global power asymmetries.⁵⁴ ‘APC-Colombia’, as Bergamaschi et al. summed up, ‘developed a dual narrative that guarantees continued eligibility to aid resources by stressing the country’s remaining challenges’ while simultaneously presenting Colombia as a ‘source of knowledge and technical experience of value to other developing countries through SSC’.⁵⁵ The Santos government expanded this narrative towards security cooperation, making it a central element of the country’s SSC strategy.

Dubbed the *Estrategia de Cooperación Internacional en Seguridad Integral* (International Cooperation Strategy for Integral Security) and *Diplomacia para la Seguridad y Defensa* (Security and Defense Diplomacy), from the early 2010s onwards, Colombia aimed to provide other countries with security-related ‘technical assistance’, with the goal of positioning itself in the global security assistance market by ‘effectively managing the international demand and supply of cooperation in Defense and Security’.⁵⁶

Key items on Colombia’s export agenda included police training and education programmes, Special Forces training courses, as well as training on jungle warfare, anti-kidnapping and anti-extortion, maritime interdiction, and riot control. Southern partner countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, and Panama) were the principal importers of these offerings.⁵⁷ Importantly, and despite the institutionalisation of Colombian South–South activities within the more developmental branches of the country’s foreign policy apparatus, with its embrace of SSSC, in 2010 the Colombian government designated the CNP and the Ministry of Defence as

⁵²Eric Cezne and Jana Hönke, ‘The multiple meanings and uses of South–South relations in extraction: The Brazilian mining company Vale in Mozambique’, *World Development*, 151 (2022), p. 105756.

⁵³On the ‘rise’ of the Global South, see Kevin Gray and Barry K. Gills, ‘South–South cooperation and the rise of the Global South’, *Third World Quarterly*, 37:4 (2015), pp. 557–74.

⁵⁴Guerra Rondón, ‘Experience with South–South cooperation’, p. 60.

⁵⁵Bergamaschi et al., ‘Going south to reach the north?’, p. 251.

⁵⁶Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Exportación de la seguridad’, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Colombia, *Estrategia de Cooperación Internacional en Seguridad Integral* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Colombia, 2012); Moe and Müller, ‘Counterinsurgency’; Müller, ‘Enter 9/11’. For quote: Ministerio de Defensa Nacional de Colombia, *Informe del Ministro al Congreso 2010–2011* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Defensa Nacional de Colombia, 2011), p. 54.

⁵⁷Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, *Informe*, p. 54.

the ‘main actors of its Foreign Policy, focused on the offer and promotion of plans and activities for international security and peace.’⁵⁸

However, the fact that many of the resulting South–South engagements gravitated around Latin America is inseparable from US national security interests. With mounting material and human costs related to Washington’s GWOT, Colombia, particularly because of the successes attributed to Plan Colombia, was discovered as a valuable regional asset. Working with and through Colombian advisors promised to make US security assistance for Latin America more effective and legitimate.⁵⁹ Seeking to realise these potentials, the United States eventually urged Colombians to step up and take responsibility. ‘We invested a lot of money in you, how about you now are working with the region?’, one of our interviewees recalled.⁶⁰

The Colombian response was affirmative – and homologisation added to this. In a view we find both among US and Colombian security practitioners, Colombia’s geographical, social, and institutional analogies with other Latin American countries, attributable to a common *Latino* ‘experience’ and ‘culture’, were seen as meaningful symbolic resources for enlisting Colombia in a triangulated South–South undertaking. From Washington’s perspective, such structural similarities promised a frictionless integration of Colombian expertise and practices into other Latin American countries’ security governance, particularly – as such ‘intangible’ cultural resources were regarded as decisive in coordinating the region’s armed forces and creating ‘jointness’ – allowing Washington, in the words of a US defence advisor, ‘[to] do better with less’ in terms of investments in hemispheric order maintenance.⁶¹

From the Colombian perspective, this homologisation not only allowed for placing the country’s security expertise in a wider regional context, but also for setting Colombia apart from, and even above, the United States. ‘I believe that a *gringo* will always be a *gringo*, that is to say, North American’, a high-ranking CNP member summed it up. ‘They have their own problems, but the North American doesn’t know ... the [Latin American] culture.’⁶² Stated otherwise, Washington’s way of waging war – against terror, crime, drugs – appeared unsuitable for a Latin American theatre of operations precisely due to these cultural dissimilarities. In a statement indicative of the Colombian self-othering, foundational for the country’s positioning on the global security assistance marketplace, another interviewee stated that ‘One thing that makes us different is that we don’t depend on technology. We have what we call here in Latin America “indigenous malice”. Our bodies are much more adapted to the adversities of weather and territory than that of other armies, especially the United States.’⁶³

In a move reminiscent of APC-Colombia’s double-homologisation strategy, this distancing allowed for a dual asymmetric comparison, essential to Colombia’s security-modelling process. Through this operation, Colombia positioned itself apart from both analogous Latin American countries (which did not effectively counter similar security challenges) and the United States (which lacks Colombia’s unique ‘intangible’ resources), while appearing to Washington as a regional asset worthy of continued support.

The resulting US–Colombian endeavour to improve Latin American security governance through Colombian SSSC was institutionalised in 2012, when US President Barack Obama (2009–17) signed an agreement that created the United States–Colombia Action Plan on Regional Security Cooperation (USCAP). USCAP’s declared goal was ‘to work together to provide assistance to partner nations and strengthen the fight against the global drug problem and transnational

⁵⁸ Departamento Nacional de Planeación, *Informe de empalme entre Gobiernos Nacionales* (Bogotá: Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2022), p. 59. See also Tickner, ‘Exportación de la seguridad’, p. 8.

⁵⁹ Interview with ENC Lieutenant Colonel, Online, February 2022.

⁶⁰ Interview with US police advisor (ret.), Antigua Guatemala, 2015.

⁶¹ Interview with US defence advisor, Bogotá, July 2022.

⁶² Interview with CNP Lieutenant Colonel, Online, March 2022.

⁶³ Interview with ENC Lieutenant Colonel, Online, February 2022.

crime.⁶⁴ Emphasis was placed on police and military cooperation, as well as capacity building, to ensure regional stability and counter multiple forms of insecurity in Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (since 2013), Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic (since 2014), and – since 2021 – Paraguay.⁶⁵ More recently, Ecuador and Argentina also joined USCAP.⁶⁶ By 2023, USCAP provided capacity building and advice to 37,586 officials in 2,249 training activities. Celebrating USCAP's 10th anniversary, the US Embassy in Colombia declared its commitment to sustaining 'this *successful model*'.⁶⁷

Underlying the creation of USCAP as a model of triangulated SSSC was a shared perception of mutual and analogous security challenges among participating countries in the region. The ways in which such common understanding was created illustrates the homologisation efforts driving US-supported Colombian SSSC at the practitioner level.

In 2012, SOUTHCOM gathered commanding officers from the original partner countries at the 7th Carrera Air Force Club in Bogotá. These high-ranking military officials were tasked with outlining the nature of the security challenges facing their armed forces and identifying the necessary means for addressing them. In so doing, a common threat scenario emerged, in response to which each branch of the Colombian armed forces articulated their potential contributions, drawing from their battle-tested experiences. One participant noted that these experiences had already a proven 'extensive trajectory with the US government'. Washington's embrace of the above-mentioned homology that depicted Colombia as a successful security performer among analogous Latin American sister republics, in turn, allowed for a smooth coupling of strategies, as US counterparts were familiar with the intended outcomes. Following the presentation of needs and wishes by each country, the Colombian forces presented the capabilities they could provide, by 'explaining to each country what capacity we needed to develop'.⁶⁸ Against the backdrop of Colombia's success in countering analogous security challenges, the participating countries embraced these suggestions and embarked on an ongoing SSSC journey. USCAP's expansion allowed Colombia to further advance and refine its security model by adapting it to specific national contexts, which, in turn, enhanced the model's appeal as a regional security blueprint.

Obviously, the previous analysis underscored Washington's far-from-small footprint in Colombian SSSC, which is inseparable from the wider hierarchies informing US–Colombian relations. As former Colombian president Iván Duque (2018–22) noted in an interview, Colombia had leeway in bringing in its own perspectives and ideas. However, he emphasised: 'Colloquially, someone used to say that he who has the syringe gives the injection.' 'Obviously', he went on, 'if a country is financing the initiatives, then it has a priority in terms of what it wants the resources [to be used] for.'⁶⁹

Such power asymmetries notwithstanding, Colombian security bureaucrats and practitioners interviewed for this article emphasised their agency and influence in setting the country's SSSC agenda, including their ability to 'tailor' the cooperation to the needs of their Latin American counterparts. While Colombian politicians may have viewed cooperation with the United States in triangular security engagements primarily as a means to enhance Colombia's international reputation, Colombian security personnel used their role in international security assistance for professional and institutional development, allowing themselves to become recognised as experts

⁶⁴'USCAP helps rebuild a safer region', *Diálogo Américas* (5 March 2020), available at <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/uscap-helps-rebuild-a-safer-region>.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*; Interview with ENC Lieutenant Colonel, Online, February 2022.

⁶⁶Interview with security advisor, San José, Costa Rica, 2 March 2023.

⁶⁷<https://www.policia.gov.co/noticia/decimo-aniversario-del-uscap-fortaleciendo-cooperacion-en-seguridad-regional>}, accessed 24 February 2025. For quote: <https://co.usembassy.gov/es/cooperacion-entre-estados-unidos-y-colombia-hacen-de-l-pais-suramericano-un-lider-en-seguridad-regional/#:~:text=USCAP%2C%20plan%20de%20cooperaci%C3%B3n%20en,actividades%20de%20formaci%C3%B3n%20y%20cooperaci%C3%B3n>}, accessed 28 July 2023, link no longer available.

⁶⁸Interview with ENC Colonel (ret.), Bogotá, July 2022.

⁶⁹Interview with former President Iván Duque, Online, February 2023.

beyond Colombia's borders. As one interviewee has put it, 'We have known how to receive assistance', stressing that, ultimately, 'we run our own circus because we learned all the juggling of the other countries but we run our own *show* [original in English]. Running their 'own show' means placing Colombia at the centre of the double-homologisation process, by 'adapt[ing] all the assistance and experiences of other states to our own realities.'⁷⁰ Confirming these perceptions, a US defence advisor acknowledged Colombia's rise to 'a regional player', highlighting that Colombia's resulting ability to export its tactical and operational expertise to other Latin American countries was grounded in the previously discussed homologisation efforts. These efforts allowed Colombia's security forces to 'develop and build the framework for a partnership, so that you align interest so that the two sides of the partnership are moving in the same direction.'⁷¹ And this pertains to both US–Colombian engagements as well as Colombian SSSC.

Turning to the crafting of the ENC's Damascus Doctrine, one of Colombia's crucial SSSC exports, and its role in creating a common regional understanding of security challenges that renders the importation of Colombian expertise and practices attractive for other Latin American governments and security forces, the next section will unpack these processes in greater detail.

From sinner to saint

Analysing the production and export of the Damascus Doctrine is important both empirically, due to its role in Colombia's SSSC, and analytically, as military doctrine is an important homologisation device. Understood as an 'approved set of principles and methods, intended to provide large military organizations with a *common outlook* and a *uniform basis for action*', military doctrinal transfer can standardise institutional structures, organisational cultures, and operational activities across doctrine-wise synchronised military forces.⁷² Zooming in on the process leading to the publication and later exportation of the Damascus Doctrine, we will highlight how processes of homologisation and US–Colombian engagements shaped one of Colombia's most important SSSC export commodities, aligning the design of military doctrine in importing countries with the Colombian model.

The uniform basis of military action as embodied in the Damascus Doctrine emerged from a doctrinal renewal process the Colombian National Army (ENC) embarked on by the early 2010s. Confronted with challenges posed by the ongoing insurgency as well as international (and domestic) criticism over human rights violations – including a high number of extrajudicial killings by the Colombian military, known as the false positives scandal, which involved the deliberate execution of civilians who were presented as guerrilla combatants in order to boost the military's performance statistics – the army leadership initiated a process of strategic doctrinal renewal.⁷³

In 2011, the Strategic Revision and Innovation Committee was created, which transformed several times until morphing into the Army of the Future Transformation Command (COTEF) in 2016. COTEF was tasked with making Colombia's army fit to counter future challenges. The complete overhaul of Colombia's military doctrine was a cornerstone of these initiatives. It led to the creation of the ENC's Doctrine Center (CEDOE) in 2016 and the publication of the Damascus Doctrine in the same year.

The doctrine's biblical reference to the conversion of Saul to the Apostle Paul on the way to Damascus symbolised the army's recognition of past human rights wrongdoings in counterinsurgency, and its transformative goal of converting from sinner to saint.⁷⁴ For this to happen, the

⁷⁰Interview with ENC Colonel (ret.), Online, November 2021.

⁷¹Interview with US defence advisor, Bogotá, July 2022.

⁷²Daniel Moran, 'Military doctrine', in Richard Holmes, Charles Singleton, and Spencer Jones (eds) *The Oxford Companion to Military History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 262–263 (p. 262), emphasis added.

⁷³Rachel Godfrey Wood, 'Understanding Colombia's false positives', Oxford Transitional Justice Research Working Paper Series (14 July 2009), {<https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/migrated/woodfin1.pdf>}.

⁷⁴Pedro Javier Rojas Guevara, 'Doctrina Damasco: eje articulador de la segunda gran reforma del Ejército Nacional de Colombia', *Revista Científica General José María Córdova*, 15:9 (2017), pp. 95–119 (p. 115).

strong association of the ENC with counterinsurgency had to be untangled. Thus, no explicit counterinsurgency manual was included in the doctrinal revamp, and military units were renamed to disassociate them from counterinsurgency. For instance, counter-guerrilla battalions were renamed ground-operations battalions.⁷⁵

Shifting semantics notwithstanding, counterinsurgency remained central to the Damascus project, significantly influenced by US counterinsurgency thinkers and practitioners. ‘I went to Washington’, a high-ranking protagonist of the Damascus project explained. ‘I was a personal friend of Mark Mellie [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 2019–23], and I told him to please support me [with the Damascus project] because I wanted to have some Americans in my CEDOE, helping me.’⁷⁶

US support for Colombia’s doctrinal renewal process included the direct participation of David Petraeus, one of the key architects of US counterinsurgency efforts in the GWOT. ‘General Petraeus came over from the US and that is how it started’, a retired ENC colonel told us. ‘The general was at the War School, and we took many lessons of [Petraeus’] model and its idea of the ecosystem of the insurgency and counterinsurgency that was applied in Iraq and Afghanistan.’⁷⁷

Incorporating these ‘lessons learned’ added a practical element to the previously noted homology strategy that placed Colombia on Washington’s GWOT map by depicting the FARC-EP as narcoterrorists. Including US counterinsurgency ‘lessons learned’ from Washington’s post-9/11 battlefields effectively upscaled Colombia’s internal conflict by placing domestic military action within global efforts of countering what was then termed ‘global insurgency’.⁷⁸ This (re)positioning of Colombia’s internal security efforts within a changing landscape of interconnected ‘domestic, regional, and global’ threat dynamics significantly helped to overcome institutional resistance to the doctrinal renewal process. Turning Colombia’s military into the region’s vanguard engaged in a domestic struggle with global implications, this repositioning promised to expand the armed forces’ regional prestige and influence, thereby creating a high level of buy-in among the country’s military leadership.⁷⁹ SSSC was the means to realise this potential.

A deepening of both US engagements and homology processes enhanced this potentiality. Frequent visits by two US advisors to Colombia, Jim Benn, deputy director of the US Army’s Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate (CADD), and Carlos Soto, an influential ‘terminologist’ at CADD, were decisive in making this happen.⁸⁰

Benn and Soto helped Colombian military reformers to develop a shared doctrinal terminology and language to create interoperability with regional (and global) partners, which became a key component of Colombian SSSC. US advisors were impressed with the outcome, noting that the level of doctrinal standardisation achieved was something even ‘sophisticated advanced democracies struggle with’, including the United States.⁸¹ Soto highlighted the broader regional implications, underscoring that ‘what we have done here has far greater implications for the whole region because this has been something I sometimes call a “divine spark” that is starting to spread. ... All are interested in having a common structure and an interoperable doctrine that can help them work better together.’⁸² Against this background, SOUTHCOM Commander Admiral

⁷⁵Rojas Guevara, ‘Doctrina Damasco’, p. 98; Interview with ENC General (ret.), November 2022, Bogotá.

⁷⁶Interview with ENC General (ret.), November 2022, Bogotá.

⁷⁷Interview with ENC Colonel (ret.), Online, November 2021.

⁷⁸E.g. David J. Kilcullen, ‘Countering global insurgency’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28:4 (2005), pp. 597–617.

⁷⁹Victor M. Mijares and Paula Alejandra González, ‘Colombian military transformation: Strategic reality and overcoming resistances’, *Austral Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, 10:19 (2021), pp. 133–153 (pp.145–146); Internal document, *Impacto de Proyecto Damasco* (Transformación de Doctrina del Ejército Colombiano), n.d.

⁸⁰{https://www.army.mil/article/209053/colombia_now_is_part_of_our_lives_armys_work_with_colombia_yields_remarkable_results}, accessed 24 February 2025. Interview with ENC Colonel (ret.), Online, September 2022.

⁸¹Interview with US defence advisor, Bogotá, July 2022.

⁸²‘Colombia now is part of our lives: Army’s work with Colombia yields remarkable results’, U.S. Army (27 July 2018), available at: {https://www.army.mil/article/209053/colombia_now_is_part_of_our_lives_armys_work_with_colombia_yields_remarkable_results}.

Craig Stephan Faller praised Colombia's Damascus Doctrine 'as the military project with greatest Hemispheric impact', according to an internal CADD document.⁸³

Doctrinal exchanges of the informal kind exacerbated this impact. Drawing upon the convergent-threat narrative – gravitating around the idea of an emerging 'crime-terror-insurgency nexus', popularised by Michael Miklaucic, director of research at the now-defunct Center for Complex Operations (CCO) at the National Defense University (NDU) – Colombian security practitioners found an adequate frame for understanding and addressing domestic security challenges in an interconnected world.⁸⁴ In a nutshell, the underlying reasoning assumes that 'Violent non-state actors, including terrorist organizations and insurgent movements, seek to collaborate with criminal networks – and in some cases become criminal networks – in order to finance acts of terrorism and purchase the implements of destruction and killing.' Consequently, so the resulting call to action, 'The old paradigm of fighting terrorism and transnational crime separately, utilizing distinct sets of tools and methods, may not be sufficient to meet the challenges posed by the convergence of these networks into a crime-terror-insurgency nexus.'⁸⁵

Inspired by this thinking, which adds an important element to the earlier mentioned homologisation strategy by blurring the boundaries between war- and crime-fighting (and elevating criminal actors to the level of military adversaries), Colombian military reformers invited faculty members from the US Special Operations University and the NDU to Colombia. Seeking to learn about 'the convergence of these threats [crime and insurgents/terrorists] in Central America', where these were considered particularly pressing security challenges, participating Colombian practitioners realised 'how much Colombia is approaching the dynamics of the Central American [armed] groups'. To counter such potential risk of approximating Central American security challenges, Colombian participants of the meetings recognised the need to improve their understanding of the FARC-EP insurgency by conceptualising it as a 'hybrid threat that incorporates the convergence of criminal factors to achieve its goal'. 'The Colombian [armed] groups', one of the participants summed it up, had 'transformed into groups that use the triangle of convergence, meaning they know how to use insurgent tactics', combined with 'the means of terrorism' to 'achieve their goals grounded in illicit economies'. Against this backdrop, the 'hybrid threat concept was born, and that of the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment (VUCA), which our commanders had to confront now'. It was because of this, our interviewee underscored, '[that] we slightly transformed the conception of counterinsurgency'.⁸⁶

Such re-tooling drew on underlying reasoning grounded in complexity theory, which gained prominence among counterinsurgents from the late 2000s onwards. Consequently, the ENC began to understand not only the FARC-EP, but also itself, as a 'system of systems', in constant adaptation to a volatile, complex, and convergent threat environment.⁸⁷

Shaped by these practitioners' encounters and epistemological exposure, key manuals of the *Damascus Doctrine*, such as the ENC's Stabilization Manual (*MFRE 3-07 Estabilidad*) or its Special Operations Manual (*MFRE 3-05 Operaciones Especiales*), are numerically, and symbolically, named

⁸³US Army Combined Arms Center, *Damascus Doctrine* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Combined Arms Center), n.d., n.p.

⁸⁴On this issue, see Markus Hochmüller and Markus-Michael Müller, 'Locating Guatemala in global counterinsurgency', *Globalizations*, 13:1 (2016), pp. 94–109; Müller, 'Enter 9/11'. The standard reference regarding the 'convergent threats' framing is Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer (eds), *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2013).

⁸⁵Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer, 'Introduction', in Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer (eds), *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2013), pp. xiii–xxi p. xv.

⁸⁶Interview with ENC Colonel (ret.), Online, November 2021.

⁸⁷Interview with ENC General (ret.), Bogotá, November 2022. On the popularity of complexity thinking, see Louise Wiuff Moe and Markus-Michael Müller (eds), *Reconfiguring Intervention: Complexity, Resilience and the 'Local Turn' in Counterinsurgent Warfare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). For a practitioner view, see Stanley McChrystal, David Silverman, Tantum Collins, and Chris Fussell, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

after post-9/11 US doctrinal publications (*Stability Operations Field Manual 3–07* and *FM 3–05 Army Special Operations Forces*).⁸⁸

However, Colombian actors involved in the project underscored the importance of adapting US inspirations to Colombian realities to avoid the Damascus Doctrine becoming ‘a bad copy of the American doctrine.’⁸⁹ ‘One must understand’, an ENC major noted, ‘that while we emerged from Western theories, the realities in our [Latin American] countries are different.’⁹⁰ To account for such differences, the Damascus Doctrine braided US epistemological borrowings with local experiences from the Colombian armed forces’ decades-long counterinsurgency expertise.

Aligning local historical experiences with ideas of converging crime–terror–insurgency threats, *MFRE 3–07*, for example, advises soldiers to ‘take into account the history of [Colombia’s] internal conflict that has demonstrated that insurgent groups show a strong tendency to associate with and execute delinquent activities (including transnational crimes, such as drug trafficking, illegal arms trafficking, and illegal mining). ... This, in general, has the consequence that these groups convert themselves into hybrid threats with a higher warfighting capacity.’⁹¹

Emphasising such indigenous features that set Colombia’s doctrine both apart from the United States (and the West more generally) and in proximity to analogous Latin American experiences has been crucial for making the Damascus Doctrine travel across the region.

Elements of the doctrine have been exported to six Latin American and Caribbean countries: Ecuador, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru.⁹² Ecuador and Peru were the most enthusiastic importers, even following the Colombian example of naming their new doctrinal publications. ‘Damascus crossed borders’, one of its key architects noted, adding that Peru and Ecuador ‘also took the model of baptizing the doctrine, giving a name to the doctrine, for example, Peru named its Damascus Wiracocha. ... Wiracocha is an Inca God, the name of an Inca God. Ecuador named its doctrine Equinoccio. [L]et us say that the Colombian product called Damascus was somehow exported, no, and there is a copy with some small adaptations.’⁹³

Such small adaptations notwithstanding, Ecuador and Peru exemplify the doctrinal streamlining of their militaries following incorporation of the ‘Colombian model’ through SSSC. Such streamlining is most visible in the fact that the Ecuadorian and Peruvian manuals’ names and numerals are following the Damascus model and promote its epistemological recasting of security threats. In both cases ‘new threats’, depicted as increasingly hybrid, complex, and convergent risks, prominently involving organised crime and terrorism, and in the Peruvian case ‘narcoterrorists’, have been identified as key threats that both countries’ armed forces need to counter.⁹⁴ ‘It is key’, the director of the Ecuadorian Infantry School and a professor of the War Academy stated, ‘to frame the problem [and], clarify the nature of organized crime and its ability to project hybrid threats in the so-called gray zone.’ This is necessary, as ‘the problems that afflict national security are

⁸⁸ Ejército Nacional de Colombia, *Manual Fundamental de Referencia del Ejército, MFRE 3–07 Estabilidad*, (Bogotá, 2017); Manual Fundamental de Referencia del Ejército, *MFRE 3–05 Operaciones Especiales* (Bogotá, 2017); United States Army, *FM 3–07 Stability Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of Army, 2008); *FM 3–05 Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of Army, 2006).

⁸⁹ Interview with ENC General (ret.), Bogotá, November 2022.

⁹⁰ Interview with ENC Major, Online, January 2022.

⁹¹ Ejército Nacional de Colombia, *Manual Fundamental de Referencia del Ejército, MFRE 3–07 Estabilidad*, (Bogotá, 2017) 3.8, pp. 3–133.

⁹² Anonymous, ‘El ejército presenta 35 libros con su nueva doctrina militar’ (internal document shared by a source familiar with the doctrine transformation process).

⁹³ Interview with ENC Colonel (ret.), Online, September 2022.

⁹⁴ Ejército Ecuatoriano, Dirección de Transformación y Desarrollo Militar, *Capacidades militares futuras* (Quito, Ejército Ecuatoriano: Departamento de Capacidades Futuras, 2022), p. 9; *Diálogo Revista Militar Digital*, ‘Operación Tenaz golpea al narcoterrorismo en el VRAEM’ (20 December 2017), available at: <https://dialogo-americas.com/es/articulos/operacion-tenacious-strikes-narcoterrorism-vraem>], accessed 17 June 2023, link no longer available; Barnett S. Koven, ‘Emulating US counterinsurgency doctrine: Barriers for developing country forces, evidence from Peru’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 39:5–6 (2016), pp. 878–98.

typically complex, unstructured in nature, and their solution requires a comprehensive approach by the state'. By providing such a Colombia-inspired problem framing, the Equinoccio doctrine is presented as *the* means through which the Ecuadorian military can successfully adapt to this new threat environment. Echoing the Colombian emphasis on interoperability, the Equinoccio doctrine stresses the centrality of 'unified action', 'synchronisation', and 'coordination' as vital factors for making sure the Ecuadorian armed forces turn into a 'team of teams', capable of confronting their 'hybrid' adversaries by successfully 'addressing complex problems'.⁹⁵

The importance of improving interoperability has also been highlighted by Jorge Orlando Céliz Kuong, the commanding general of the Peruvian Army, and Óscar Jorge Mogollón Sandoval, head of the Peruvian Army's doctrine development department, two key reformers behind the Wiracocha project. Rooted in a framing that stresses structural homologies as expressed in a 'common history and shared traditions' between Colombia and Peru, encompassing similar internal conflict scenarios, this analogous experience, according to Céliz Kuong and Mogollón Sandoval, allowed Colombian and Peruvian militaries to 'operate in scenarios beyond the conventional, where operational environments are increasingly complex, and threats are unconventional'. Acknowledging Colombia's vanguard role in doctrine development and international cooperation, Peruvian doctrinal reformers highlighted the need for a similar 'doctrinal framework that captures past experiences but enables interoperability at the joint, regional, and international levels with other armed forces within the framework of cooperative security'. Against this backdrop, modelling their own doctrine upon the Damascus project allowed the Peruvian Army 'to relate to how the National Army of Colombia has understood the operational concept of the United States Army and how it envisions applying it to its reality'. Céliz Kuong and Mogollón Sandoval emphasise the importance of understanding this double relationship between Colombian and US engagements and the adaptation of US terminology and language to Colombian realities for the case of the Wiracocha doctrine, not least because 'the Colombian reality is similar to the Peruvian reality'.⁹⁶ By incorporating Colombian lessons into their doctrinal renewal process, Peruvian military reformers also try to seize the opportunity to capitalise on these homologies by carving out a niche in the global security market place for Southern solutions to Southern security problems. Learning from Colombia promises the Peruvian army to 'achieve international standards that allow interoperability with other forces in multinational operations and peacekeeping missions' – as well as engaging in SSSC, one would want to add.⁹⁷

Conclusion

Offering an analysis of Colombian security cooperation in Latin America, this article identified the production of security homologies and models as key drivers behind the emergence and consolidation of SSSC. In unpacking Colombia's transformation from a potentially failed state to a Global South security model, we highlighted how politicians, bureaucrats, and practitioners in Colombia and the United States engaged in continuous homologisation efforts over the last two decades. This engagement allowed Colombian actors to distinguish themselves from both analogous Latin American countries, which were incapable of addressing domestic security challenges as successfully as Colombia did, and the United States, which lacks Colombia's unique 'intangible' resources – while, at the same time, reinforcing Colombia's image as a regional security asset for Washington that is worthy of continued support. Through this epistemological recasting, Colombia became a Global South 'security model', which gained increasing purchase throughout the region, allowing Colombia to become Latin America's biggest security exporter through SSSC.

⁹⁵Danillo Gerrillo and Guillermo Benavides, 'El estado ecuatoriano y el crimen organizado', *Revista Academia de Guerra del Ejército Ecuatoriano*, 16:1 (2023), pp. 110–121 (p. 111, 115–17).

⁹⁶Jorge Orlando Céliz Kuong and Óscar Jorge Mogollón, 'La doctrina Damasco y su relación con la doctrina Wiracocha', *Experticia Militar*, 9 (2020), pp. 44–53 (pp. 46, pp. 48–9).

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 47.

Given the fact that these homologisation processes are grounded in a benign, and selective, reading of Colombia's security achievements – actively advanced by Colombian and US security practitioners, policymakers, and analysts alike – they tend to bracket out some of the limitations of the country's counterinsurgency campaigns as well as the harm done by the country's security forces in their multiple wars against insurgents, criminals, and terrorists. Despite the government's peace agreement and demobilisation of the FARC-EP in 2016, Colombia is still plagued by violence from the ELN guerrillas, remobilised FARC-EP splinter groups, (post-)paramilitary groups, and countless criminal gangs.⁹⁸

Given this backdrop, our findings caution against overly positive assessments of SSSC, as seen in calls for 'Southern solutions to Southern security problems' by practitioners and academics alike. Not only might these 'Southern' solutions come with a heavy Northern imprint, moreover, by repackaging inherently militarised security approaches as Southern alternatives to Global North engagements, SSSC might also come with a potential of deepening already heavy-handed security governance approaches in the Global South in the context of the 21st century 'everywhere wars' against 'converging' threats ranging from migration and terrorism to insurgency, crime, and drugs.⁹⁹ This trend is evident in Colombia's neighbourhood, particularly Ecuador, where escalating gang violence led to the declaration of a state of emergency, framing the crisis as an 'internal armed conflict' – echoing the Colombian Army's threat convergence narrative.¹⁰⁰ Similar tendencies can even be observed in Costa Rica, long hailed as a peaceful exception in Central America, where Colombia's security assistance has contributed to the growing militarisation of public security.¹⁰¹

Accordingly, future research on SSSC should empirically and analytically question the potential 'difference' Southern actors entering the contemporary global security marketplace through SSSC can make when compared to their Northern counterparts. The findings of this article suggest that shared historical experiences, Global South positionalities, and cultural similarities might not serve as a bulwark against the deepening of the coercive outlook of domestic security governance – a common critique of Western security engagements with the Global South. This is because, as we have shown, these similarities are intentionally produced through transnational elite- and practitioner-driven homologisation projects, which selectively highlight contextual features amenable to particular security models, grounded in specific ideological visions and political assumptions about how security can be achieved and for whom. Accordingly, far from representing an 'alternative' to North–South security cooperation, contemporary forms of SSSC seeking to target 'convergent' threats, our findings suggest, should be considered as an element integral to an elite-centred toolkit of transnational order preservation. Such transnationally entangled elite politics, cutting across North–South divides, it is important to recognise, have historically shaped the outlook of global security governance, often at the expense of marginalised populations around the world.¹⁰² Consequently, future research on SSSC should not lose track of these wider transnational elite politics to better assess whether SSSC is a qualitatively new feature of contemporary global

⁹⁸See Colombia. Comisión de la Verdad. *Hay futuro si hay verdad: Informe Final de la Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición. Tomo 4* (Bogotá, 2022), available at: {<https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/hasta-la-guerra-tiene-limites>}, accessed 12 December 2024; see also Markus Hochmüller and Markus-Michael Müller, 'Transnationalizing the Colombian (post-)conflict', *Critical Studies on Security* (forthcoming).

⁹⁹On 'everywhere war(s)', see Derek Gregory, 'The everywhere war', *The Geographical Journal*, 177:3 (2011), pp. 238–50.

¹⁰⁰'Noboa endurece su discurso y empodera a los militares en Ecuador: "¡Ceder ante el mal, jamás!"; *El Mundo* (11 January 2024), available at: {<https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2024/01/11/65a04685fdddffefa88b45b5.html>}, and 'Understanding Ecuador's armed conflict', *DW* (14 January 2024), available at: {<https://www.dw.com/en/understanding-ecuadors-internal-armed-conflict/a-67969203>}.

¹⁰¹See Markus Hochmüller and Markus-Michael Müller, 'The myth of demilitarization in Costa Rica', *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 55:4 (2023), pp. 370–6.

¹⁰²Fabian Bennewitz and Markus-Michael Müller, 'Importing the "West German model": Transnationalizing counterinsurgency policing in Cold War Costa Rica', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 33:4–5 (2022), pp. 581–606; Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgency* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Schrader, *Badges without Borders*.

security governance or simply a repackaged old wine, which, in its new bottles, still carries a bitter taste for those exposed to its effects.

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