

Making Peace: Next Steps in Colombia

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ABSTRACT: After a brief history of the longest-running insurgency in the Western Hemisphere, this article contextualizes recent developments in the transition of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to legal politics in Colombia. The authors also provide policy recommendations for the US Department of Defense.

On August 24, 2016, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia announced a peace accord to end the world's longest civil war. Over the next month, lawmakers in Bogotá publicly backed the agreement, FARC leadership ratified it, and a signing ceremony took place in Cartagena. Polls suggested a strong majority of Colombians would vote “yes” in a plebiscite on October 2.¹ Instead, Colombians rejected the deal by less than half of one percent.²

That same year, the parties returned to the table and reached what is widely considered a better deal. President Juan Manuel Santos and FARC leader Rodrigo “Timochenko” Londoño signed a revised accord on November 24, the Colombian congress unanimously endorsed it later that month, and on December 13 Colombia's constitutional court ruled that there need not be a second referendum.

Although legal challenges have continued, and political and military hurdles remain, after 53 years, more than 220,000 casualties, and 7.6 million refugees, FARC is laying down its arms.³ Colombia is ending its war.⁴

Because the inventory of death and destruction goes far beyond atrocities perpetrated by FARC, some might argue assigning so much significance to the demobilization of a single group would be disingenuous. There is truth to this claim. Other insurgencies responsible for mass killing and violations of human rights have included the April 19 Movement (M-19), the National Liberation Army, the Popular Liberation Army, and lesser known groups. Paramilitaries like the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia have massacred entire villages believed to support guerrillas. The state itself has committed war crimes.

1 “Colombians Would Vote in Favor of Peace in Plebiscite—Poll,” Reuters, September 9, 2016.

2 Helen Murphy and Julia Symmes Cobb, “Colombia's Peace Deal in Limbo after Shock Referendum,” Reuters, October 3, 2016.

3 Dayra Carvajal, “As Colombia Emerges from Decades of War, Migration Challenges Mount,” Migration Policy, April 13, 2017, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/Colombia-emerges-decades-war-migration-challenges-mount.

4 “Court Says Colombia Can Speed Peace Laws through Congress,” Reuters, December 13, 2016.

Nevertheless, FARC has been at the epicenter of political violence in Colombia since its inception. The organization has carried more political and military weight than other guerrilla groups, and at times it has governed vast swaths of territory. This actor prompted the rise of such counterinsurgency and paramilitary forces as the United Self-Defense Forces, which caused much damage during the conflict. In classical strategic terms, FARC has been the center of gravity in Colombia's long war.

For all the weight of this moment, the disappearance of FARC as a military force will not end problems stemming from violence or politics in Colombia. Poverty, drug trafficking, and common crime will endure; neoparamilitary groups will undermine state authority; and unforeseen obstacles will arise. These challenges require understanding the historical context and thinking clearly about the future. To that end, this article outlines Colombia's war, analyzes peace processes in recent decades, and recommends policies the US Department of Defense could implement to facilitate Colombia's transition toward peace.

Colombia's War

Colombia's confrontation with FARC is rooted in *La Violencia*, a period of civil war between liberals and conservatives in the mid-twentieth century. The assassination of the Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948, marked the beginning of a catastrophic decade characterized by events similar to what Colombia has suffered more recently: internal displacement, land dispossession, and brutal political violence.

Early in the conflict, a peasant named Manuel Marulanda Veléz and some of his close family members took up arms, moving back and forth between the departments of Quindío and Valle del Cauca west of Bogotá.⁵ Before long, Marulanda was leading dozens of liberal guerrillas and coordinating with groups led by the Colombian Communist Party. By the late 1950s, he had fully embraced communist politics and was practicing guerrilla tactics.⁶

In 1958, political elites implemented a power-sharing agreement, the National Front, whereby the Liberal and Conservative Parties would alternate power every four years until 1974. This agreement extricated Colombia from *La Violencia* but excluded anyone not politically aligned with the traditional parties. Those on the far left felt betrayed by Colombia's elites, especially as they saw leftist politics take root elsewhere in Latin America. The following year, Fidel Castro would lead the Cuban Revolution (1956–59) and begin his decades-long rule.

In 1964, the government began a military offensive designed to subdue restive settlements of communist farmers in Marquetalia, Guayabero,

5 Born Pedro Antonio Marín, the founding father of FARC, took his nom de guerre from a union worker who was tortured to death by the government of Laureano Eleuterio Gómez in 1953. Marulanda was also known as Tirofijo, or Sureshot, for his aim with a rifle early in the conflict.

6 Garry M. Leech, *The FARC: The Longest Insurgency* (Halifax: Zed Books, 2011), 13. For a brief period in 1959 and 1960, Marulanda demobilized and reincorporated into civilian life. When his friend Jacobo Prías Alape (alias "Charro Negro") was killed, he returned to arms. Patricia H. Micolta, "Illicit Interest Groups, Social Capital, and Conflict: A Study of the FARC," in *Social Capital and Peace-Building: Creating and Resolving Conflict with Trust and Social Networks*, ed. Machaelene Cox (London: Routledge, 2008), 78.

El Pato, and Rio Chiquito. From the government's perspective, these populations threatened the stability of the state, and armed residents' refusal to recognize authority undermined the government's monopoly on the use of force. The government's attacks had the unintended effect of galvanizing local support for resistance.

In 1966, some 350 guerrillas who had fought the Colombian army in 1964 held the Second Guerrilla Conference of the Southern Bloc. The movement agreed to be called the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and chartered a socialist agrarian platform that called for revolutionary change.⁷ From that moment forward, FARC's Marxist ideology was clear, and its association with Colombia's Communist Party was public.

Until the late 1970s, FARC's growth was relatively modest. Dramatic expansion during the mid- and late 1980s resulted from decisions made at the Seventh Guerrilla Conference (1982), when the group decided to reorganize from a large guerrilla band into a formal army. In addition to ambushes, members would attack police and military units in strategically important areas, including small urban centers. To expand geographically, FARC would delve further into kidnapping for ransom and extortion.

The organization also became deeply involved in the drug trade, especially in cocaine, during the 1980s. Early involvement was tangential, through the taxation of drug traffickers, but FARC eventually moved directly into the production chain. Manufacturing and trafficking drugs, kidnapping, and extortion served as key sources of finance to reinforce the group's presence throughout the country. These activities became even more important as funding from external actors, especially Cuba and the Soviet Union, faded at the end of the Cold War.

The FARC's transformation by the Eighth Guerrilla Conference (1993) was substantial. During the conference, the group drew up ambitious military plans that assumed continued growth over the next five years and established a plan to govern the country after taking power. This plan would influence the negotiating agenda when the government and the FARC held formal talks from 1999 until 2002.

During those talks, and amid an ongoing war, both sides strengthened their military power. Increased defense spending and US assistance through Plan Colombia, which began in 1998, fortified the Colombian armed forces, who had clearly gained the upper hand by 2002. At some 18,000 soldiers, however, FARC had never been larger. Both sides believed they were in positions of strength, but the condition most conducive to successful talks—what negotiation theorists call mutually hurting stalemate—was absent. The government believed its offer was more than sufficient to end the war. The FARC sought more than the state could grant.

When talks broke down in early 2002, Colombia changed its approach to fighting the guerrillas. The newly modernized military retook territory key to the security of large populations, the national economy, and citizen perception. Guerrillas were driven from towns and villages where they

7 "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army," Stanford University, August 15, 2015, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/89>.

had influence and reverted to a previous organizational structure. For years, FARC had operated as a formal military, concentrating soldiers in large formations. Now under pressure, small bands were employing hit and run tactics again. From 2002 to 2008, state advances were frequent, vicious, and sometimes illegal, but they had their intended effect. Over that period, more than half of all FARC soldiers deserted or were killed or captured.

In this context, an important development in 2008 went mostly unnoticed by the public. Signs emerged that the FARC was slowing, and in some cases reversing, government advances. Casualties in the ranks of the armed forces multiplied as civilians remained caught in the crossfire. Increasingly, analysts began to believe that defeating the FARC militarily would be prohibitively costly in humanitarian and financial terms. As former presidential candidate and FARC hostage Ingrid Betancourt would later write, “Despite the government’s undeniable military achievements, the country was still moored by FARC’s presence.”⁸

These two stages of the war—the debilitation of FARC from 2002 to 2008 and the inability of the state to defeat the group definitively from 2008 to 2010—were the structural conditions that led Santos to consider negotiations when he took office in 2010. Colombia, he judged, had reached a mutually hurting stalemate. Both sides were suffering the costs of war; neither could end it through force. The time had come again to seek peace through dialogue.

Failed Negotiations

The prospect of a negotiated solution to Colombia’s internal conflict first arose during the administration of Belisario Betancur Cuartas (1982–86). Exploring the possibility of dialogue has been a constant across administrations ever since, and successes were achieved with the M-19, the Popular Liberation Army, and the Socialist Renewal Current (a faction of the National Liberation Army), as well as with smaller organizations like the indigenous guerrilla movement Quintín Lamé. Until recently, however, talks with FARC, and the broader National Liberation Army, have been a series of failures.

Betancur sought peace especially with M-19 and FARC. Dialogue with the former broke down quickly, but significant advances were made with the latter. After agreeing to a truce in 1984, for example, FARC formed the Patriotic Union, a Leftist political party that included guerrillas who had laid down arms. The same talks contributed to political and administrative reforms that had roots outside the peace process, including the introduction of local elections for mayors.

The paramilitary phenomenon emerged around this time, in part because a negotiated settlement threatened the interests of key sectors in society. The military had tentatively cooperated with Betancur’s peace initiative but harbored doubts about guerrilla intentions that contributed to unraveling the peace process. Local politicians, landholders, and drug traffickers, in contrast, opposed talks outright and sought to combat FARC free of legal constraints. As the conflict took on this new dimension, skirmishes between the parties led to larger confrontations.

8 Ingrid Betancourt, “At War over the Right Kind of Peace,” *New York Times*, December 5, 2016.

Talks between the government and FARC were waning by 1987; the process officially died in December 1990.

A perverse consequence of this early attempt to achieve peace through dialogue was the annihilation of the Patriotic Union in the late 1980s. More than 3,000 of its members, including congressmen, city councilmembers, and mayors, were assassinated.⁹ Through direct action, or by failing to protect individuals, the state was responsible for a large number of these assassinations. Other responsible actors included paramilitaries, local political bosses, and drug traffickers. This history contributes to the trepidation some guerrillas feel about giving up arms, and it has framed recent discussions about security guarantees for FARC.

By 1997, after unsuccessful negotiation attempts between FARC, the National Liberation Army, and President César Gaviria Trujillo (1990–94), the war had become a humanitarian disaster, civilians its principal victims. The perceived lack of respect for basic human dignity among the warring parties catalyzed a popular movement, the Citizen Mandate for Peace, to call for a return to the negotiating table. Meanwhile, paramilitaries acted without restraint, often with the quiet approval of politicians and the state's military and intelligence apparatus. Guerrilla kidnappings increased to the highest levels in history, extortion was rife, and entire communities were caught in the crossfire.

Andrés Pastrana Arango was elected president (1998–2002) because he was perceived to be the person most likely to negotiate a settlement with FARC. In January 1999, his administration began formal talks with the group in San Vicente del Caguán. The state's greatest initial concession was logistical: the dialogue took place in a demilitarized zone (DMZ) measuring some 42,000 square kilometers (roughly the size of Switzerland), where FARC could reside without fear of a military presence.¹⁰ The substance of the agenda was expansive: it included 12 main points and more than 100 subpoints that ranged from the social and economic structure of the state to environmental policy. It was a recipe for endless negotiation.¹¹

Talks also suffered from procedural problems. From the beginning, Pastrana conveyed the image of a government, as he explained in his memoir, “willing to do anything for peace.”¹² The president routinely extended deadlines and made other concessions to FARC for little or nothing in return. Well-intentioned attempts to build good will convinced FARC that the president was weak. The group learned that it could test the government, freeze talks, and issue ultimatums without fear of repercussions. The continued growth of paramilitary forces beyond the DMZ complicated the picture, in part because FARC correctly believed that the government could have done more to combat it.

The Caguán peace process lasted three years, ending abruptly on February 20, 2002, after FARC hijacked an airplane and kidnapped

9 John Otis, “Guerrilla Politics: Colombia’s FARC May Soon Be on the Ballot,” Public Radio International, September 25, 2013, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-09-25/guerrilla-politics-colombias-farc-may-soon-be-ballot>.

10 US General Accounting Office (GAO), *Narcotics Threat from Colombia Continues to Grow* (Washington, DC: GAO, 1999), 10.

11 Harvey F. Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold: The Peace Process of Colombian President Andrés Pastrana* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 71.

12 Andrés Pastrana Arango, *La palabra bajo fuego* (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana, 2005), 142.

one of its passengers, Senator Jorge Eduardo Gechem Turbay. This event, in the wake of myriad challenges to the peace process, united the government and public opinion against FARC, which was more confident in its numbers and capacity than ever before. It was the final blow to a battered process that, by this time, few believed had any prospect of success.

The failure at Caguán led to a situation in Colombia where even talking about negotiations with FARC became taboo. Most Colombians believed the government had bent over backwards to accommodate the group—that it had done so to a fault—and that the guerrillas had negotiated in bad faith throughout the process. The alternative they now sought was *mano dura*, a hard line against FARC whereby the newly-modernized military would confront the group directly and mercilessly.

After the election of Alvaro Uribe Vélez (2002–10), the public began to believe that military defeat of the insurgency was possible, and it increasingly accepted the government's refrain that FARC had long abandoned politics in favor of narco-terrorism. This perspective set the stage for a loosening—and sometimes breaking—of the rules of war. Alleged government ties to paramilitaries and “false positive” scandals, like that in Soacha in 2008, crowded the headlines. Though in his second term Uribe made overtures to the National Liberation Army, and even tentatively to FARC, his eight years in office were overwhelmingly characterized by military attacks on the guerrillas. Uribe was effective: on his watch, the FARC's ranks fell to some 7,000 soldiers.¹³

When Santos took the oath of office in 2010, many believed he would continue Uribe's hard line against FARC. As Uribe's minister of defense from 2006–09, Santos had overseen dramatic military gains in the war. In his inaugural address on August 7, 2010, however, he suggested that there may be another way, that “the door to negotiations was not locked” and could be opened if the guerrillas demonstrated a real desire for peace.¹⁴ In this context, with public opinion firmly against renewed talks, Santos quietly initiated back channel contacts with FARC to see if the parties could return to the table.

Dialogue in Havana

Discrete contacts preceded conversations with guerrilla representatives in Cuba, where formal negotiations would continue when they went public in 2012. Though it may have been possible to negotiate elsewhere, talks in Colombia were unthinkable: the memory of Caguán remained a nightmare. Legal risks for FARC negotiators in many countries were considerable. Negotiations in Venezuela, which had given aid to the insurgents, would have been unpalatable to the Colombian public. Of all potential locations, Cuba was the logical choice. Its government was sympathetic to the FARC's politics, yet the island had begun its own political and economic transition. As a host, Cuba had credibility in the eyes of all critical stakeholders.

¹³ Claire Felter and Danielle Renwick, “Colombia's Civil Conflict,” Council on Foreign Relations, January 11, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/colombias-civil-conflict>.

¹⁴ “Discurso completo de posesión de Juan Manuel Santos [Complete text of Juan Manuel Santos's Inauguration Speech], *Semana* (Bogotá), August 7, 2010.

In contrast to Caguán, the agenda in Havana was limited and well-defined. Topics included (a) agricultural reform; (b) political participation and democratic opening; (c) cessation of hostilities and guerrilla demobilization; (d) the problem of illicit drugs; (e) victims' rights; and (f) implementation, verification, and popular endorsement of the agreement. At no point did the talks consider anything that could undermine the sovereignty of the state or alter its political, economic, or social structure. The dialogue was reformist but with the tradeoffs required to end the war.

Reaching agreement on the details of incorporating former FARC members into legal politics, and especially how they would be represented in institutions such as Colombia's congress, posed a serious challenge. So too did reaching agreement on punishment for those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. These two issues—FARC political representation and “transitional justice”—were the principal impediments to the settlement. They were, and continue to be, the areas critics of the accord target most effectively, arguing that FARC impunity and influence through legal politics are the opposite of justice.

Leading the “No” campaign throughout this process have been former presidents Uribe, the man most responsible for FARC's diminution leading up to negotiations, and Pastrana. These men and the conservative opposition they represent argue that dialogue with FARC should be limited to terms of surrender, not extended to political compromise. For months before and after the initial accord, and en route to the public referendum on October 2, 2016, they campaigned vigorously against the agreement, often stretching the truth to its breaking point. Nevertheless, most analysts, world leaders, and Colombians believed their efforts would fail. In the weeks leading to the October referendum, polls suggested that a two-to-one split in favor of the accord was more likely than its defeat.

As with other geopolitical surprises in 2017, the analysts and experts were wrong. Many reasons contributed to the upset, but a development one week before the vote merits special mention. For months, Santos had explained that public rejection of the accord would mean a return to war, but preceding the vote the FARC's leader, Timochenko, told a newspaper that FARC would not return to war regardless of what happened in the referendum. That statement, widespread hatred of FARC, a vigorous No campaign, and perhaps the national assumption that the measure would pass created apathy. Only 37 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot in perhaps the most important referendum in Colombia's history. The tally was 49.8 percent for, 50.2 percent against.¹⁵

Six weeks after the referendum failed, the government and FARC signed a revised deal that clarified dozens of ambiguities in the text and incorporated more than 50 substantive changes in line with opposition proposals. Among these, the new agreement provided assurances to land owners regarding property guarantees, specified that FARC would provide a balance sheet of assets to be used for victims' reparations, clarified the government could use aerial spraying to eradicate illegal crops, prohibited foreign judges from participating in a forthcoming

15 Daniela Gonzalez, “Colombia's Vote against Peace Was Far from a Failure,” *Stanford Politics*, February 1, 2017.

special tribunal, and reduced the amount of funding the FARC's political party would receive to compete in upcoming elections.

These changes strengthened the accord in many respects, but the most important parts of the agreement remained unchanged. Cosmetic modifications notwithstanding, on the core questions of political representation and transitional justice, neither the government nor FARC were willing to budge. According to the current agreement, like the initial one, the political party that succeeds FARC will participate in elections with ten seats guaranteed in congress—five in the lower house and five in the senate—for two congressional terms (until 2026). Rather than face prison time, those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity will have restrictions placed on their movements, contribute to victims' reparations, and otherwise serve their communities for periods of five to eight years.

Recommendations for US Defense Policy

In November 2016, Colombia's congress endorsed the revised agreement unanimously.¹⁶ Colombia's constitutional court has since approved congressional ratification of the accord, as well as a fast-track mechanism that enables quicker passage of legislation than possible during the normal legislative process. In the months since, thousands of FARC guerrillas have congregated in more than two dozen demilitarized zones to begin the process of demobilization.

The momentum of the process is on the side of those advocating for an end to war, but progress is not irreversible. Rulings by Colombia's constitutional court in May 2017 paved the way for opponents of the accord to string out the process of implementation ahead of 2018 presidential elections, introducing further uncertainty into the process and complicating efforts to fully transition away from political violence.¹⁷ In this context, the US Department of Defense should implement policies that signal its commitment to support Bogotá through and beyond the end of Colombia's war. Adoption of the following recommendations will do that, thereby strengthening the state, reducing the likelihood of renewed insurgency, and paving the way for peace.

Continue robust assistance to Colombia's armed forces. Over the past two decades, US aid to Colombia has exceeded \$10 billion, much of which has taken the form of security assistance. As the war winds down, calls for the United States to scale back support for the Colombian armed forces have begun in both countries. These calls should be resisted. In the coming months and years, Colombia will need to expand the state's presence to areas where it has been historically weak, counter recent spikes in coca cultivation, and combat criminal and other illegal

16 The vote was 130-0 in the 166-member lower house and 75-0 in the 102-member senate. The conservative opposition led by Alvaro Uribe's Centro Democrático abstained. Helen Murphy, "Colombian Peace Deal Passed by Congress, Ending 52-Year War," Reuters, November 30, 2016.

17 On May 17, 2017, Colombia's constitutional court overturned part of the peace accord's legal framework, which prevented making decisions on laws and reforms en masse and required modifications only occur by changing the agreement with government approval. A high-ranking FARC official, responded, "The court's decision doesn't help the implementation of the accord, it opens the doors to a return to war." James Bargent, "Colombia Court Ruling Spells Trouble for FARC Peace Process," InSight Crime, May 19, 2017, <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/colombia-court-ruling-spells-trouble-farc-peace-process/>.

networks that seek to fill the void left by FARC.¹⁸ While nonsecurity assistance will be at least as important as security assistance going forward, Colombia's armed forces will be essential to maintaining stability in postconflict environments.

President Barack Obama's commitment in March 2016 to aid Colombia to the tune of \$500 million per year over the next five years would represent further substantial investment in a country that has been a leading recipient of US aid for years.¹⁹ Properly allocated, however, and subject to proper conditions, addressed in further detail below, the investment would be money well spent. It would facilitate Colombia's transition to peace, end war in the hemisphere, and reinforce relations with a strategic ally. Military leaders in the Southern Command in particular, who have strong relationships with Bogotá, should advocate for continued and robust security assistance.

Advocate for limiting the internal role of the Colombian military. Although security assistance must continue, the Department of Defense should use its political and financial leverage, and the good will it has built with Bogotá in recent years, to advocate for a more limited internal role for the Colombian military. For decades, Colombia's army has conducted law enforcement in some of the areas most affected by the war, a condition justified by circumstance. Law enforcement is not a proper role for any army, however, or for any other branch of the military. Militaries are trained to use overwhelming violence to defeat enemies, not minimal violence to police communities. Differences in culture, training, and tack between military and police forces can and do lead to disparities in outcomes on the ground—including, perhaps most importantly, civilian trust in state authority.

As Colombia moves into a postconflict environment, the Department of Defense should encourage augmenting police forces throughout the country, especially in the areas most affected by the war. Simultaneously, the Defense Department should push for a gradual reduction of the military's role in the daily lives of average citizens and an increased focus on the traditional role of militaries: external defense. This transition will not happen overnight but should be constantly monitored and reassessed. Security assistance to Colombia should increasingly reflect this prioritization. If Bogotá does not make progress in this regard as Colombia consolidates peace, policymakers should condition subsequent security assistance on such progress.

Condition security assistance on increased respect for human rights. One of the key policy debates coming out of Colombia's war will involve a basic question about ends and means. Did loosening the military's rules of engagement under the Uribe administration, which contributed to

18 Coca production, up 18 percent from 2015–16, is at the highest point since 1994. Associate Press, "Colombia's Coca Production Soars to Highest Level in Two Decades, US Says," *Guardian*, March 14, 2017.

19 Daniel Kurtz-Phelan and Dan Restrepo, "Colombia's Tenuous Peace Needs U.S. Support," *Foreign Policy*, May 17, 2017; and Arlene B. Tickner, *Colombia, the United States, and Security Cooperation by Proxy* (Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America [WOLA], 2014). This figure includes military and nonmilitary spending, but dollar amounts allocated to support the armed forces are substantial: \$143 million for international narcotics control and law enforcement, \$44.6 million from the defense budget for counterdrug programs, \$38.5 million in foreign military financing, and \$21 million for nonproliferation, antiterrorism, demining, and related programs. Adam Isacson, "Peace Colombia: What's New about It?," Washington Office on Latin America, February 15, 2016, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/peace-colombia-whats-new-about-it/>.

decimating FARC but involved gross violations of human rights, play a decisive role in ending the war? Even if the answer to that question is yes, human rights violations perpetrated by the Colombian military have not come without significant costs. In some parts of Colombia, trust in the armed forces is no higher than in the illegal groups that share their battlespace. Rebuilding that trust will take time, and will be a tenuous process, but it will be essential for the proper functioning of the state in the years to come.

The Department of Defense, along with the Department of State and others, can take several steps to encourage increased respect for human rights among Colombia's armed forces. First among these is the conditioning of security assistance. The key tools in this regard are the Leahy laws, introduced in 1997 and expanded in 2011, which require the United States to restrict security assistance to police and military units engaged in human rights violations.²⁰ Importantly, this tool is a scalpel, not an axe, that allows the continuation of assistance to units not engaged in human rights violations within the same country. That distinction is appropriate, but to avoid scenarios where some units have more flexibility (implicit or explicit) regarding respect for human rights, US defense officials working with their Colombian counterparts must remain vigilant and foster a culture of reporting that can detect indirect violations of the policy.

Other steps that would encourage increased respect for human rights include the promotion and funding of sensitivity training, especially vis-à-vis race and gender; working with counterparts to design financial and promotional incentives that promote human rights; and the trials of officials who have allegedly overseen or committed human rights violations.²¹ American officials might also consider postponing plans to have members of the Colombian military train officers in other countries until Colombia has renewed its track record of consistent respect for human rights.

Assist the expansion of state presence throughout Colombia. Colombia will need to expand its presence into areas where it has been historically weak. US counterparts should assist Bogotá and local governments to bring courts, education, healthcare, housing, infrastructure, and other services to all parts of the country, especially those most affected by the war. These endeavors do not fall within the authority of the Department of Defense, nor should they, but a now-famous 2013 statement by US Secretary of Defense James Mattis (then-commander of US Central Command) looms large: “If you don’t fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition ultimately.”²² The secretary’s message here is that war and peace are about more than bullets and bombs. Defense officials should continually reinforce this message in Washington, Bogotá, and throughout Colombia, recognizing that the military component of peacemaking is one of many.

20 10 U.S.C.; Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, Pub. L. No. 87-195, 22 U.S.C. 2378d, § 620M (2017); and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, Pub. L. No. 115-91 (2017).

21 Many of the hardest-hit populations in Colombia’s war have been Afro-Colombian and indigenous, and these populations have disproportionately suffered human rights abuses at the hands of the state.

22 Joseph K. Grieboski, “A Real National Security Budget Would Fully Fund State Department,” *The Hill*, March 23, 2017, <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/325320-a-budget-that-emphasizes-national-security-would-fully-fund>.

On the security front, expanding state presence will involve confronting criminal groups that may or may not have political roots (especially in the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces), but that all have an interest in contesting state control of local territory and the state's monopoly on the use of force. The most important organization in this regard is the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, which operates primarily in Colombia's northern departments. Taking on this group will require both military and police action, which should be supported by the United States through the provision of funding, training, and intelligence. Defense officials in both countries should be careful not to let Colombia slip into the bad habits that once characterized the war with FARC. Though a serious problem, this organization does not pose a threat to Colombia along the lines that FARC once did, nor is such a threat posed by any existing group foreseeable.

Augment support for guerrilla reintegration. Among the principal challenges Colombia faces as it transitions from war is the reintegration of former guerrillas into civilian life. Former guerrillas will sometimes face resentment from fellow citizens and potential employers. Knowledge of weaponry, surveillance, combat, and other skills relevant to war will make these individuals attractive to drug traffickers and organized criminal networks like those mentioned above. Although the peace accord provides transition assistance of \$6,100 to each former guerrilla for the first two years of the transition, reports suggest that some illegal armed groups are offering up to triple that amount. When former guerrillas realize that they can make more money for themselves and their families by breaching the accord, even if not by returning to the fray of political violence, incentives to do so will be strong.

To mitigate these risks, the Department of Defense should support Bogotá in its allocation of welfare, job training, mental health counseling, and security guarantees to those who have chosen to give up arms. The Defense Department's role in some of these areas will be more direct than others, but the success of these programs will bear directly on Colombia's long-term security environment. The Departments of Defense and State should also plan for the contingency that resources currently allocated for these programs will be insufficient. Though it would be unwise to advertise the availability of additional funds if necessary—this would create incentives for existing resources to not complete the job and give ammunition to critics who object to any aid for former FARC members—the United States and Colombia should do what it takes to ensure the success of the reintegration effort.

Push for a comprehensive truth and reconciliation commission. Truth and reconciliation will be necessary for the construction of a durable peace. As a longtime partner of Bogotá, and a key actor in Colombia's war for decades, the Department of Defense should work closely with Colombia and other countries (especially Ecuador and Venezuela, to the extent possible) to release previously classified information about the conflict. This communication should happen as soon as possible, consistent with the requirements of national security. The guiding principle of the process should be transparency. Extensive interviews with former combatants, victims, political leaders, and others will be required. Ample resources from the Department of Defense and elsewhere should be dedicated to psychological support, the construction of a formal record of the

conflict, such as through the creation of a national museum, and other programs aimed at national reconciliation. Commissions like these have been integral to ending various civil wars, including those in a majority of countries in South America. It should come as no surprise that truth and reconciliation will be essential to end the world's longest civil war.

Conclusion

As Colombia moves toward presidential elections in mid-2018, President Santos and all Colombians dedicated to ending the war must work expeditiously to carry out the terms of the recent peace accord so its benefits may be felt by all Colombians. The United States should back this effort in word and in deed, providing political, diplomatic, military, financial and technical support for implementation on the ground. The more the parties can do to consolidate peace now, the less likely the accord is to be successfully challenged before or after presidential elections.

The impending absence of large-scale political violence in Colombia suggests the country is poised for significant positive change. What comes next is the need to focus on solving the problems that remain: corruption, healthcare, education, infrastructure, employment, social security, poverty, inequality, economic diversification, and more. Each of these challenges is serious, and the current states of some are dire, but addressing all of them will be made easier by the absence of war. For the first time in more than half a century, that reality is upon us.

Seth Cantey

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