

# **The Reform of Intelligence: A Democratic Imperative**

## ***Intelligence in Recent Public Literature***

Andres Villamizar. Colombia: Editorial Kimpres Ltda., 2004.

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La Reforma de la Inteligencia was published in September 2004 by the Fundacion Seguridad y Democracia [Security and Democracy Foundation], a think tank in Bogota promoting public debate over Colombia's national security policies. Its author, Andres Villamizar is a national security expert in Colombia who has taught at the University of the Andes in Bogota. In this book, Villamizar limits himself to calls for political transparency and increased effectiveness in the Colombian intelligence reform process and successfully reminds readers that the United States is not alone in its struggle to reform and improve national intelligence capabilities.

The government of Colombia's recent victories against insurgents and narcotics traffickers is well documented and impressive for many reasons. However, these victories defy explanation when one considers the material Villamizar presents in *La Reforma de la Inteligencia* that, in effect, tells us that Colombia lacks a functional intelligence community. In Colombia, intelligence agencies operate independently, are routinely assigned to

carry out intelligence functions under vague control mechanisms, and suffer through repeated instances of duplication of effort, inter-service jealousies and professional rivalries. These are all products of poor institutional development and the absence of a professional foundation. Lacking are clearly defined missions and roles, foreign collection capabilities, and the trust of the country's highest political and military circles. Without these, Colombia's national intelligence assets are incapable of guaranteeing public security and safety and in uncovering current and potential strategic security threats.

If Colombian intelligence capabilities are in disarray, how then have Colombian successes against the insurgents and drug traffickers been possible? How were the weaknesses of a group of confused and misguided state intelligence agencies overcome? According to Villamizar, operational successes have been possible thanks only to the limited intelligence capabilities of the Colombian armed forces at the tactical level. In *La Reforma de la Inteligencia*, Villamizar says that is not good enough. He demands reform of Colombian intelligence organizations at *all* levels, and reminds readers of the enduring importance of intelligence, not just as a battlefield accessory, but as an enduring, strategic-level decisionmaking tool.

Presumably because Villamizar believes change must be the product of an informed public discussion, he invests time in this book explaining intelligence, something that has received little attention in Colombia's public media. Many of his definitions will be familiar to US intelligence professionals. He defines intelligence as a decisionmaking tool to reduce uncertainty. He presents a general review of the theory and functions of state intelligence agencies and discusses the theories and components associated with commonly known intelligence processes. In doing so, he cites numerous sources, including US Marine Corps Doctrinal Publications, Joint Military Intelligence College (JMIC) papers, passages from the Bible, the works of intelligence analyst Mark Lowenthal and military theorist Sun Tzu. The second chapter is a thorough, postgraduate-level primer of intelligence concepts. Chapter three reviews the reform processes experienced in Latin America and Eastern Europe following the Cold War and the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States. Villamizar effectively leads the reader through a definition of important terms, a review of the intelligence collection process, and a history of the origins and development of Colombian intelligence agencies. He then offers an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, missions, and roles of the Colombian intelligence apparatus. In the last chapter, the author presents

what he believes to be the basic path toward a profound reform of the intelligence entities within Colombia and provides recommendations on how to realign the focus of these institutions in support of internal and external threats.

What then do these recommendations include? Reform, Villamizar writes, must involve the public by encouraging interest and debate on the subject. It must end inter-agency confusion regarding roles and core competencies and should lead to an improvement in the way appointed intelligence agencies develop their strategic role. Much improvement, he argues, can come from the creation of a clear, legal, and precise framework, with well-developed and well-defined intelligence roles and specialized skills.

Such definition would also increase the likelihood that intelligence organizations will cooperate with each other. Moreover, Villamizar advocates clarification of the way in which intelligence and law enforcement agencies operate, asserting Colombia's need to de-conflict its international, domestic, criminal, and foreign missions. The Colombian intelligence agencies must be given specific charters that direct them away from law enforcement duties, and criminal investigation units must be directed to steer clear of strategic intelligence missions. He proposes a structure that defines the roles, mission priorities, and the incentives for institutional inter-cooperation and calls for reformed intelligence institutions to possess a professional and apolitical character and subsequently to develop the capability to produce strategic-level reports and analysis in support of decision-makers.

Villamizar advocates the appointment of a director of Colombian intelligence who is capable of developing and managing professional, independent civilian intelligence agencies. This director would answer directly to the executive branch on matters of strategic intelligence, and complement military and public security intelligence efforts currently focused on criminal and internal threats.

Many of the author's observations transcend the requirements for a renaissance of Colombian intelligence. His reaffirmation of the value of intelligence and his recommendations for reform are applicable to any country with a developing or active intelligence program. The post-Cold War era has been a time in which intelligence agencies have been forced to adapt to new domestic political conditions—as in the former states of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union<sup>[1]</sup> — and to take on such threats as drug trafficking, transnational gangs, decentralized terrorism cells, and the

illegal proliferation of weapons. Although Villamizar does not address the possibility of US involvement in reform in his country, US security officials should take an interest in the developments in Colombia, as they have elsewhere. Discreet participation in such reform efforts offer US intelligence professionals opportunities to assist in this difficult undertaking and to learn from host nation counterparts. Lessons learned in the pursuit of intelligence reform abroad can then be analyzed at home and can prove invaluable within strategic efforts to work with other governments to protect and advance mutual security interests and policies.

Villamizar's observation that reformation of intelligence agencies by national governments elsewhere in Latin America have been indicators of democracy at work suggests a challenge for US decisionmakers. Villamizar believes that reform of intelligence capabilities along the lines he suggests in Colombia can only strengthen that government's security and stability in a time of peril and improve the prospects for the survival and enhancement of democratic ideals. If he is right, the same should hold true as new intelligence entities are developed in Iraq and Afghanistan. In that light, *Reforma de la Inteligencia* forces us to consider the development of intelligence capabilities in keeping with democratic ideals as an important piece of future national building efforts.

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[1]See Larry L. Watts, "Intelligence Reform in Europe's Emerging Democracies," *Studies in Intelligence* 48, no 1 (2004).

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