Resisting War

In civil conflicts around the world, unarmed civilians take enormous risks to protect themselves and stand up to heavily armed combatants. This is not just counterintuitive – it is extraordinary. In this book, Oliver Kaplan explores cases from Colombia, with extensions to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and the Philippines, to show how and why civilians are able to influence armed actors and limit violence. Based on original fieldwork as well as statistical analysis, the book explains how local social organization and cohesion enables both covert and overt nonviolent strategies, including avoidance, cultures of peace, dispute resolution, deception, protest, and negotiation. These “autonomy” strategies help communities to both retain civilian status and avoid retaliation by limiting the inroads of armed groups. Contrary to conventional views that civilians are helpless victims, this book highlights their creative initiative to maintain decision-making power over outcomes for their communities.

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Resisting War

How Communities Protect Themselves

OLIVER KAPLAN

University of Denver
To the campesinos of Colombia: the true experts on making peace.

To Ben.
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Preface and Acknowledgments

This project began with a question and a curiosity. How can we tell if civilians in conflict settings can protect themselves through social movements? The reigning theories all said this was unlikely, and yet there were cases that suggested, shouted, that protection was possible. I wanted to know why, when, and how these kinds of efforts succeed or fail. I was motivated by the idea that research could help answer these questions and even contribute to the protection of people living in the direst of situations. The choice of Colombia as a research site was dictated by the question, then, rather than the reverse.

I had lived in Central America but had never been to Colombia and knew little about the country, except that it was probably not an easy location in which to do research. I started learning all I could, became drawn to the place, and realized research could be quite feasible and enjoyable, as long as one uses common sense, or does not dar papaya (literally to “give papaya”). I found a beautiful country with warm, humble, thoughtful, determined people and, thankfully, great coffee and rich chocolate. What started as my doctoral research became a journey of discovery that led to the findings presented in this book. It was a true education, full of new experiences, treasured memories, and fast friends. It would also hold my first experience with tear gas and encounters with unbearable heat and unimaginable carsickness, among other pleasantries.

I realized early on in my research that I would have to keep a list of all the people that helped me along the way because I was racking up and continued to take on many, many debts of gratitude. In this sense, this book is the result of a true and broad collaboration. However, any remaining errors are, lamentably, my own.

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### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>ACIA</td>
<td>Integral Peasants Association of the Atrato Region</td>
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<td>ACR</td>
<td>High Advisory for Reintegration/Colombian Agency for Reintegration</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACVC</td>
<td>Peasant Farmer Association of the Cimitarra River Valley</td>
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<td>AFP</td>
<td>Armed Forces of the Philippines</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANA</td>
<td>Afghan National Army</td>
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<td>ANUC</td>
<td>National Peasant Association</td>
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<td>ARMM</td>
<td>Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao</td>
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<td>ASOPROA</td>
<td>Association of Small- and Medium-Scale Producers of Eastern Antioquia</td>
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<td>ATCC</td>
<td>Peasant Workers Association of the Carare River</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUC</td>
<td>United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAFGU</td>
<td>Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units</td>
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<td>CDF</td>
<td>Civilian Defense Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>CINEP</td>
<td>Center for Investigation and Popular Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNAC</td>
<td>National Confederation of Communal Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNRR</td>
<td>National Commission on Reparation and Reconciliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>COCOMACIA</td>
<td>Community Council of the Peasant Association of the Atrato Region</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPP</td>
<td>Communist People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPR</td>
<td>Communities of Populations in Resistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRIC</td>
<td>Cauca Regional Indigenous Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>DANE</td>
<td>National Administrative Department of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAS</td>
<td>Administrative Department of Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELN</td>
<td>National Liberation Army</td>
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<td>EPL</td>
<td>Popular Liberation Army</td>
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<td>EZLN</td>
<td>Zapatista Army of National Liberation</td>
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<td>FARC</td>
<td>Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia</td>
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List of Abbreviations

FATA  Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FMLN  Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front
FSA   Free Syrian Army
IGO   Intergovernmental organization
ISAF  International Security Assistance Force
ISIS  Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JAC   Community Action Board
LCC   Local Coordination Committee
LRA   Lord’s Resistance Army
M-19  Movement of April 19
MAQL  Quintín Lamé Armed Movement
MAS   Death to Kidnappers
MBNC  Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia
MILF  Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF  Moro National Liberation Front
NATO  North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDF   National Democratic Front
NGO   Nongovernmental organization
NPA   New People’s Army
PCCC  Colombian Clandestine Communist Party
RUF   Revolutionary United Front
SDA   Special Development Area
UP    Patriotic Union Party
ZOP   Zone of Peace