

against Western-oriented modernizers.

A brief analysis of how negotiations developed in Bogota may serve to illustrate how important such 'institutional' factors can be for foreign ministry crisis managers coping with diplomatic hostage-taking by terrorists.

Who are the M-19 and how did they manage, as a local guerrilla group, to achieve world-wide attention and partial realization of their objectives? Although the group first came to public attention as recently as 1974, the Colombian guerrilla movement from which it springs was about the earliest to emerge in Latin America and grew out of conditions peculiar to Colombia.

In many ways Colombia is a microcosm of all Latin America and combines its varied social, political, economic, racial and geographical peculiarities. Lying athwart the Panamanian isthmus, it stands at the crossroads of Central and South America. It has a Pacific as well as an Atlantic and Caribbean coastline and orientation. It is ribbed not by one but by three Andean *cordilleras* separated by tropical jungle, rain forest, great plains and high plateaus, which force its 27 million inhabitants to combat some of the most difficult physiography in the Western Hemisphere; as late as the 1920s it took a Colombian foreign minister 12 to 18 days by horse, carriage, paddle-wheeler, rail and barge to reach the Atlantic coast port of Baranquilla to set sail for New York or Europe. The population comprises whites, Indians, blacks, *mulattos* and *mestizos* who, alongside much primitive agriculture, have developed some of the largest-scale industry and the finest coffee cultivation in South America. While the oligarchical upper class is as sophisticated and urbane as any in Latin America, it is more cultivated than most; it is for good reason that Bogota has been known as the 'Athens' of South America. There is a mass of impoverished and illiterate peasantry and the per capita income barely reaches mid-way on the low Latin American scale. The small middle class is diffused in numerous medium-sized cities and the capital does not dominate the nation—more like Italy and Germany than Britain or France.

Democratic system

What distinguishes Colombia from the other South American countries is that it has managed remarkably to maintain a democratic system of government for virtually all of this century, although its political life has been dominated by the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties and the general socio-political process is not as entirely unblemished as the oligarchy and the government would like to believe; they would not always find the reports of Amnesty International and the International Press Institute entirely to their liking.

The only military regime during this

century—and it was not a very harsh one—lasted from 1953 to 1957. Its vaguely populist leader, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, was no old fashioned *caudillo* blazing his way to power by a military coup. As head of the armed forces, he was invited by the Liberal and Conservative leadership to take power as an alternative—or third force—to quell *La Violencia*, an insensate, internecine and fratricidal civil war. *La Violencia*, which left tens of thousands of casualties, was not a class struggle pitting impoverished peasants against absentee landlord but a war between Liberal and Conservative villages and peasants, and its cause dynamics have continued to fascinate political scientists and sociologists to this day. It abated slowly after 1958, when the warring Liberal and Conservative leaders, fearing total disintegration of their country again came together—this time to remove the General who wanted a second, unelected term. They re-instituted elections and a democratic regime through a unique 20-year power-sharing experiment just ended.

One by-product of that era was an extraordinary rise in petty, and not-so-petty crime, especially kidnapping by criminals for ransom, which has remained endemic in Colombia. Another legacy of *La Violencia* was the birth of three native guerrilla groups, who were forerunners of the better-known *Tupamaros* in Uruguay, *Montoneros* in Argentina and other violence-prone Latin American activists. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Moscow-oriented and with ties to the local Communist Party, is based in the remote mountainous areas of south eastern Colombia, occasionally displaying strength in villages uncomfortably close to the capital. The National Liberation Army (ELN), Castro-oriented, operates in the jungle and mountains of the 'Medio Magdalena'—about half way down the Magdalena River, the St. Lawrence of Colombia. The People's Liberation Army (EPL) is vaguely Maoist, and surfaces fitfully in the mountains of the state of Antioquia in the northwest.

Still another legacy was the creation by General Rojas Pinilla of a vaguely populist party, *Anapo*, as a vehicle for a political comeback after his 1958 ouster from the presidency, and it was welded by his redoubtable daughter, Maria Eugenia, into a potent challenger to the Liberal and Conservative power-sharing monopoly. The General nearly won the 1970 presidential election but Maria Eugenia, who in the 1974 election became the first woman to seek the presidency of any Latin American country, did not fare well at the polls. The party began to decline, but both the General and his daughter denounced the use of force to achieve power.

Origins of M-19

M-19 was formed as a clandestine military wing of *Anapo* by some left-of-centre academic activists, ex-army officers and middle class professionals; their