

The Transformation of Warfare

The Colombian predicament exemplifies many of the features inherent in the global transformation of warfare which is apparent at the threshold to a new millennium. Some of these include shifts in the geographical space where warfare occurs, the fresh roster of participants, the blurring of warfare/terror/crime, and the establishment of new forms of communication. The primary focus here will be upon human security in relation to narco-trafficking and the privatization of war.

While traditional forms of combat entail confrontation between opposing militaries, the Colombian case since the 1980s has involved combat between the military, the paramilitary, an assortment of competing guerrilla groups, and narco-traffickers. Civilians are involved, either as targets for terror - as was the case with regard to Pablo Escobar's reign of narcoterror in the late 1980s and early 1990s - or as innocent bystanders caught between the crossfire emanating from a multitude of belligerents. There have been 726,000 Colombians displaced by warfare between August 1994 and June 1998, with about 40 percent of these under the age of 18.⁹³ Between the wars waged by leftist revolutionaries, right-wing paramilitaries, the narcos, and the State, "the rate of killing in Colombia far exceeds the amount of ethnic cleansing that went on after the breakup of Yugoslavia."⁹⁴ About 35,000 Colombians have lost their lives in warfare over the last ten years.

While narco-trafficking contributes to the blurring of borders between belligerents and civilians, it is by no means the only factor. Perhaps the biggest growth industry in Colombia during the late 1990s is the kidnapping business. The dominant player is the country's second strongest rebel group, the ELN, which, despite their Christian-Marxist dogma, employs kidnapping for political purposes and monetary aggrandizement. They achieved international notoriety after kidnapping an entire plane load of people, and later a church congregation, in mid-1999. The Farc, paramilitaries, and assorted crime organizations also participate in the trade to the point that Colombia is home to more than