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The M-19's Journey **from Armed Struggle to Democratic Politics**

Berghof Series
Resistance/Liberation Movements and
Transition to Politics

Mauricio García Durán, Vera Grabe Loewenherz, Otty Patiño Hormaza:
M-19's Journey from Armed Struggle to Democratic Politics:
Striving to Keep the Revolution Connected to the People
Berghof Transitions Series No. 1

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Berghof Transitions Series

Resistance/Liberation Movements and Transition to Politics

Editors

Veronique Dudouet and David Bloomfield

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About this Publication Series

This case-study is one of a series produced by participants in an ongoing Berghof research project on transitions from violence to peace. The project's overall aim is to learn from the experience of those in resistance or liberation movements who have used violence in their struggle but have also engaged politically during the conflict and in any peace process. Recent experience around the world has demonstrated that reaching political settlement in protracted social conflict always eventually needs the involvement of such movements. Our aim here is to discover how, from a non-state perspective, such political development is handled, what is the relationship between political and military strategies and tactics, and to learn more about how such movements (often sweepingly and simplistically bundled under the label of *non-state armed groups*) contribute to the transformation of conflict and to peacemaking. We can then use that experiential knowledge (1) to offer support to other movements who might be considering such a shift of strategy, and (2) to help other actors (states and international) to understand more clearly how to engage meaningfully with such movements to bring about political progress and peaceful settlement.

Political violence is a tool of both state and non-state actors, and replacing it by political methods of conflict management is essential to making sustainable peace. With this project we want to understand better how one side of that equation has been, or could be, achieved. Depending on the particular case, each study makes a strong argument for the necessary inclusion of the movement in any future settlement, or documents clearly how such a role was effectively executed.

We consciously asked participants to reflect on their experience from their own unique point of view. What we publish in this series is not presented as neutral or exclusively accurate commentary. All histories are biased histories, and there is no single truth in conflict or in peace. Rather, we believe these case-studies are significant because they reflect important voices which are usually excluded or devalued in the analysis of conflict. Increasing numbers of academics, for example, study "armed groups" from outside, but few actually engage directly with them to hear their own points of view, rationales, and understandings of their context. We are convinced that these opinions and perspectives urgently need to be heard in order to broaden our understanding of peacemaking. For exactly this reason, each case study has been produced with the very close co-operation of, and in some cases authored by, members of the movement concerned. As the results amply illustrate, these perspectives are sophisticated, intelligent, political and strategic.

So authenticity has in this instance been prized above accuracy. The reader may or may not agree with the perspectives expressed. But, much more importantly, we hope that the reader will accept that these perspectives are valid in themselves and must be included in any attempt at comprehensive understanding of violent conflict and its transformation. We urgently need to understand in more depth the dynamics of organisations who make the transition between political violence and democratic politics, in order to improve our understanding of their role, and our practice, in making peace.

The views expressed are those of the authors and contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies or any of its constituent agencies.

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Introduction

The case of Colombia is especially interesting as regards the transition of liberation or resistance movements from armed struggle to legal, political entities. Not only has it one of the longest guerrilla conflicts in the world (more than 40 years to date); it is also a place where experiments in peace-making with armed insurgents have been explored for more than 25 years. Various peace processes led to different peace agreements in the 1990s which made it possible for ca. 5,000 guerrillas to demobilise and reintegrate into social and political life. Although this did not signify the end of the armed conflict in the country, it entailed a series of political transformations which changed the context in which the nation developed and made a definitive solution to the conflict possible.

The 19th of April Movement (*Movimiento 19 de Abril, M-19*) was the first of many guerrilla groups in Colombia to start a negotiation process that concluded in a final peace agreement involving its demobilisation as an armed group and leading to some of its members founding a new political party, the Democratic Alliance M19 (AD-M19) (*Alianza Democrática M19*). This not only paved the way for seven other groups to start peace negotiations and ultimately transform from armed to political actors. It also influenced reform of the Constitution, probably the most significant event of the twentieth century in Colombian politics, and the most important attempt at democratization of the country in its Republican period.

This study combines interaction between first-hand experience and academic knowledge of this peace process. We have the experience of Otty Patiño and Vera Grabe, top commanders of M-19 who played an important role during both its phase as an armed organisation and in its subsequent political existence after demobilisation. Based on their own experience, they have reflected on the challenges and implications of this transition from an armed political struggle to a legitimate political struggle (Grabe: 2000, 2003 and 2004; Patiño: 2000 and 2001). Additionally, we have the knowledge of Mauricio García Durán, who has researched the Colombian peace processes since 1990 (García Durán: 1992, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2004 and 2006a). This case study is therefore not only based on knowledge of the published literature in Colombia, but is primarily the result of a sustained and rich 'dialogue of understandings' among the three authors.

The study is divided into four sections. The first explores the context in which M-19 emerged, the reasons for its appearance and the way in which it engaged in armed struggle as a political-military movement. The second section considers the internal and external factors that pointed this guerrilla group towards the path of peace. Section 3 analyses the way in which M-19 entered the peace process, negotiated a political agreement and subsequently formed a legitimate political movement that participated in electoral life. A final section draws out the results of this process, highlighting some lessons that could be relevant to other groups who consider a similar path.

1. The Movement's Origins and Aims: Initiation into the Armed Struggle

M-19 was not the first guerrilla movement to emerge in Colombia. As early as the time of *La Violencia* of the 1950s¹, guerrilla movements emerged as a form of self-defence amongst several sectors of the population, especially peasants. Later, revolutionary guerrilla movements emerged in the heat of the Cuban Revolution, advocating a radical transformation of social and political life. The first generation of guerrilla movements appeared in the 1960s: in 1964, the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN) with a pro-Cuban direction; between 1964 and 1966², the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC) with a pro-Soviet direction; and in 1965, the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*, EPL) with a pro-China direction.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a second generation of guerrilla movements emerged: in 1973, M-19, with a more nationalistic direction; in 1981, the Quintín Lame Armed Movement (*Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame*) as an indigenous self-defence group; and in 1983, the Workers' Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, PRT) as a result of acute divisions between the Colombian Marxist Leninist groups in the 1970s. Other fronts and dissident groups formed in those years were the Ernesto Rojas Commandos (*Comandos Ernesto Rojas*), the Manuel Garnica Front (*Frente Manuel Garnica*), the Workers' Self-Defense Groups (*Autodefensa Obrera*, ADO) and the Socialist Renovation Movement (*Corriente de Renovación Socialista*, CRS).

1.1 The Historical Context and the Conflict Issues in Colombian Society

The guerrilla struggle in Colombia emerged from deep-rooted social dynamics. The formation of armed groups such as M-19 was not simply a matter of spontaneous armed responses. Rather, these groups formed as specifically political responses to particular historic circumstances, the most important of which were the following (González, 2004):

1. **The agrarian conflict in Colombia:** The process of populating and colonising the country left the agrarian issue unresolved. Peasants were constantly displaced from their lands by the development of large estates, which pushed them further into new regions, colonising lands in such marginalised territories that they were barely linked to the political and economic life of the rest of the country. The interests of the large estates prevented any real success at agrarian reform. These colonising peasants supported the armed insurgent groups who emerged in the country through the 1960s and 1970s, and eventually they became the eager workers of coca production in the 1980s when the industry was forced out of Peru and Bolivia.

2. **A tradition of violence as a political tool:** In the period of *La Violencia* of the 1950s, a result of the quarrel between the two traditional political parties (Liberal and Conservative), ca.

¹ In 1948, the charismatic popular leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated. He had proclaimed the need to unite the people against the oligarchic elites that governed the country. He belonged to the Liberal Party, and was their candidate for, and a potential winner of, the 1950-1954 presidential election. His murder unleashed a violent confrontation between the Liberal and Conservative parties that lasted more than five years and produced more than 200,000 deaths.

² In 1964, when the army attacked peasant self-defense groups close to the Communist Party in Marquetalia, El Pato, Riochiquito and Guayabero, these groups formed mobile guerrillas, creating what was known as the South Block (Bloque Sur), which in turn evolved into the FARC in 1966.

200,000 people died and countless peasants were forced to flee to the cities. The impact of that period on the nascent guerrilla movements that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s derives not only from establishing a culture prone to adopt violent solutions to social conflicts, but also from the legacy of the accumulated experience of self-defense peasant groups and guerrilla warfare adopted by the armed groups of that time.

3. **Political exclusion of the National Front:** The National Front was established in 1958 as a power-sharing pact between the traditional (Liberal and Conservative) parties in order to put an end to their civil war. The two parties agreed to take alternate turns in government and state bureaucracy. But this caused the exclusion of all other political groups and actors outside the two traditional parties by deeming them illegal (as, for example, was the case of the Communist Party until 1970). Expressions of opposition could now only legally be voiced through dissident groups *within* the traditional parties (for example, Liberal Anapo and Conservative Anapo³). Guerrilla movements emerged in angry response to this political exclusion and, in the case of M-19, as a specific reaction to the rigging of the 1970 elections to defeat the Anapo.

4. **The Cuban Revolution:** The impact of the Cuban Revolution was as important for Colombia as for the rest of Latin America. The triumphant revolution in the Caribbean island appeared to indicate a path which various social sectors who felt economically and politically excluded could follow. With Ernesto “Che” Guevara as the ultimate icon of the revolution, its impact was not limited to peasant sectors, but it also affected large numbers of students and workers. The emergence of insurgent groups was linked to a great extent to efforts to establish “*focos guerrilleros*”⁴ in various areas of the country, mainly in places with a tradition of peasant resistance or guerrilla groups during *La Violencia* in the 1950s.

5. **The accelerated urbanisation of the country:** Between 1930 and 1970, Colombia changed from a rural to an urban country, with most of its population in the cities (70% - 75%). Peasants displaced by violence in the 1940s and 1950s migrated mostly to the cities, forming the poverty belts that still surround big cities. Most of them entered urban life in precarious conditions (occupying the lands where they built their houses without public services, lacking stable employment, etc.). These factors account for the noticeably urban character of M-19, both in its origins and throughout its history, and for the many efforts it made to connect with these urbanised sectors of the population.

1.2 The Emergence of M-19 as an Armed Group

M-19 emerged when the dissenting tendency inside the Anapo combined with a group of young people, mainly from the FARC and the Communist Party, who were critical of using armed peasant resistance as a long-term strategy. Both groups had an urban identity: the Anapo was a political phenomenon primarily rooted in urban areas, while the Comuneros group had emerged from within FARC, arguing the necessity “to take the war to the cities”⁵. In this sense, it can be said

³ Anapo is the acronym for *Alianza Nacional Popular* (National Popular Alliance).

⁴ This follows Régis Debray’s theories. He tried to universalise the application of the model of the Cuban Revolution in other countries, especially in Latin America.

⁵ The Comuneros Group emerged from the Fifth Conference of the FARC when it was decided that the war must be taken to the cities. Due to discrepancies regarding the ‘traditional’ approach to the armed struggle, this group ‘left’ (some were expelled) the FARC ranks to start a new project of the political armed struggle.

that M-19 was born as an urban group with an urban orientation, which made them different from the other, mainly rural, guerrilla movements of the time, most notably the FARC.

The social make-up of this initial group was a combination of middle class students and graduates (when they did not abandon their studies to join the armed struggle), and urban popular sectors. They were mostly very young people, especially those from FARC and the Communist Party, but there were older people amongst those who came from the Anapo (i.e. Toledo Plata, Almarales and Tristancho). Insofar as M-19 offered an alternative that was more connected with urban dynamics and less rooted in international models (Soviet, Chinese and Cuban), it became a point of reference and a meeting-point for left-wing approaches that disagreed with those models. Consequently, other young militants from the ELN and other left-wing groups, particularly Marxist-Leninists, also joined the early group that comprised the Anapo and the FARC.

A specific historical event unleashed the political dynamic that gave birth to the movement. On 19 April 1970, the general election was rigged to defeat the Anapo candidate, retired General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla.⁶ The Anapo represented a growing antagonism towards the two traditional parties in the country, and its social base felt that the elections had been stolen from them. As Jaime Bateman, first commander of M-19, expressed it: “The event caused frustration which generated the political foundation that allowed the development of an organisation like ours and, at the same time, marked the historical downfall of the Anapo” (Quoted by Villamizar, 1995: 39).

Between April 1970 and November 1973, the initial founding group of M-19 came together. The movement was made public on 17 January 1974, after some unusual publicity in the press when an insurgent unit removed Simón Bolívar’s sword from the *Quinta de Bolívar* in Bogotá. The slogan that accompanied this action was: “With the people, with the arms, with María Eugenia⁷ to power!” (Villamizar, 1995: 53) Thus M-19 was born as an armed protest movement:

Such a painful experience taught us a great lesson: popular conquests will only last and be definitively respected by the oligarchy in so far as they are backed by the power of arms in the hands of the people themselves⁸.

In other words, the group that initiated M-19 felt the need to create a military apparatus as a tool to channel social indignation and support the popular will.

Initially, M-19 was linked to the Anapo, but two internal processes separated them. First, the Anapo movement began to wither and ceased to be an effective expression of the sense of alienation that had linked it with M-19.⁹ Rojas Pinilla died in January 1975, and his daughter María Eugenia, who inherited his leadership, adapted herself to more conservative institutional interests. Second, and in parallel, Marxists entered the Anapo and penetrated its organisation, bringing with them their own ideology and strategy. This resulted in the formation of the Socialist Anapo, which first caused a separation from the official institutions of the movement, and then a total rupture from the Anapo towards the end of 1975.

Between 1976 and 1978, everyone in M-19 supported socialism. Their new political-military vision derived from recognition of the oppression and misery in which the Colombian people were mired. It advocated a nationalist, Bolivarian, anti-imperialist, anti-oligarchic model,

⁶ General Rojas governed the country between 1953 and 1957, after a coup against the Conservative government. When Rojas tried to act independently from the Liberal Party and from the Conservative sectors that supported him, they formed a military junta to remove him, which paved the way for the return to democracy in 1958 after the bipartisan agreement in the National Front.

⁷ María Eugenia Rojas was the daughter of General Rojas.

⁸ First public bulletin of M-19, in which they announced their existence, quoted in Villamizar, 1995: 57.

⁹ Jaime Bateman, first commander of M-19, valued the popularity of the Anapo more than its socialism.

and argued for ‘Socialism Colombian-style’. M-19 sought to overcome the ‘ideologisms’ of left-wing Marxist organisations by adopting a revolutionary, socialist, nationalist ideology. M-19 emerged as a critique of the existing left-wing groups in the country, in particular breaking with the international models (Maoism, Leninism, etc.) which dominated left-wing armed groups in Colombia.

Largely, they were eclectic and unorthodox in their understanding of the armed struggle:

- Strategically, they declared that, “they were not willing to eat monkeys” (that is, they did not want to have to maintain guerrilla fronts in marginalised rural areas where adequate supplies would be difficult).
- Ideologically, they believed it was necessary to understand the history of the country in order to justify the struggle, rather than simply following events in international history (Russia, China, Cuba, Albania), as revolutionary as these might be.
- Regarding their language, they claimed that their audience were not the left (who demanded the use of the prevailing international leftist vocabulary) but the common people, and that therefore they must use a language that was comprehensible to them.
- Organisationally, they did not want their militants to have an ‘apparatus’ view (that is, a view focused on the apparatus, on the armed organisation), but to be linked to popular and students’ sectors.
- Regarding their interaction with other guerrilla movements, there was great concern to build unity between the various groups, even though the prevailing mood was one of extreme sectarianism and lack of integration.

Once the Anapo withered as the focus for dissent, and seeing the need to capture a new popular base, M-19 began to concentrate on their links with the workers’ movement. To this end, they decided to undertake an exemplary action against the corrupt pro-employer union leadership: the kidnapping, trial and assassination of José Raquel Mercado, leader of the Workers’ Central Organisation of Colombia (*Central de Trabajadores de Colombia*, CTC). “Through this trial, M-19 sought to condemn all the political, social and economic scaffolding that had held up the central union organisations; it was likewise a challenge to the system, and a warning to those leaders who acted behind the backs of their powerbases” (Villamizar, 1995: 83).

M-19 promoted a new way of practising politics, seeking to connect with the people in the big cities by carrying out Robin Hood-like deeds. These symbolic and populist actions included distributing newspapers and bulletins to spread their ideas and proposals; invasions of unions, schools, and meeting places to spread their propaganda to the working classes, teachers and students; and distributing food and toys in marginalised areas and schools. They also used their violence to pressurise employers to solve labour conflicts, as in the case of Indupalma.¹⁰ They were first and foremost a group of ‘armed propagandists’ seeking to understand the people’s needs and interests. This kind of action won them both the affection of the people and positive public opinion.

¹⁰ M-19 kidnapped Hugo Ferreira Neira, general manager of the strike-bound palm company to press the company to find a solution to the strike favourable to the employees. He was liberated once the labour conflict was resolved (Villamizar, 1995: 100-106).

1.3 A New Style of Guerrilla

The style and organisational structure of M-19 prioritised identity, cross-cultural encounter and the positive value of difference, more than any other guerrilla group. In addition to being an urban guerrilla movement, non-dogmatic, and more politically than doctrinally orientated, M-19 achieved high levels of communication with, and affection from, the population due to several other reasons arising from the group's culture:

1. **Cross-cultural encounter:** Colombia has diverse and idiosyncratic regions. M-19's founders were primarily young people from Bogotá, Cali and Santa Marta, three very characteristic regions. Bogotá, the capital city, was already a diverse place at the time. The previous 'Bogotá culture', rather introverted and cold, had given way to a city that integrated all regions of the country in a cosmopolitan manner. Cali, capital of one of the country's richest and most developed departments, had strong links with the more extrovert Caribbean culture despite its geographical location on the Pacific coast. Jaime Bateman, who would become the first commander of M-19, came from Santa Marta, on the Caribbean coast, and managed to articulate a vital new discourse that was warm and very easy for common people to understand. Of course, members also came from other regions, but the blending from these three regions in particular gave the new movement its unique brand.

2. **"Revolution is a party":** M-19's critique of left-wing groups extended to their strategy, methodology, language and style. Whereas in other guerrilla movements, inspired by models of heroism and sacrifice, the language used was epic and transcendental, M-19 used a mild, captivating language that was always specifically related to their activities and their programmes, and which was enormously attractive. Bateman's phrase, "revolution is a party," was not only a slogan; it summarised a mood, a spirit that was expressed in day-to-day life and in their most important activities. M-19 similarly reinstated love, modesty, the liberating tradition of their ancestors, the Latin American fraternity and the national symbols of Colombia, whereas the left generally promoted class hatred, avant-gardism, the heroism of communist fighters, proletarian solidarity, the cohesion of rural socialism, the Internationale as the anthem and the hammer and sickle as the emblem.

3. **A respect for life:** There was a widespread tradition in rural areas of Colombia of using violence to "clean the area"¹¹ to achieve territorial hegemony. But M-19 decided not to use their weapons to create regimes of terror or to subdue the population. They also strongly criticised the arbitrary executions by which guerrilla commanders traditionally reinforced their leadership. The high point of M-19's stand against this came in 1985, when a splinter group from the FARC, the Ricardo Franco Group, murdered more than 150 of its fighters accused of 'enemy infiltration'. The M-19 leaders publicly denounced such actions. This effectively stopped the massacre. The Ricardo Franco Group soon disappeared, its leaders and its brutal practices condemned by other movements.

4. **International connections:** Another novel element of M-19 at the time was its global outlook. It established contacts with similar guerrilla movements elsewhere, and remained open to new suggestions, debates, attitudes and political proposals from organisations such as the Socialist International, COPAL (the Conference of Latin American Political Organizations), etc. It cultivated relationships with nationalist, democratic governments which supported M-

¹¹ "Cleaning the area" is a recurring practice in Colombia which various armed groups (including state forces) use in order to exile or eliminate those who (by suspicion or by fact) belong to another faction.

19's approach, in both Latin America and Europe. M-19's unorthodox ideas fuelled debates and stimulated the resurgence of other armed groups and politicians across the Americas. This kind of diplomatic activity intensified especially following the siege of the Dominican Republic embassy, which brought M-19 global exposure not only as an armed group but also as an organisation with a serious peace proposal.

5. Room for women: One of the most important consequences of this openness to debate and innovation was the serious discussion of gender issues within the movement. Women found a space to be militants in the organisation, not only as entry-level members, but as top commanders. M-19 had more women amongst their national leaders than any other guerrilla movement. However, this did not mean that there were no difficulties regarding gender issues, or that the weight of chauvinist opinion did not affect the internal dynamics of the organisation. During the Eighth Conference in 1982, a group of women insisted on debating the topic. As Vera Grabe describes it:

During the Eighth Conference, when we were discussing the formation of an army, the debate on the participation of women emerged. El Flaco (the thin one)¹² said, 'There should not be women in the army because that causes a lot of problems. There are not any women in armies, not even in the Soviet army'. He quoted some other examples and obviously, there was mayhem. Women replied, 'We are here. Are you going to sack us or what? What are you going to do with us? What is going to be our contribution then?' Our reaction as women was beautiful: we got together and made an appointment with commander Bateman. There were twenty of us. This gave us the chance to discuss women-specific problems: comrades beaten up by their partners, others whose only task was to do laundry, and pregnancy as a problem for guerrillas. We discussed chauvinist attitudes in M-19. So el Flaco had to change his position. A controversial regulation came from this. It included: no to domestic abuse, yes to abortion, yes to the right to birth control, egalitarian treatment and education for women in the movement (Quoted by Madariaga, 2006: 127).

1.4 From Urban Armed Protest to the Development of a Rural Military Apparatus

Although M-19 was involved in armed struggle from its early stages, it was following the Sixth Conference in March 1978 that the guerrilla movement insisted on its configuration as a political-military organisation, maintaining a presence in the cities as well as developing 'mobile guerrillas' in different areas of the countryside, thus building a proper army. This building of the military apparatus came about in three ways.

The first element in this military development was the combination of commando-like actions in urban areas with the intention of also building a more rural army. M-19 carried out audacious operations in urban centres, especially in Bogotá. For example:

On New Year's Eve 1979, Cantón Norte, a military garrison in the north of Bogotá, was raided. Using a tunnel dug from a nearby house, M-19 took more than 5,700 arms from a weapons cache belonging to the Colombian army. Fierce reaction by the army caused significant damage to the organisation, with many members arrested and prosecuted.

¹² This is how friends and comrades referred to Jaime Bateman, M-19's first commander.

During February-April 1980, the Dominican Republic's embassy in Bogotá was surrounded and besieged, with M-19 demanding the liberation of political prisoners and denouncing the human rights crisis in Colombia. After a 60-day negotiation with the government, there was a peaceful solution, and the ambassadors and guerrillas walked out. The political prisoners were not liberated, but the action opened the door to a debate about amnesty and a peace agreement.

On 6 November 1985, 35 guerrillas from M-19 laid siege to the Palace of Justice, demanding legal action against the government because of its lack of compliance with the terms of the peace agreement. When the government rejected dialogue, state forces carried out a counter-siege, resulting in more than a hundred fatalities, including the president of the Supreme Court, other magistrates and employees, and guerrillas.

In parallel, from 1978 onwards, M-19 also concentrated on building a guerrilla army. They started with the mobile guerrilla of Caquetá (*móvil del Caquetá*) which in turn led to the formation of the Southern Front (*Frente Sur*), an audacious guerrilla group with an offensive mentality (demonstrated in the siege of Florencia and various army ambushes) but lacking tactics and techniques. Training at Cuban military schools led to improvement by combining military technical elements (e.g., adapting battlefields by engineering works such as trenches, pits, tunnels, vaults, etc.; and using tactical, operational and strategic radio communications, camouflage for infiltration operations, and mining for active defence operations) with more intuitive tactical elements of peasant origin. In other words, they combined rural and urban styles in their force, eventually reaching a level where they could take on the state army, as in the case of Yarumales (December 1984), the peak of M-19's technical and tactical military capacities, where they sustained the fight against the army for 22 days. M-19 applied these military advances to develop other units such as the Western Front (*Frente Occidental*) and the Battalion America (*Batallón América*). At the same time, they 'exported' these improvements to other rebel movements through guerrilla training schools which they ran in conjunction with the ELN, EPL and Alfaró Vive.

A second important element was the relationship with foreign armed organisations, such as the Montoneros from Uruguay. Under their influence, M-19 worked to develop a political-military organisation based on rural armed fronts (mobile guerrillas) with the participation of guerrilla movements from other countries, such as the Ecuadorian group Alfaró Vive. Here they were introduced to the technical elements of warfare, such as jamming TV channels. Units from M-19 also travelled to Libya and Cuba for training. (These trips were also crucial for the organisation's international networking.) As a result of their training abroad, they formed a 'special forces' unit which reached high levels of military effectiveness, but ended up forgetting about politics and elevating the importance of the military apparatus to the extent that they saw this as the means to political power, and concentrated on intensifying the war.

Thirdly, from an early stage M-19 promoted unity amongst the different guerrilla movements in Colombia. They pursued this through bilateral interaction with other guerrilla groups (e.g. the creation of the Joint Force, *Fuerza Conjunta EPL-M19*, training schools run in conjunction with the ELN, and joint campaigns with the Quintín Lame). They also played the leading role in the formation of the National Guerrilla Coordination (*Coordinadora Nacional Guerrillera*) and then the Simón Bolívar Coordinating Board (*Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar*, CGSB). And they continued to share their learning through training schools and so on. However, advances on this question of unity were very slow, especially on political issues, due to ideological differences and to the needs of each group to protect their own identity and independence. This caused disenchantment in M-19, frustrated at the thoughts of more than 15,000 fighters in total, but without a common direction or a clear, common political strategy. So joint decisions remained lacking on strategies both for war and for peace.

Finally, M-19 were never well-funded. Their main source of funds was ransom money from kidnappings. When they robbed banks or laid siege to towns, they got only 'pocket money' to complement the ransom income. They had international logistical support (from Panama, Cuba and Venezuela) and political support (from Mexico and Costa Rica). But only rarely did they receive 'a dollar here and there' from international sources.

2. A Path towards Peace: Internal and External Causes

M-19's path towards peace and legitimate political participation was affected by internal and external factors which impacted on its political and military activities and triggered a shift in its strategic approach.

2.1 Internal Factors

Five different internal factors stirred debate inside M-19 concerning the political direction of the movement. This also made them question whether their strategy was connecting them sufficiently with the politics of the country, given that their *raison d'être* was as a political-military group.

1. **Political redefinition:** the struggle for democracy and peace. At its Seventh Conference in 1979, M-19 redefined its political concept, proclaiming the struggle for democracy as its main strategy. Thus it moved from defining itself as an organisation fighting for socialism, and adopted democracy as the basis for its political and military project, subsequently defining itself as 'a democracy in arms'. In other words, although M-19 radicalised its discourse between 1975 and 1978, with this reorientation in 1979 it developed a wider ideological outlook after realising that change in Colombia must be democratic in nature:

Originally, we created a definition of 'socialism Colombian-style', following the path left by the Anapo which had been the political foundation of M-19. But then we discovered that in Colombia it was necessary to deepen democracy more than intensify socialism. In one way or another, the left had always accepted that the oligarchy was democratic just because they ran elections in the country, without paying attention to the background of that ceremonial democracy and without realising that it was tainted. This was the challenge for the revolutionary groups: to found a real democracy. We recognised that feature of democracy thanks to the reaction to the military offensive [...] from civil society, from the human rights struggle, which is quintessentially democratic. Democracy [...] became the fundamental crux of the ideological definition of M-19 (Patiño, 2001).

A year later, in the wake of the siege of the Dominican Republic embassy, Jaime Bateman realised that peace could be a revolutionary tool:

As a result of the negotiations to get to a peaceful solution to the siege of the embassy, Bateman clearly saw that the process of resolving the siege was like a scale model of what could be a negotiated solution to the armed conflict in Colombia. That was the first attempt at peace in Colombia: Bateman's proposal for a negotiated solution through dialogue, truce and amnesty. From the beginning, peace was more about process than content. The possibility of finding a peaceful solution to the country's political and social conflict: that was the first mention of peace (Patiño, 2001).

And so these two concepts, peace and democracy, defined the armed struggle of M-19 in the 1980s. It could be said that the M-19 experienced its 'perestroika' between 1979 and 1981, long before the crises of other socialist countries. This political belief in a struggle for peace and democracy subsequently facilitated the transition to a negotiated peace.

2. War taken to its limits: M-19, led by Álvaro Fayad, took war to the limit by forming the 'special forces' unit, making efforts to build an army with the *Battalion America*, developing urban militias, and attempting to co-ordinate with other guerrilla groups. At that time, there was a very strong heroic and warrior-like attitude amongst the guerrillas. This led to the prioritisation of the military strategy, intensifying the war as part of political and organisational development. For example, the urban militias adopted military logic, which allowed them to carry out large-scale military operations such as the siege of military battalions in Armenia and Ipiales, the 'siege' of Cali with the urban support of popular militias, and the attacks against General Zamudio, commander of the state military forces, and against the Minister of Internal Affairs, Jaime Castro. But although these were engagements of significant military magnitude, they can be considered as political failures. This is because this phase was wrongly understood as an insurrection, provoking a negative reaction from the state and its military forces, and strengthening those who opposed both social and political reforms and the development of any peace process with guerrilla movements.

This emphasis on military action by 'special forces' culminated in the siege of the Palace of Justice in November 1985. This turned into an enormous tragedy, due to the reaction of the state armed forces who conducted a counter-siege and set fire to the Palace, causing the deaths of 95 people. Whatever the original objectives of the leadership, the siege was not generally seen as a political action, but rather as a 'terrorist attack'. After the siege, M-19 stepped up its military activity but felt as if it was 'crossing a desert' (as Carlos Pizarro, general commander at that time, expressed it) because people no longer supported its war and were tired of the effects of warfare, especially of the 'dirty war' unleashed in 1985. People generally began to support the idea of a definitive peace process with guerrilla movements, and a year after the massacre at the Palace of Justice, the Movement for Life (*Movimiento por la Vida*) emerged, demanding acknowledgement and respect for social and political leaders who fell victim to armed actors, especially to the growing paramilitary groups.

3. The risks of authoritarianism: In December 1985, in Tacueyó (Cauca), the corpses of 163 guerrillas from the Ricardo Franco Group were found buried in communal graves, murdered by their own leaders in an internal disagreement. As M-19 was carrying out joint actions with this FARC splinter group, the events in Tacueyó generated internal questions about the relationship between war and authoritarianism, and about the dangerous consequences that this could have on efforts to build a more democratic and fair country. Again, this highlighted the necessity of a clear and transparent commitment to democracy, both in the political arena and internally.

4. **Changing leaderships:** The different leaders of M-19 played important roles in the transition from armed struggle to legal politics. Indeed, the capacity of the commanders to connect with the people was a crucial factor in this shift. Four different phases of leadership can be identified:

1) In the formation and initial stages (1973-1983), Jaime Bateman (or Comandante Pablo) was the undisputed leader.¹³ He was very strong on military issues, and had political charisma which allowed him to project himself beyond the movement. After the siege of the Dominican Republic embassy, Bateman understood that peace would be crucial to the social and political development of the country. His tragic death in an airplane accident left M-19 with an uncertain future and a problem of continuity.

2) After Bateman's death, Iván Marino Ospina, his second in command, assumed the leadership for 22 months. However, he was considered as politically erratic and did not stand out militarily, and the Ninth Conference, in Los Robles in February 1985, moved to replace him. "Many considered his actions unwise, since he was not present during the critical moments of the negotiations with the government and in the difficult days during the Yarumales crisis" (Villamizar, 1995: 391). A power struggle erupted in the organisation, causing fractures between the leading figures: Iván Marino Ospina, Álvaro Fayad, Carlos Pizarro and Gustavo Arias. Ultimately, Fayad was elected general commander, but needed to demonstrate his credentials as a leader to the others. He did this by prioritising military actions, especially those of the 'special forces,' as the siege of the Palace of Justice demonstrated.

3) M-19 suffered important leadership losses at the hands of the state armed forces. The most notable were Ospina (August 1985), Andrés Almarales and Luis Otero (November 1985), Álvaro Fayad (March 1986), Israel Santamaría (March 1986), and Gustavo Arias (July 1986). "This long sequence of deaths in the ranks of M-19 [...] was undermining its structure and its political and military capacity. A high amount of human losses showed the clear intention of the state to annihilate M-19 and the weaknesses and mistakes of the movement" (Villamizar, 1995: 475).

4) When Fayad died, Carlos Pizarro assumed the leadership, and with it the challenge of healing the fractures in the organisation. Due to his military capabilities, he had enough authority to face this challenge and to re-establish a common policy and a political project aimed at peace. Pizarro suspected that recovering M-19's political prominence was directly dependent on a clear drive for peace, and he took that direction resolutely.

5. **Strategic redefinition:** In January 1988, a crucial strategic redefinition of M-19 took place, which finally brought together all these factors which were forcing change on the movement. The organisation held a meeting attended by commander Carlos Pizarro, most of the national leadership and members of every current political and military unit of M-19. The meeting location was dubbed Campo Reencuentro (reunion camp), since it entailed reunions between many partners and friends who had not met in a long time because of the war. In the discussion, they took a critical look at the organisation and examined their political position.

The crisis affecting the organisation was acknowledged.

¹³ Darío Villamizar (1995: 303-304) has compiled a range of testimonies to how highly Bateman's partners in the armed struggle valued him.

There has been a big crisis, but not as big as the decisiveness, democratic conviction and the sense of unity of our people. Now the challenges are bigger and demand the redefinition of the organisational and operational criteria, style and methods. We face a development crisis because in parallel with the weakening of the group, new ideas have emerged that require integration. Therefore, we need to organise such a development to be able to make the most out of it in the country and recover our influence on the democratic project in a definitive way [...] We should not only lead the organisation, but a national project” (quoted by Villamizar, 1995: 517).

Resolving the crisis was based on a redefinition of the strategy of military confrontation on which they had concentrated in recent years. This was summarised in the slogan, “Life for the nation, peace for the armed forces and war against the oligarchy!” The intention was firstly, to protect the lives of people affected by the ‘dirty war’; secondly, to stop the war against the state armed forces, since the fatalities on both sides were ordinary people; and thirdly, to focus on what was crucial: the struggle against an oligarchy that did not allow non-violent coexistence or the consolidation of real democracy.¹⁴ So peace emerged as the way to open the door to social and political change. Peace was, therefore, the key to recovering M-19’s connection with the people, in order to regain their influence in national political life.

2.2 External Factors

There were six important factors from outside the organisation, which impinged on the shift from political armed struggle to legitimate political struggle, five national and one international.

1. **Drug trafficking** enhanced the possibility of peace, because the government could not sustain armed confrontation on two separate fronts. In the 1980s, there was a significant growth in the production of cocaine. Until then, Colombia had mainly been a transit and processing station for coca produced in Bolivia and Peru. With the rise in Colombian cocaine production, the number of drug traffickers operating in the social and political arenas also increased. Their efforts to gain control and influence caused confrontation with the state. On 30 April 1984, the murder of Minister of Justice, Rodrigo Lara, unleashed a storm of argument over the extradition of Colombian nationals, especially to the United States where they were wanted on drug trafficking charges. The drug traffickers resorted to terrorist actions and bombs, for example planting a bomb in the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (Security Administration Department) and blowing up an airborne plane in November 1989. Consequently the government now faced two wars at the same time: one against the armed insurgency and another against drug trafficking. The need to resolve at least one of them made more attractive the idea of a peace negotiation to demobilise armed groups, even at the cost of political reforms.

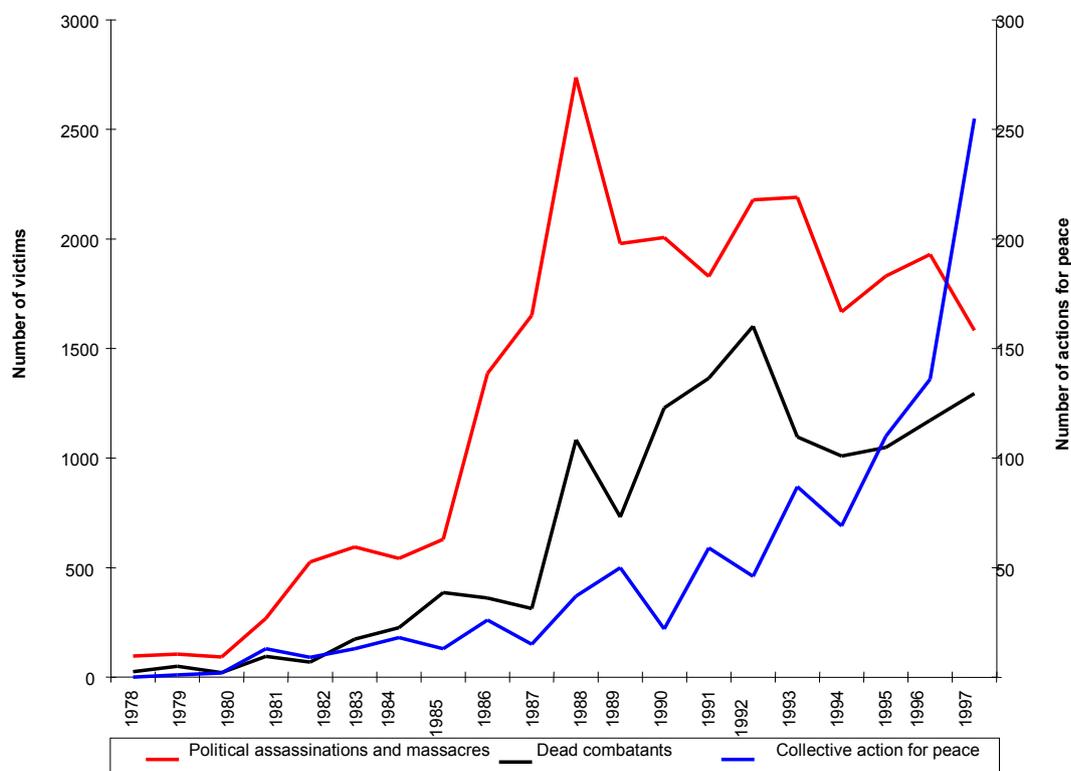
2. The country endured at this time a growing **dirty war**. As Graph 1 shows, political assassinations and massacres spiked in the 1980s. Even worse, numbers of civilian victims were significantly higher than those of guerrillas and state forces. Additionally, paramilitary groups were increasing in parallel with the growth of guerrilla groups. The first paramilitaries were

¹⁴ For the oligarchic way of domination, an armed opposition is very useful because it justifies maintaining social and political exclusion based on violent mechanisms.

formed in Magdalena Medio, Córdoba and Urabá. Their tactics involved attacks on the political bases of the guerrilla movements and not the guerrillas themselves. As guerrilla groups such as the FARC, EPL and M-19 increased their political influence through the truce agreements made during the Betancur administration, the paramilitaries unleashed a ‘dirty war’ which involved the assassination of members of the Patriotic Union (*Unión Patriótica*, UP), attempts to sabotage electoral gains, and actions against political and social leaders who might politically support the democratic demands of the insurgency groups. Crucial among the political assassinations were the murders of Guillermo Cano on 17 December 1986 (director of one of the most important newspapers in the country); Jaime Pardo Leal on 11 November 1987 (leader of the UP), and Luis Carlos Galán on 18 August 1989 (presidential candidate of the Liberal Party). M-19 did not want to keep fuelling a confrontation that was chiefly affecting the civilian population. Internally, they started thinking that it was time to search for alternatives to war. There was an ethical principle gradually spreading through the group: if the armed struggle is negatively affecting the civilian population, it is necessary to stop it!

3. Linked to the previous factor was a **social fatigue with war**, which expressed itself in increased mobilizations for peace (see *Graph 1*). One of the earliest of these was the Movement for Life, which first appeared in public on the first anniversary of the massacre at the Palace of Justice (November 1986). Gradually, such social actions gained momentum, advocating the protection of life and questioning both the legitimacy of war and the use of violence to achieve the social transformations that the country needed. M-19’s decision to embark upon a peace process was influenced by the growing proportion of the population who wanted to support a genuine move towards peace.

Graph 1: Armed Conflict, Dirty War and Peace Mobilisation



Source: García Durán, 2006b: 353.

4. Some sections of government saw the necessity of **modernising the state** and adjusting its institutions for the struggle against drug trafficking that threatened their collapse. These ideas reached the higher levels of power during the Virgilio Barco administration (1986-1990), which acknowledged that a process of democratic normalisation was required, but that this could not be based on a repressive policy. Rather, it was seen as essential to have adequate institutional channels for discussing social and political conflicts, and the government promoted reform of the national constitution, negotiation with social groups, and prioritisation of legal political action over armed options. In September 1988, as part of its Peace Initiative (*Iniciativa de Paz*), the government made the conciliatory offer of certain constitutional reforms in response to some of the demands of the armed groups.

5. As noted earlier, there were frustrating **limits to guerrilla unity**. Guerrilla movements had different political cultures, and each group preferred its own doctrine and 'strategic truth' over any possibility of coordination or joint articulation. There were also tensions between different groups, such as the early and irreconcilable hatred between the FARC and the EPL, which hindered a collective approach to the crises they faced¹⁵. Each group insisted on its own internal process of reflection and redefinition, and refused to consider the possibility of a collective process that would have brought them a bigger impact as a revolutionary force. Further, each movement's desire for prominence and vanguardism also reduced the possibility of joint action, and M-19 was no exception: the other guerrilla movements distrusted M-19 and considered them an irresponsible and adventurous organisation. Thus the proposition of united struggle never had a real chance. The Guerrilla Coordinating Boards, first without the FARC and then with it, were symbolic gestures towards revolutionary unity, but produced no significant operational achievements. Pizarro realised this on his last trip to Cuba, when he made a huge, but ultimately futile, attempt to achieve guerrilla unity with a real, strategic character. Despite this failure, and even on the brink of peace talks with the government M-19 were still urging a joint process, but got no clear reply from the other movements. So they accepted the limitations of guerrilla unity, and decided to follow the path of peace alone.

6. The **transition to democracy in Latin America** had an impact upon M-19. Firstly, in southern South America, the transitions from dictatorship to democratic regime increased the opportunity for, and the importance of, strengthening democracy in the region. This coincided with M-19's strategic shift towards democratic struggle. Secondly, Colombia supported the Contadora Group in the search for negotiated solutions to conflicts in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Clearly, the participation of the Colombian government in this international diplomatic effort generated a national question: if a negotiated solution was favoured in Central America, why not also in Colombia? This was reinforced by the participation of Colombia in the Non-Aligned Movement, which enhanced the autonomy of the country in the international political arena and gave it more independence from the United States.

¹⁵ These crises included: the ELN's crisis after Anorí, when the army almost exterminated them; the EPL's crisis after the murder of the Calvo brothers, the movement's main leaders; and the crisis of the FARC after the genocide of the UP that unleashed the 'dirty war'.

3. Peace Mobilisation Strategy

The connection between M-19 and Colombian society was truly re-established when the movement adopted a social peace agenda. Here, we examine seven distinct phases of this transition, and how this shaped a peace process that involved the shift towards legitimate political struggle.

3.1 From Peace as Tactic to Peace as Strategy

M-19's internal political debate fundamentally changed their strategy and, thus, their concept of peace.

Peace appeared as an initiative of the insurgency for the first time in M-19 at the beginning of 1980, in the wake of the Dominican Republic siege that was carried out to demand the release of our prisoners. This was an ideological break, because Latin American revolutionaries were born under the influence of phenomena such as the Cuban Revolution, which had the slogan of 'win or die', not conciliate or negotiate. Therefore, daring to propose a negotiated solution to the conflict was considered an absolute heresy (Patiño, 2001).

M-19's proposal had three components at that time: a truce in the armed struggle, national dialogue and the derogation of the Security Statute (to permit amnesty provision). But President Turbay Ayala refused both a truce and any political dialogue with insurgents. He offered only to pass a very restricted amnesty in Congress, and the guerrilla groups rejected this. For them, a simple amnesty was not peace, and it reminded them of the defeat of the Liberal guerrillas in the 1950s.

When Belisario Betancur became president in 1982, the government's position regarding peace changed. This president supported the insurgency's proposals, especially those of M-19, and he encouraged national dialogue and truce agreements with those guerrilla groups willing to participate. In fact, ceasefire agreements were signed with the FARC, M-19, EPL, ADO and some units of the ELN (see *Chart 1*). However, the right moment for peace had not yet come. The path of national dialogue offered by Belisario Betancur was not clear, and he did not have the necessary political support to strengthen democracy and peace as he hoped. National dialogue was not supported by the military or by the politically powerful, and it in fact encouraged an increase of paramilitary groups, who multiplied significantly in those years. However, the guerrillas, including M-19, were not willing to gamble on peace alone. Although peace gained importance in their discourse, they maintained a war discourse that included peace as a tactic. Their strategy was still to create political strength based on military might.

After the Palace of Justice siege and their subsequent political isolation, M-19 assumed a *strategic* perspective towards peace, not only because they felt that this option would enable them to reconnect with the country, but also because they recognised that this kind of approach could be revolutionary in the Colombian context.

Chart 1: Type of Peace Agreement in Each Presidency, 1982-1994¹⁶

	Ceasefire accords	Agendas and preliminary procedural agreements	Final peace agreements
Betancur (1982-86)	<p>La Uribe Accords with the FARC (March 1984)</p> <p>Accord with the M-19 and EPL (August 1984)</p> <p>Accord with the ADO (August 1984)</p> <p>Accord with units of the ELN (December 1985, April and July 1986)</p>	<p>Accord between the FARC and the Peace Commission (March 1986) to extend La Uribe Accords</p>	
Barco (1986-90)		<p>Tolima Accord with the M-19 (January 1989)</p> <p>Agreement for initiating a peace process with the EPL, PRT and Quintín Lame (May–June 1990)</p>	<p>Political Pact with the M-19 (November 1989)</p> <p>Political Accord with the M-19 (March 1990)</p>
Gaviria (1990-94)		<p>Cravo Norte with the CGSB (May 1991)</p> <p>The Caracas agenda (June 1991)</p>	<p>Final Accord with the PRT (January 1991); the EPL (February 1991); and Quintín Lame (May 1991)</p> <p>Final accord with the Ernesto Rojas Commands (March 1992)</p> <p>Final accord with the CRS (April 1994) and the Garnica Front (June 1994)</p> <p>Coexistence Accord with Medellín militias (May 1994)</p>

¹⁶ Chart by Mauricio García Durán, previously published in Accord 14 (2004: 80).

M-19 was the first insurgent organisation to discover that peace in Colombia could be a transformative and revolutionary element. In Colombia, over the last 50 years, violence has become correlated with power and is used in order to acquire, maintain and exert power. The oligarchy in Colombia knew that the best way to impede social and political transformations in the country would be to perpetuate violence. M-19 discovered that peace could be a very important element to change that. That is to say that the oligarchy in Colombia, in general, is not a friend of peace because it seeks to exploit violence for the perpetuation of the status quo and thus has generated a violent form of governance.

It permanently needs a certain amount of violence in order to justify exclusion and authoritarianism and in order to violate democratic liberties and maintain a certain degree of legitimacy in the management of a state where force has become a very important element (Patiño, 2001).

3.2 From Anti-Oligarchic Struggle to Political Negotiation

The starting point of the transition to political negotiation was the kidnap of Álvaro Gómez, a former presidential candidate and renowned representative of the national oligarchy. What began as an act of war ended as a process of agreement: the leadership of M-19 recognised an opportunity for compromise as they noted the strong reactions to the kidnapping. At what was known as the Usaquén Summit (*Cumbre de Usaquén*) on 29 July 1988, despite the absence of the government, the door to a peace process was re-opened when M-19 made public a proposal that became a starting point for subsequent negotiations.

After the Summit, the initial proposal of the Barco administration was a simple road-map for demobilisation with little political content. In contrast, M-19 had proposed a highly political negotiation process. The outline that was finally adopted for negotiation included contributions from both sides. So when, in January 1989, the first agreement that initiated the peace process was signed, the political dimension was an essential part of the agenda. The Palace of Justice siege was still quite fresh in the memory of the public and the government. That translated into a nervousness about embarking on negotiations with guerrilla groups, especially with M-19. It was obvious to Carlos Pizarro that it was crucial to build a relationship with the government as interlocutor. What gradually gave the government confidence was the attitude of M-19 towards disarmament. For the leadership of the M-19, it was clear that if the government was willing to carry out their reforms, they were willing to disarm themselves.

The negotiation strategy of M-19 was built gradually. There were two starting points: the peace initiative of the Barco government, and that of the guerrilla groups.

The Barco initiative was largely limited to the procedural. On 1 September 1988, the government made public its 'Initiative for Peace', explaining the position of the national government regarding conditions and strategies for a negotiated peace. There would be three phases: 1) a phase of tension-reduction, in order to create an atmosphere of credibility and trust by demonstrating a real desire for reconciliation by the guerrilla groups; 2) a phase of transition, to initiate a shift towards institutional normality and the return of armed groups to democracy; and 3) a phase of incorporation, including both total reintegration of armed groups into social and political life and guarantees and encouragements necessary for them to do so (amnesty, guarantees of electoral participation, temporary economic assistance measures, security and protection, and a regional dialogue process to generate ideas for coexistence, normalisation and reconciliation).

In contrast, the M-19 initiative was very substantive. It included what Carlos Pizarro called “the three great corrections” needed to resolve the Colombian crisis: 1) a new constitution which, in both its form and its content, would become an authentic peace agreement; 2) an economic development plan, agreed both regionally and nationally, to guide the process of prosperity with social justice; 3) a philosophy of coexistence, national unity and sovereignty which would guide the design of a unique policy regarding weapons, and which would express itself in the democratic management of law and order and the re-establishment of justice within a framework of guarantees for the full exercise of citizen rights.

There were four forums for negotiation:

- Bilateral discussion and negotiation between the government and M-19, which took place in Santo Domingo Camp.
- Political negotiation through the Working Table for Peace and National Reconciliation (*Mesa de Trabajo por la Paz y la Reconciliación Nacional*), set up on 3 April 1989, at which different political representatives participated, including the government and M-19. This forum was also open to other guerrilla groups who might decide to join the process.
- The Tables of Analysis and Agreement (*Mesas de Análisis y Concertación*) were complementary to the Working Table, and offered a more open forum where regional and sectoral organisations and groups could also participate. Discussions here covered the specific ingredients of a possible political pact which would be enacted through laws or governmental resolutions.
- Finally, preparations were laid for the construction of a political movement of civilian character, in conjunction with those people who visited the negotiations in Santo Domingo. Political commitments were established regarding M-19’s electoral participation after its demobilisation.

But there was another dimension of dialogue that worked towards new understanding and reconciliation. It began informally among various actors under Pizarro’s initiative, outside the agreed forums. At first, other guerrilla groups participated, but without result due to jealousies and differences between distrustful, sectarian and vanguardist organisations. However, in 1990 the EPL, PRT and Quintín Lame, started to follow the steps of M-19, and signed peace agreements in 1991 with representatives of the political class with whom they had had the most acute confrontations, including former president Ayala. Pizarro made moves of reconciliation towards the state forces, especially the army, establishing dialogue with Generals Guerrero Paz and Valencia Tovar. They started to meet with illegal counter-insurgency groups such as the self-defense groups from Magdalena Medio, which demobilised in 1992. They also tried unsuccessfully to talk to the coca traffickers, who were divided among themselves and were acting on many fronts and without clear guidelines.

One of the decisions that smoothed the progress of negotiation was the concentration of the M-19 military force mainly inside the Santo Domingo Camp. This permitted a ‘separation of forces’ with a ‘demilitarised strip’¹⁷ between the Camp and the towns further down the mountain, and made possible a bilateral truce. This process took place through 1989 as combatants from all around the country gradually arrived in the Camp area.

¹⁶ Chart by Mauricio García Durán, previously published in *Accord 14* (2004: 80).

¹⁷ Although no third party was involved as guarantor, the design of their location inside Santo Domingo Camp was such as to keep the insurgent forces apart by concentrating them in one area and creating a demilitarised zone, as indicated in the cease fire agreements (Fisas and Herbolzheimer, 2007).

3.3 From Negotiation with the Government to a Dialogue with Society

Introducing a more political debate to the negotiation agenda, M-19 sought to develop a discussion both with politicians and, to some extent, with society in general. This discussion eventually centred on the conditions required to consolidate a real democracy and to guarantee a lasting peace. The idea was to build a political consensus that would subsequently translate into laws and constitutional reforms. Two different sets of issues were discussed.

Firstly, there were issues that bore a direct relation to the reintegration of guerrilla groups (amnesty, security, economic and social guarantees for the demobilized, and development programs in areas under the influence of guerrilla groups). These issues were negotiated directly between the government and M-19, and became an important part of the peace agreement (see *Chart 2*). This same scheme was later used by the government in negotiations with other guerrilla groups (EPL, PRT, Quintín Lame and CRS).

Secondly, there were issues of a more political character, such as favourable political conditions, constitutional reforms to deepen democracy, measures related to human rights, justice and public order, and reform of social and economic policies. Pizarro proposed that these matters be considered as part of the political debate when the Working Table for Peace and National Reconciliation was established. On that same day, he also outlined a political peace and democracy pact based on:

- 1) Giving legal status to all agreements resulting from the consensus among the participants of the Working Table and the Table of Analysis and Agreement;
- 2) Agreement on electoral reform;
- 3) A commitment from the political forces in Congress to support and approve the legislative initiatives that emerged from the agreements at the Working table; and
- 4) Commitments by the national government to a referendum for peace and democracy, in which the Colombian people could decide on the reforms agreed and on a specific national policy regarding weapons.

The parties agreed that for each of the three thematic areas proposed by M-19, there would be a Table of Analysis and Agreement, in which citizens and society representatives could participate. These Tables started work within a month and delivered their results on 13 July 1989 for consideration by the Working Table for Peace and National Reconciliation as contributions to the political pact in the peace agreement.

Operatively, during the peace process, there was a positive disposition among participants on both sides to find solutions to the problems that emerged. A clear example of this was the reaction to the murder of M-19's Afranio Parra in April by the police in Bogotá. Many thought that this would destroy the negotiation process, but M-19 showed great resolve in avoiding a polarisation of the situation, and the government arrested the police officers responsible.

Chart 2: Comparing Negotiation Accords with the M-19 (1989-1990)¹⁸

Agenda	Political Pact (2 November 1989)	Political Agreement (9 March 1990)
Favourable political conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Call for an extraordinary peace and democracy referendum (main point: the possibility to reform the constitution through a Constitutional Assembly) - Electoral reform (electoral card, funding, information, obligatory vote) - Legal recognition of political parties that emerge from the peace process and a special peace constituency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reaffirming the need for: + a special peace constituency; + electoral reform; and + a constitutional reform that allows the widening of democratic spaces
Justice, human rights and public order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commissions to reform the justice system, to study drug trafficking and the ratification of Protocol II - Publishing information on paramilitary groups accountable to the armed forces - Review of the Statute for the Defence of Democracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The government would appoint the commissions and apply the rest of the negotiated points
Social and legal guarantees for ex-guerrillas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amnesty - Reintegration Programme - Security Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amnesty - Reintegration Programme - Security Plan until August 1990; then the new government would redefine the terms from 7 August
Regional and social development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National Peace Fund to run programmes in zones under the influence of demobilised groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This Fund could be increased with the contributions of the government, the private sector and international organisations
Socio-economic policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measures for participatory planning regarding income, salaries, labour issues, housing, health, food security, peasant produce and marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The government started to put the agreement in force from the day set to abandon arms
Verification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Catholic Church was selected to provide 'moral and spiritual guidance' to the peace process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decommissioning weapons before a commission from the Socialist International - A monitoring commission to facilitate the compliance of the different commitments that derived from the peace agreement

¹⁸ This chart was created by Mauricio García-Durán (1992) based on the documents of the agreements.

3.4 From the Audacity of a Leader to a Democratic Decision

The starting point of the peace process was the brilliance of Carlos Pizarro. The idea of opening negotiations with the government was a step of political audacity, based on confidence in the people and their political support. Pizarro could embark on the adventure of negotiations, not only equipped with his own political intuition, but also, above all, because of the influence that he had in M-19, especially with those who were more involved in the military actions. Thus the movement followed him when he suggested starting at peace negotiation. It can be said that the 'religiosity' of hierarchic structures ruled: the commander is never wrong. Therefore, the movement fell into step towards peace behind the commander.

Pizarro, who represented the leadership, dared, in an audacious and solitary act, to sign a statement with the national government that initiated a peace process; solitary because despite his efforts to create a joint process with other guerrilla groups, this was not possible; solitary because that statement was not discussed with the organisation, not even with the other leaders of the M-19; audacious because in that statement Pizarro proposed the disarmament of the group as the final step of the process. This happened in January 1989. After that, we got together and tried to find a consensus [...] In 1989, the internal challenge consisted of accepting the possibility of disarmament. There was a theoretical political understanding, but it was very difficult for those people who belonged to M-19 to understand the effects it would have on their own lives. With that statement, on 10 January 1989, Pizarro started to put things together. Arms as fetishes to express revolutionary views were put completely into question. (Patiño, 2001)

Not all the militants in M-19 were convinced of the need for a one-way journey to peace. However, the internal discussions and political dynamics that developed in Santo Domingo Camp convinced even the most reluctant. One example was Rosemberg Pabón, who had been in charge of the siege of the Dominican Republic embassy. His radical opposition to disarmament changed when three busloads of people from Yumbo (his hometown) arrived to ask him to abandon arms and become their political leader in the region. At that moment, he changed his view of the process, and became one of the first to enter into legitimate political struggle. One of the most difficult challenges was dealing with the fears of the organisation's political bases. These concerned the uncertainties of demobilisation, since transition to civilian life would not only remove a collective reference that gave them their identity, but also implied the loss of social and political recognition that they had enjoyed as guerrillas, as fighters.

The camp became a pilgrimage site, a place for social mobilisations and mass communication. The press office at Santo Domingo became a central focus in the camp. Social leaders, students, representatives of political organisations, and ordinary people came to Santo Domingo to make contact and start debates with guerrillas. This reassured the movement that their decision in favour of peace was the right one. In October, during the Tenth Conference, there was a democratic vote to decide if the movement was going to abandon arms and reintegrate into civilian life to form a political party. The results were conclusive. Out of 230 votes, 227 were in favour of demobilising the armed group.

3.5 The Challenge of Peace Without Compliance

On 2 November 1989, M-19, the national government and the Liberal Party signed a political pact. This included both the agreements reached in the Tables of Analysis and Agreement in July, as the key points with which to guarantee the proper reintegration of guerrilla groups (see *Chart 2*), and also the social and political reforms necessary to strengthen democracy. M-19 sought to translate into concrete measures the political agreements that they had reached with the Barco administration and the political party in government.

The political pact was heavily dependent on the constitutional reform process that was taking place in Congress. But this reform was withdrawn by the national government when some congressional representatives tried to introduce the stipulation of non-extradition of Colombian nationals (which was unacceptable to the government because of its ongoing war against drug trafficking). When this constitutional reform process collapsed, the most important agreements reached with M-19 – regarding the reform of the constitution and a referendum – collapsed as well. As Otty Patiño described it:

However, the government reintroduced the justice reform proposal to the Congress and attached it to what we had agreed, and then Troy burned. Congress reacted against the government and approved the opposite, i.e. non-extradition. Then the government withdrew its reform proposal and allowed the process to be filed away. A whole year of work was lost. It was a very critical moment, the most critical of all. It forced us to generate an emergency plan: Pizarro and Navarro had to go to Bogotá to hastily build a new political pact to make peace feasible. The positive aspect of this crisis was that it demonstrated the powerlessness of both government and Congress to create paths for peace. The need for a Constitutional Assembly as a forum to discuss and implement the reforms that had been developed in the Tables of Analysis and Agreement started to emerge (Patiño, 2001).

Would M-19 go back to war? Could it keep on gambling on peace, despite the lack of compliance by the government and the main political parties in Congress? This was a difficult moment for the armed movement. They had to, in the words of Antonio Navarro, take a “leap of faith,” without knowing if the people were going to break their fall for them. But M-19 took the leap, and the electoral results showed that the people supported them more than they expected.

Some comment is needed on the role of verification in the peace agreement. In fact, there was nothing stronger than a commitment to use ‘the moral guidance of the Catholic Church’. In subsequent agreements in 1991 and 1994, verifiers were appointed at both national (such as the Confederation of Evangelical Churches and the Constitutional Assembly) and international level (such as the Socialist International and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples). The government, apart from their presence at demobilisation sessions, did not play a role in verifying compliance¹⁹. In the case of M-19, more than ten years after signing the peace agreements, there were still commitments which the government never honoured, such as a commission to study the problem of drug trafficking, and the publication of the names of paramilitary groups created by the government. The government never clarified who was responsible for the murder of Carlos Pizarro (see *below*).

¹⁹ It is ironic that the presidency of Álvaro Uribe now wants to sign a final agreement with groups who were demobilised in the 1990s, and finish with their reintegration process once and for all.

3.6 From Electoral Triumph to Political Dispersion

M-19 demobilised on 9 March 1990 and, two days later, participated in elections as part of the Nationalist Action for Peace (*Acción Nacionalista por la Paz*).²⁰ They achieved surprising results given such a short period of campaigning, winning more than 120,000 votes for different posts: Carlos Pizarro received 70,901 votes (7.8%) in the race for mayor of Bogotá, which put him in third place; two representatives were elected to the chamber of Congress, as were the mayor of Almaguer and five town councillors in five different cities (*Dirección General para la Reinserción*,²¹ 2000).

On 2 April 1990, a new national political movement was created under the leadership of M-19. It was called Democratic Alliance M19 (AD-M19) (*Alianza Democrática M19*), and also included a group from the Patriotic Union (*Círculos Bernardo Jaramillo*), the Popular Front, Democratic Socialism (*Socialismo Democrático*), Colombia United (*Colombia Unida*) and the Nonconformist Movement (*Movimiento Inconformes*), as well as other regional civic and political groups. This represented a significant confluence of several political groups who were also seeking a redefinition of Colombian democracy through a nonviolent leftist alternative. The founders of the party considered that they were forming a “nationally unified movement to transform the current situation with the total conviction that in Colombia today only civil and democratic methods will be valid methods of political action” (quoted in *Dirección General para la Reinserción*, 2000: 21).

The AD-M19 contested presidential elections in May with Pizarro as its candidate. But enemies of peace tried to put a stop to the achievements of this alliance between demobilised sectors and left-wing actors, by murdering Pizarro on a plane on 26 April 1990. Nonetheless, M-19 continued with the peace process, and Antonio Navarro assumed the presidential candidacy of AD-M19. He did not, however, assume leadership of M-19, which had officially ceased to exist after the peace agreement.²² Indeed, Navarro included in his political circle some who were not part of M-19.

Initial results for AD-M19 were very positive, reflecting the strong support of the public for their demobilisation. In the presidential elections of May 1990 they gained 12.5% of the vote, and in December 1990, in the election for the National Constitutional Assembly, they gained 27.3% (see Chart 3). However, this election was an exceptional poll, untypical of the normal pattern of Colombian elections.

In October 1991, the Congress that had been revoked by the National Constitutional Assembly was renewed, and AD-M19’s electoral support began to decline, although a significant parliamentary force was still elected. In 1994, four years after the demobilisation, support oscillated between 3% and 4%, much more like the normal level for left-wing parties in Colombia. In March 1998, no senators were elected and only three representatives (including Antonio Navarro and Gustavo Petro) were elected, but as representatives of the Movement Alternative Way (*Movimiento Via Alternativa*).

Something similar happened in the regional elections. In March 1992, the AD-M19 gained only one mayor, 260 councillors and 17 members of parliament. In October 1994, it won five mayors and 120 councillors through the ordinary system, 42 councillors through the electoral constituency for peace, and seven members of parliament. In October 1997, it secured two mayors,

²⁰ M-19, Democratic Front, Christian Democracy, Colombia United and a group of independent democrats formed this coalition before demobilisation.

²¹ National Office for Reintegration.

²² M-19 as a political entity ceased to exist. It remained a “political current” within the wider alliance of leftist and democratic sectors of AD-M19.

44 councillors and two members of parliament. A singular character of this 1997 election was the high number of candidates from demobilised guerrilla groups. AD-M19 did not have the support of the majority of these forces, as some of them had formed different movements (e.g., the Movement of Democratic Integration, *Movimiento de Integración Democrática*). A group of veteran militants 're-founded' M-19 as a political movement distinct from the AD-M19. Furthermore, these new groups formed coalitions with other political forces, and another demobilised guerrilla group joined the electoral landscape: the Socialist Renovation Movement (*Dirección General para la Reinserción*, 2000).

Chart 3: AD-M19 Electoral Results

Date	Type of election	Votes	%	Elected
27-05-1990	Presidency	754,740	12.5	---
09-12-1990	Constitutional Assembly	950,174	27.3	19 representatives (out of 70)
27-10-1991	Congress	483,382 ²³	9.0	9 senators, 13 representatives
13-03-1994	Congress	153,185	2.7	1 representative
29-05-1994	Presidency	219,241	3.8	---

Source: *Dirección General para la Reinserción*, 2000.

The different political options available to voters generated a paradox of simultaneous continuity and fragmentation. Continuity remained regarding the use and the prestige of the M-19 name as something worth preserving. But the political alliance included forces other than M-19, which produced the fragmentation: what emerged from the peace agreements was not only the transition from a guerrilla group to a political party, but an alliance with other forces including other demobilised groups (the EPL and PRT) as well groups that had never been part of the armed struggle.

A further difficulty at the time was the nature of the leadership of AD-M19. The rushed electoral campaigns on a series of back-to-back elections (local, presidential, Constitution Assembly, and new Congress elections) did not give time or space for the new political grouping to collectively discuss and agree its political future. In fact, Navarro was restricted by a leadership that limited more democratic participation and by the formation of a political party. Those who wanted to stand for election under the AD-M19 banner demanded the endorsement of whoever seemed to be the leader of the organisation, and Navarro, pragmatist that he is, was forced by the organisation and by political circumstances frequently to make decisions without consultation or consensus. This earned him a reputation for being authoritarian and autocratic.²⁴

The transition lacked awareness of the necessity to build a political party, blinded by the very positive initial electoral result when AD-M19 came overall second in the Constitutional Assembly elections. Opinion polls greatly favoured Navarro for president in that first period.

²³ For this congressional election and the one in 1994, the results of the votes for the Chamber of Representatives are included since they are higher than those from the Senate.

²⁴ Paradoxically, Bateman and Pizarro wielded stronger influence as commanders during war. They took decisions without consultation, with the style and ease of someone invested with power. Nobody took offence.

This led many people, including Navarro himself, to believe that AD-M19 was the best option for the next presidential election. But this distracted them from appreciating what they had already achieved: and so the results of the 1991 congressional elections were seen as a defeat, when they went from taking second place in the Assembly to having only 22 members of parliament (9 senators and 13 representatives). This caused a certain tension between the parliamentary group and Navarro the presidential candidate, as he criticised their behaviour in Congress. In general, there was no awareness of the urgent need to act as a political *collective*.

They also lacked a collective understanding of political power, and the difference between a short-term personal vote (based on support for a figurehead) and the actual, longer-term arrangements by which *clientelist* politics function (a support network or *clientela* with a loyal 'tied' vote). And so they did not have the capacity to respond constructively. Furthermore, within AD-M19, individual leaders appeared after the collective and hierarchical guerrilla apparatus had ceased to function, and this also had clear consequences in the 1994 elections. They did not opt for a unified list but for many separate candidate lists, and the result was a catastrophe: from 22 parliamentary representatives they were reduced to one. They had not developed political strength, and they painfully learned that building a political culture is a very demanding challenge.

Apart from the difficulties in the political arena, there were also problems with the economic reintegration of the demobilised force. For those who were involved in politics (mostly former commanders) reintegration was not so important, since their political participation resolved their dilemmas of transition from life as a guerrilla to life as a civilian. However, for most of the rank and file, the situation was much more difficult, and this caused a split between the two groups. And when the participation of the demobilised groups in the political arena collapsed, the problems of reintegration returned, as there were difficulties and delays in the implementation of the agreements regarding economic assistance, loans for productive projects, training and technical assistance, land and employment. "Due to the delay in payments, and the difficult conditions in which many of the ex-combatants lived, they faced social and family obligations without having any economic support. A lot of those projects never started, and the resources were used to meet basic necessities such as rent and subsistence, debts, etc." (Franco, 2000: 138). As a result, new negotiations with the government became necessary in 1993, to review aspects of the 1990/1991 agreement (*Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación, 1993*).

3.7 Rebuilding Personal Projects and Building Local Politics

There were two significant aspects to the demobilisation process and the difficulties experienced in establishing legal political dynamics. Firstly, there was a momentous personal challenge for demobilised guerrillas in the transition to civilian life: it was necessary to completely rebuild their personal lives. María Eugenia Vásquez describes this critical moment:

I was so confused; not being a guerrilla left me in limbo. Where did I belong? Many times, I have believed that if I got dressed in elegant clothes that the grandmother of my son gave me, I could become a lady, just like the owner of the clothes, and I used to make an effort to seem like one only to realise that high heels and fake gestures bored me. I wanted to be like most women and have a family, a house and a steady job. Some other times, I was tired of everything and I dreamt of bumping into a common man who offered to take

care of me. To give the responsibility of my own existence to someone else. I wanted, I looked, I faked... and, finally, inside all of that, there was only me, without knowing very well who I was. It was a continuous coming and going, from partial identities to no identity at all; but, slowly, in the middle of such contradictions, I was building myself (Vásquez, 2000: 426).

Secondly, some of the members of M-19 continued political operations. Following the poor electoral results in 1994, a group of former militants recognised the importance of rebuilding the political option, starting at a local level. This was true of Navarro, who went from being a presidential candidate to running for the mayoral election in Pasto. He won, and thus formed a political base that once again allowed him to re-launch himself at the regional and national level. “It is important to point out that during the municipal administrations of Antonio Navarro in Pasto and ‘Lucho’ Gómez in Riohacha, the important process of citizen participation took place. Navarro’s administration, located in the capital of Nariño, was considered the best out of 1,100 mayors in the whole country.” (*Dirección General para la Reinserción*, 2000: 106). Something similar happened to Rosemberg Pabón when he was elected as the mayor of Yumbo in Valle del Cauca three years later.

Further, those demobilised M-19 guerrillas who had signed peace agreements went on to play an important role in the formation of the Alternative Democratic Pole (*Polo Democrático Alternativo*), the current amalgamation of left-wing democratic sectors in the country. They began in recent years to play an important role in social projects, departmental and municipal peace bureaux and women’s groups, as well as working with victims of violence. “Ex-combatants have generated many initiatives to work on specific fronts or to develop actions of regional impact, building a rich experience that has generated more than one hundred NGOs” (Franco, 2000: 120).

4. Results of M 19’s Transition from Guerilla Movement to Political Party

Can the peace processes in Colombia in the 1990s be considered successful, especially in the case of M-19?

Not a success in itself. That was what could be done at that time. Here, there had never been a peace process under those conditions. There was a lot of inexperience. As people say, ‘you learn afterwards’. Despite its deficiencies, the process had great legitimacy and validity. We could even say that not all the difficulties and failures were a product of the process, but of our own incapacity to appreciate and implement the results. The process had good results not because of the final peace agreement, but because of the process of democratic advancement. Demobilisation, daring to enter the political arena, generating a new Constitution, those were the initial steps towards an important development that was beneficial both for us and for Colombia. Especially for Colombia (Patiño, 2001).

In other words, with the peace agreement and the subsequent reform of the constitution, M-19 did in a broad sense achieve their objectives as an armed group: to broaden Colombian democracy, making more feasible the social changes they were looking for.

This final section reflects on two dimensions of the overall process: assessing the results

of M-19's transition from armed political struggle to legitimate political struggle; and drawing from this analysis some lessons both about the achievements and about the difficulties and limitations of the process:

This peace process meant a **paradigm shift within the revolution** and within the peace processes: it was heresy to abandon arms in a country where that was unthinkable since it meant surrender, yet that does not mean that there are not political and armed groups that uphold this perception. This process was not the product of a military defeat [...] Due to the current reality of armed confrontation in Colombia, of its degradation, its barbaric and institutional character, the value of and justification for abandoning arms is reaffirmed. It is an ethical question of knowing how to read every historical moment and understand what it means to be a revolutionary but also to be willing to change and venture into the unknown, abandoning your own skin and reconceptualising yourself with a non-exclusionary logic. That is an achievement in itself and confirms that this process was worth it (Grabe, 2004: 46).

Peace was shown to be possible; people could fight for social change without resorting to violence, and political will could produce progress.

- The **political and constitutional reforms** resulting from the peace process with M-19 and other demobilised guerrilla groups enabled an important step in the development of the country, managing to make of the constitution a real bill of rights. However, from the day it entered into force in July 1991, there have been various efforts to reverse some of its most progressive points. “The lesson is that redefining the basis of the state has to be part of a long term political pact in order to guarantee the necessary foundations to build the new house. The constitution was the expression of a new country but this did not mean the defeat of the traditional leaders and their political culture” (Grabe, 2004: 46). As a consequence, it is necessary that the negotiation process be linked to the agreed reforms and to a durable political pact, so that agreement to a transition makes certain changes irreversible and sufficiently consolidates a truly democratic political dynamic.
- It is necessary to adequately prepare for the **transition from a military structure to a political party** since these have different organisational logics and different political cultures. However, demobilisation entailed, on the one hand, the emergence of a new type of political organisation different from the armed organisation and, on the other, a transition from a political-military culture to a civil culture, which was not easy. “Turning into civilians without stopping being revolutionaries was a difficult step to imagine” (Patiño, 2001). Due to the cultural legacy of their time as guerrillas, the demobilised M-19 did not grasp quickly enough that it was crucial to build a new mentality. Demobilisation entailed the loss of internal cohesion that the armed approach had offered. It also generated questions regarding the vertical management structure. The greatest challenge of demobilisation was individualisation, the challenge of freedom. Demobilised fighters faced the option of whether or not to continue with their political lives as a decision personal to each. If the choice of a guerrilla movement that signs a peace agreement is to transform into a legal political party, it is vital to have the greatest possible strategic clarity and to be able to generate organisational dynamics and ideological and cultural debates that help most members to make the transition successfully.

- The peace process with M-19 opened doors for **other peace processes** in the 1990s (see *Chart 1*): the PRT in January 1991; the EPL in February 1991; the Armed Movement Quintín Lame in May 1991; the Ernesto Rojas Commandos in March 1992; the CRS in April 1994; the Urban Militias of Medellín in May 1994; and the Garnica Front in June 1994. With M-19, a model of negotiation was developed, which was then applied to these later negotiations. The M-19 peace process also influenced the negotiation effort with the Guerrilla Coordinating Board (FARC, ELN and a faction of EPL) in Caracas in 1991. Even today, despite electoral defeat, a group of former militants from those groups are still politically active and play an important role sustaining a non-violent democratic left wing. They have managed to continue to fly the political flags for more social justice, a better democracy and the defence of national sovereignty. The lesson that can be learnt from this is the importance of consolidating the dynamics of peace with other armed groups in the country.
- AD-M19, a political alliance resulting from the demobilisation process, achieved significant **political and electoral results**, which ranked them the second political force in national politics, something that the left had never achieved before. This enabled them to play an important role in the 1991 constitutional reform process. However, there were difficulties in sustaining this political surge, since they did not manage to consolidate the structure of a political party complete with the necessary social foundations to face the political machineries of the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties. A clear lesson is the necessity for demobilising guerrilla forces to work at constructing a discourse and a political structure that allows them to maintain a positive relationship with the population, and to participate in electoral processes promoting the social challenges and political reforms needed for national reconstruction. This had to be a joint effort by the demobilised groups co-operating with other political forces. At the time, it was better to make a mistake in the political dimension than to maintain the purity of ideological or regional identities. The challenge of political development is in knowing how to blend with other groups without losing one's identity in the process.²⁵
- Due to the emphasis on the political component of the peace agreement, the **social and economic reintegration** of ex-combatants was insufficient and underdeveloped. This was compounded by inexperience, of both the government and the demobilised groups, in matters of reintegration, which led to a series of mistakes in the implementation of the different components (productive projects, education and health). This in turn created a critical situation for many ex-combatants, especially in the years immediately following the peace agreement. An adequate balance is required between conditions that guarantee the successful economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants, and the configuration of political proposals. Too much economic emphasis, however, could threaten the political aspect. If what is seen as most important is to 'sell' the disarmament of a guerrilla movement, then the political aspects, which are crucial for the future role of the demobilised force, are relegated to a secondary status. This seriously limits the content and meaning of the whole peace negotiation process.

²⁵ This can be seen in the lists that AD-M19 formed for the elections. The National List which gained a significant amount of votes in the Constitutional Assembly united different people with a shared interest in social transformation, democracy and peace. A similar thing happened to the list for the Senate elections in 1991 under Vera Grabe. However, the lists for the Chamber were typical of M-19, i.e. they were fragmented and the discourse became increasingly exclusionist.

- A peace agreement with armed actors such as M-19 required a **favourable legal framework** that included measures to make the negotiations possible (despite criminal proceedings being taken against the guerrilla groups), to facilitate amnesty, and ultimately the legal acknowledgement of the resulting political organisation (and its right to contest elections). This legal aspect requires swift execution. Otherwise, it will continue ad infinitum with grey areas of non-compliance (unresolved situations, ex-guerrillas arrested long after the agreement has been signed, etc.). The lesson is that a legal normalisation through transitional methods is required which permits the political engagement of those who abandon arms. Amnesties and mechanisms for access to electoral processes should be fast and flexible, in order to facilitate the guerrillas' incorporation into politics and into the current legal regime. Yet at the same time the door must remain open for a reconciliation with those groups with whom the armed confrontation was worst.
- Every transition from a guerrilla group into a legal political party poses a **security dilemma**: how to safeguard the lives of militants after they surrender their arms. Although security schemes were agreed, especially in the case of the commanders, these did not necessarily guarantee the avoidance of attacks against demobilised personnel. In M-19, the murder of Carlos Pizarro was paradigmatic in that it raised many questions, but there were more murders of militants after the agreements were signed. Between 1989 and 2005, there were 160 murders of militants from M-19, 17.8% of its demobilised force, and 20% of all the homicides committed against demobilised guerrillas in the 1990s (Villarraga, 2006: 80-81). But most of M-19's fatalities were not the result of political incidents. They were demobilised in a country with an ongoing armed conflict and high levels of social violence.²⁶ Furthermore, an ex-guerrilla is more vulnerable to social violence than an ordinary citizen is. This reminds us that, as part of the negotiation process, it is essential to examine the security dimension to guarantee high levels of protection against mortal risk.
- How can the **sustainability of a peace agreement** be guaranteed? How can we avoid taking backward steps on the substantive aspects agreed as a condition of disarmament? From the experience of M-19, there are at least four aspects to note: 1) The peace agreement should be made concrete in the form of a law or constitutional reform, to avoid its falling prey to shifting political dynamics. 2) A political force needs to be built that can defend changes and reforms within the democratic infrastructure of the country, so that they can be deepened and accompanied by complementary measures and thus become a reality in the social sphere. 3) A transitional political regime has to be built, which can deal with the weaknesses and inexperience of the forces that emerge from the peace process: a regime which can guarantee that, even in the worst conditions of electoral failure, those who surrendered arms have a minimum level of power. 4) Verification monitoring commissions established by a peace process and the agreements resulting from that process should go beyond merely a presence at formal events when the agreements are signed or when the armed forces demobilise. Verification commissions must be strong enough to insist on compliance from the parties, especially from the government.

²⁶ 75% of the daily murders in Colombia were not related to politics.

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Chronology of M-19²⁷

Origin and Birth (1970-1974)

1970- 19 April: Electoral fraud against the opposition movement, the National Popular Alliance (Alianza Nacional Popular, Anapo), during the presidential elections and against their presidential candidate Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, former president of the country.

1973- The 19th April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril, M-19) was formed. Its name refers to the date when the popular will was ignored during the elections. The group formed to express the necessity to defend the will of the people through the armed struggle under the slogan: “with the people, with the arms, to power!”

1974- January: M-19 makes its first public appearance as a guerrilla movement by removing the sword of Simón Bolívar from the Quinta de Bolívar in Bogotá.

Building a Political-Military Organisation (1974-1978)

1974-1976- M-19 commenced its political military actions primarily in urban regions by armed propaganda and actions to improve the infrastructure.

1976- February to April: M-19 kidnapped and assassinated José R. Mercado, a union leader accused by the union groups of “being a traitor to the interests of the working class”. This came after attempts to negotiate with the government for a plebiscite to seek a ‘popular verdict’.

1977- February: M-19, at its Fifth Conference, decided to adopt a political-military organisational structure, with hierarchies and orientated towards comprehensive actions at the political and military level.

August: M-19 kidnapped the manager of Indupalma, an agro-industrial African Palm Company, in support of the struggle of its employees, who were demanding better working conditions. Their demands were recognised, they engaged in a negotiation process, and M-19 freed the kidnapped victim.

1978- Julio César Turbay Ayala was elected president of Colombia and promoted the Security Statute as a measure against actions of social dissent and as a tool against insurgency.

Challenging the Regime and Re-discovering Democracy and Peace as a Way of Dialogue (1979 – 1980)

1978- 31 December: M-19 removed more than 5,700 weapons from an arms cache of the Colombian army in northern Bogotá.

1979- The immediate reaction of the government was to undertake a series of raids, detentions and unprecedented torture, which affected not only M-19 but also large sectors of the population unrelated to the movement. Many of the middle and senior ranks were taken prisoner.

June: The Seventh Conference of M-19 took place, redefining their political concept. The organisation shifted from identifying themselves as a group fighting for socialism, to one adopting

²⁷ Based on chronologies developed by: Villamizar (1995), Grabe (2003) and García (2004).

democracy as the *raison d'être* for their political and military project which aimed to become a “democracy in arms”.

1980- 27 February - 27 April: M-19 laid siege to the Dominican Republic embassy in Bogotá, demanding the liberation of its political prisoners and denouncing the human rights crisis in Colombia. After a sixty-day negotiation, a non-violent solution was reached and the ambassadors and guerrillas came out of the embassy. The political prisoners were not freed but the debate around amnesty and peace had begun.

July: Turbay's administration presented an amnesty bill to Congress, which was rejected by M-19 because of the stipulated requirement of armed groups to surrender. Social organisations, the relatives of political prisoners, and democratic political groups began to struggle for an improved version of amnesty.

Four Years of Wars for Peace (1981-1984)

1981- President Turbay created a Peace Commission under the leadership of former president Carlos Lleras Restrepo.

December: As a reaction to the kidnapping of Martha Nieves Ochoa by M-19, landowners and drug traffickers joined forces to create a group called “Death to Kidnappers” (Muerte a Secuestradores, MAS) to annihilate guerrilla groups in revenge for kidnapping them and their families.

1981-1982- The so-called “wars for peace” started. M-19 carried out a series of military actions as part of the promotion of a peace proposal they had been developing since the embassy siege. This included ending the state of emergency, the derogation of the Security Statute, an unconditional general amnesty and national dialogue.

1982- Belisario Betancur was elected president after flying the flag of peace throughout his campaign. On the day of his inauguration, 7 August, M-19 sent him a letter proposing dialogue.

August: During its Eighth Conference, M-19 decided to reinforce the structure of its guerrilla army.

September: Belisario Betancur created a peace commission, with the participation of all parties, to initiate a dialogue with political forces and guerrilla groups, especially M-19 and the EPL.

December: The government approved an amnesty law. Political prisoners were released from jail at the end of 1983.

1983- April: The general commander of the M-19, Jaime Bateman, died in a plane crash between Panama and Colombia, whilst in the middle of peace talks with the Betancur administration. M-19 continued its search to develop a peace proposal.

October: The first secret meeting took place between two guerrilla commanders of M-19 and President Belisario Betancur in Madrid.

The First Peace Process: Truce and National Dialogue (1984-1985)

1984- August: the Betancur administration, M-19 and the EPL signed an agreement of “truce and national dialogue” in Corinto, El Hobo and Medellín.

December: The army attacked M-19 in Yarumales; combat lasted for 26 days.

1984-1985- The so-called national dialogue started, with the intention of bringing different political, social and trade union sectors to debate national transformation. This process lacked support from the government, even facing hostility from certain sectors within the government, and opposition from the state military forces.

1985- June: M-19 created “camps for peace and democracy” in several cities to attract young people, especially those from poor neighbourhoods. This caused alarm amongst business and political leaders who decided to outlaw them.

July: After a life-threatening attack on Antonio Navarro and other guerrillas, the truce was broken and both sides resumed fighting.

From an Armed Peace to the Limitations of War (1985-1987)

1985- 6-7 November: a group of 35 guerrillas from M-19 laid siege to the Palace of Justice in the main square of downtown Bogotá (Plaza de Bolívar), in protest at the government’s failure to comply with the peace agreements. State forces carried out a counter-siege, resulting in more than 100 fatalities.

December: In Tacueyó (Cauca), the corpses of 163 guerrillas from the Ricardo Franco Group were found buried in communal graves. They had been murdered by their own leaders as a result of an internal disagreement.

1986- M-19 participated in the formation of the National Guerrilla Coordination (Coordinadora Nacional Guerrillera) together with the ELN, EPL, PRT and Patria Libre.

1987- February: M-19 proposed a dialogue to re-start peace talks and the joint demilitarisation of indigenous areas in Cauca.

September: The Simón Bolívar Coordinating Board (Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar) was founded, with the inclusion of the FARC.

Re-encountering Peace (1988-1989)

1988- January: M-19 arranged a national meeting to assess the situation in the country, and reflect on what its contribution might be in solving the national crisis. The group carried out its strategic redefinition, declaring the confrontation against the armed forces over, and defining the crux of their struggle in the slogan: “life to the nation, peace to the armed forces and war against oligarchy”. M-19 announced a ceasefire for six months.

May: M-19 kidnapped the rightwing leader Álvaro Gómez. This became the prologue to a new peace process.

July: There was a political summit in Usaquén to resolve the situation, and the Commission for Democratic Coexistence was created to present a peace proposal to the government.

September: President Barco presented the Peace Initiative as his proposal for negotiation.

December: The government announced that it would open negotiations with M-19.

Peace as a Path: Towards the National Constitutional Assembly (1989-1991)

1989- January: Carlos Pizarro, commander of the M-19, and the peace commissioner, Rafael Pardo, began negotiations in Tolima.

March: A camp was established in Santo Domingo (Cauca) as the location for negotiations.

April: In Bogotá, Tables of Analysis and Agreement were developed to promote transformation proposals for social, political, legal and economic topics. Those tables were subject to high levels of participation.

July: The results of the discussion that took place as part of the Tables of Analysis and Agreement nurtured the peace agreements.

September: As a result of the negotiations, at its Tenth Conference, M-19 voted to abandon arms.

November: The government and M-19 signed a political pact recognising the results of the Tables of Analysis and Agreement.

December: A constitutional reform bill that included the political reforms agreed with M-19 was rejected by congress. However, an amnesty law was approved.

1990 – January: Carlos Pizarro and Antonio Navarro, with the support of the government, travelled to Bogotá to forge political agreements that enabled their demobilisation.

March: M-19 signed a peace agreement that was conducive to the abandonment of arms and to its birth as a legal political movement. In the municipal and congressional elections, M-19 fielded its own candidates in a coalition with other groups.

April: The Democratic Alliance AD-M19 was created with the participation of other left-wing political groups that did not participate in the armed struggle. On 26 April, Pizarro, M-19 commander, instigator of the peace process and presidential candidate, was murdered. However, the M-19 maintained its ambitions for peace.

May: Antonio Navarro ran as presidential candidate for AD-M19 and received 20.5% of the vote.

June: The government began dialogues with the EPL, PRT and Quintín Lame.

August: Antonio Navarro was appointed Minister of Health.

December: A national constitutional assembly was convened with the support of the upper echelons of the judicial system. In the elections, AD-M19 came second, achieving sufficient votes for the election of 19 deputies. On the same day as the elections, the army attacked Casa Verde, the headquarters of the FARC, in La Uribe.

1991 – January and February: FARC's military activities increased whereas other organisation such as the EPL, PRT and Quintín Lame pursued their own peace processes, agreed the terms of reintegration and participated in the Constitutional Assembly.

February: The Constitutional Assembly gathered to draw up a new Constitution.

July: The new Constitution was promulgated as a result of a momentous process of agreement. It was considered to be a real peace agreement.

Participation in Electoral and Political Life (1991-1994)

1991 - October: The AD-M19 accumulated 9% of the votes in the elections for a new Congress, including nine senators and thirteen deputies.

1993- Those guerrilla groups who had signed earlier peace agreements established with the government a pact for the consolidation of the peace processes.

1994- March: In congressional elections, AD-M19 electoral support declined to only 2.7% of the votes, electing just one deputy.

April: The Socialist Renewal Movement (Corriente de Renovación Socialista), a splinter group of the ELN, and the militias followed their own process of peace and reintegration.

May: AD-M19 gained 3.8% of votes.

About the Authors

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