

## US Army War College in Colombia: 1st-person intro to keeping internal peace, regional security, trade success, diplomacy

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*Students and faculty of the U.S. Army War College and National War College tour a Colombian Navy facility. Students learned about the nation's shipbuilding industry, its science-and-tech initiatives, and the role of the Colombian Navy in national and*

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[Today we talked with the delegation National War College and the U.S. Army War College](#)

Army War College students heard firsthand testimony from former guerrilla fighters of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) about the impact of the 50-year armed conflict in the country. This was but one of the unique engagements for 10 students who traveled to Colombia for a week.

Colombia is the first of two Latin American countries on the travel schedule of the new elective, Advanced Regional Studies - Americas. A pilot course for the U.S. Army War College's 2018 academic year, the elective is designed for students to deeply examine regional security issues and consider how the interests and approaches of our allies might overlap or diverge from our own. Before travel to Colombia and to Chile, the second

reg of creative travel, the creative students met in seminars to study the history and culture of each country as well as its current economic and political environment.

Before travel, their analysis of conflict and security instability in the region extended to the start of the conflict between the FARC and the government of Colombia, the 2016 ceasefire accords led by Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos, and the impacts of the peace deal for the country as a whole. The student group conducted a video teleconference with US SOUTHCOM military planners to gain a better understanding of the diplomatic, military and economic issues of the country and how they influence U.S. interests in the region.

In Colombia, members of the U.S. Embassy team in Colombia provided escort throughout the visit to both the Army War College team and their colleagues from the National War College.

Day 1 featured briefings at the U.S. Embassy in Bogota from the Senior Defense Officer and Office of Security Cooperation. They discussed the critical US-Colombia security cooperation initiatives and offered an update on Colombia's long term strategic military objectives. Those briefings were complemented, later, by engagements with economic advisers, a USAID representative, and the Minister of Defense Advisor.

Day 2 began at the Colombian War College, where the group explored the strategic role of the Colombian military on the ongoing peace process with the FARC as well as other challenges. Received by Brig. Gen. Oscar Hernandez, director of the Colombian Superior School of War, and briefed by Maj. Gen. Gabriel Hernando Pinilla, chief of Planning and Policy for the Colombian Army, the students received an in-depth appreciation of the scope of the Army's responsibilities. The discussion addressed the National Liberation Army (ELN), criminal and drug trafficking organizations, and other internal, border and regional instability factors.

At a Reincorporation and Normalization Agency (ARN) brief, the students learned about Colombia's plan to reintegrate demobilized people of organized illegal armed groups.

ARN is a state-funded initiative that works in coordination with the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of the Interior and Justice, and Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, seeking to incentivize the return of the demobilized population to legality in a sustainable manner. To date, the ARN has received 51,000 former militants and certified more than 20,000 through a rigorous eight-dimension reintegration process.

Three former members of the FARC spoke with the students, sharing details about the former guerilla organization, its recruitment processes, operations, and the significant life challenges the former fighters now face.

The tone shifted at the end of Day 2, when the students of the Army and National War Colleges met with Colombian graduates of the US Army War College. The social engagement at the U.S. Chief of Mission Residence included the war college alumni among other senior Colombian military officials and U.S. diplomats.

The last official engagement in Bogota was with the American Chamber of Commerce where the visiting groups learned details about Colombia's economy, its regional and global trade markets, and the impact of U.S. trade policies on the country.

The team traveled to Cartagena to visit the Corporation of Science and Technology for the Development of the Maritime and River Naval Industry (COTECMAR) where the team saw firsthand Colombia's shipbuilding capabilities and gained an understanding of the Colombian Navy's impact on local and regional security. Later that same day at Naval Base ARC Bolivar, the group discussed maritime security concerns with senior Colombian naval officers and boarded naval frigate ARC Independiente for a detailed tour of the vessel.

Despite the academic design of the visit, with myriad official engagements, the students' Colombian experience was enriched with multiple stops at local restaurants, monuments and facilities, including the Palace of Narino, which is the official home and workplace of the President of Colombia.

At the trip's end, the students had a better understanding of the culture, traditions, history, and strategic landscape of Colombia.

The Army War College this year offered two Advanced RSP electives. The Americas course included travel to Colombia and Chile. The Middle East ARSP included travel to Jordan and Israel.