



Colombia

Peace and Stability in the Post-Conflict Era

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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A Report of the CSIS Americas Program

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Executive Summary

The project that culminated in this report was conceived just over a year ago as an initiative to assess the major accomplishments in strengthening the Colombian government's efforts to bring peace and stability to its countryside.

The project's primary goal was to examine what the government of Colombia is currently doing to consolidate the success it has achieved and prevent any regression to the problems that have long plagued the country—with a particular focus on the role of U.S. policy given its place as Colombia's key regional security partner.

Overall, this project sought to determine whether the United States is on the right course in reducing security and development assistance to Colombia by the 2014 deadline. The project sought to identify those areas where continued support is still necessary and most pivotal—and where it can most effectively foster the consolidation of the gains achieved to date.

In this task, the project could then become a point of reference for U.S. policymakers in determining the future course of the countries' bilateral relationship. At a time when political discourse in Washington is polarized and discretionary spending is tight, the project aimed to provide unique insights into Colombia and the unfolding situation there, as well as offering policy options that would have broad, bipartisan appeal in the United States.

At the time of publication, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the armed political insurgency largely responsible for the widespread rural violence that has plagued the country for decades, were engaged in negotiations seeking to end Colombia's decades-long conflict. Though the talks' prospects are themselves uncertain, the peace process is currently the way forward agreed upon by both sides in the conflict—and an important alternative for consolidating its hard-earned gains and finally bringing an end to the 50 years of fighting that have left hundreds of thousands of casualties and immeasurable human suffering in their wake.

There are, to be sure, countless factors that play into the achievement and consolidation of a real and lasting peace in Colombia. The peace process, the upcoming electoral cycle, and the political and economic stability of Venezuela—each of these has the potential to secure (or, for that matter, to prevent) the resolution of the decades-long conflict. Even as these variables remain in a constant state of flux, the country is at a critical juncture. Colombia's very future—all that the country has worked to achieve—hangs in the balance.

By means of this report, we hope to take up this issue, addressing where Colombia stands now, how it has gotten there, and where it will be moving forward. Ultimately, our recommendations, which will be elaborated on later in the executive summary, are as follows:

1. The U.S.-Colombia strategic partnership should continue for the foreseeable future—even should the ongoing peace process prove successful in formally ending the principal conflict and resolving the several outstanding issues on its agenda.

2. In that vein, the following issues will likely emerge as central to the two countries' partnership in the future: land restitution; offensive action against non-guerrilla perpetrators of violence; support for the Colombian judiciary; resource allocation for internally displaced persons; protection for the country's indigenous communities and other vulnerable groups; and the clearing of non-state armed actors from areas of illicit resource extraction.
3. It is also imperative that the Colombian government take on a number of initiatives of its own, including: an effective public messaging campaign to alter continued perceptions that the country remains at war; and a monitoring and evaluation framework, to keep track of whether and to what extent progress is being made in the consolidation programs already in place.

Colombia Then and Now

Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos and his government spent the summer and fall engaged in peace talks with the FARC, with an eye to ending the widespread rural violence that has plagued the country for decades. And while the talks' prospects have fluctuated with the unpredictable behavior of Venezuelan leadership—a key player in the ongoing conflict and negotiations—it cannot be denied that, whatever the talks' outcome, the Colombian government has made huge strides in ameliorating the struggles the country has faced over the course of the last decade.

Much of that progress is credited to Colombia's own efforts—but important, as well, are the results obtained through Plan Colombia, a bilateral effort of the Colombian and U.S. governments begun in 2000 to address the South American country's challenges and strengthen the Colombian government's ability to establish peace, law, and order in its national territory.

By most accounts, in 2000 the government was barely in control of one-third of Colombia's countryside and had ceded a sanctuary the size of Switzerland to terrorist insurgents. Just seven years later, government presence had extended into about 90 percent of national territory, and in 2008, security forces rescued 15 high-profile hostages and decimated the insurgency's leadership in a series of successful raids.

A 2008 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report stated that Plan Colombia—and the U.S. aid included in it—helped cut Colombia's homicide rate nearly in half. At the same time, annual kidnappings were reduced by over 85 percent.¹ And the use of the country's highways increased by nearly 60 percent in the first six years of the partnership alone, a signal of the population's growing confidence in the security of the roads and the countryside they traverse.

Colombia has, in recent years, begun to enjoy the major security gains derived both through its own efforts and by means of Plan Colombia. And, though there is still much work to be done, as the country has become an increasingly stable partner, the U.S.-Colombia relationship has begun to shift in kind.

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), "GAO-09-71: Plan Colombia," October 6, 2008, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/290/282511.pdf>.

Once focused on U.S. aid for Colombian efforts to improve the rule of law, effect stability, and root out rural violence, the two countries have now turned to an increasingly commercial phase in their relations, with the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (CTPA) and a sharp increase in U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in recent years; from 2010 to 2011, U.S. FDI in Colombia increased by 7 percent,² and from 2011 to 2012, FDI increased by an additional 15 percent.³

By most measures, then, the U.S.-Colombia partnership ranks among the most successful of its kind. It would, however, be a grave mistake to assume that the work is done. Though Colombia remains among the top-ten recipients of U.S. military assistance, the United States is drawing down bilateral aid as part of its exit strategy to end the Plan Colombia partnership by 2014.

With the United States focused on the expanding commercial side of the relationship, there are concerns that it may be too soon to draw down bilateral security, counternarcotic, and development efforts when state authority has yet to be permanently extended to broad swaths of Colombia's countryside. Despite impressive progress, reduced guerilla fronts continue to operate, while some demobilized insurgent and paramilitary combatants have returned to murder, marauding, and drug trafficking.

If Colombia's many gains are not consolidated, its recently hard-won progress could recede, propelling the countryside back into the hands of transnational criminals and terrorists.

New Hope: The Peace Process

After decades of conflict and a dozen years of efforts under Plan Colombia, the Colombian government agreed to begin long-awaited talks with the FARC in November 2012, marking the first time the two parties to the conflict had attempted negotiations since 2002. Six months later, the two groups reached an agreement on the first of the six issues on the agenda: rural land reform.

Early this fall, with just over four months remaining before the hoped-for deadline of January 2014, the FARC officially put the negotiations process on hold. And, just a few weeks after the start of this so-called "pause," the two sides resumed talks, quickly coming to an agreement on the second issue on the agenda: the political participation of the FARC.

The pause, which was requested after the government announced its hopes for a public referendum on whatever agreement is derived from the talks during the national election cycles next year, was met with mixed reactions.

On one hand, there were those—including the government negotiators—that voiced their understanding of the FARC's break, citing the group's need to consider the referendum proposal and its effects, particularly given their preference for a constituent assembly

² "Colombia," Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, 2012, <http://www.ustr.gov/countries-regions/americas/colombia>.

³ "Preliminary Overview of Latin America and the Caribbean: Colombia," Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2013, http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/3/48593/Colombia_ing.pdf.

that could engrain the accords in Colombia's constitution. And, in the context of the breakthrough achieved in May and the various statements made by both sides as to their firm intention to see the process through and effect a real and lasting peace, the pause, so the argument goes, paled in comparison to the progress made in the lead-up to it.

That said, many still fear that the pause, though already over, was another on a long list of delays and obstacles that collectively may stand in the way of successful negotiations. With the initial deadline fast approaching and four major agenda items still to be addressed, the pressure is on both the government and the FARC to ensure an expedient and—to the extent possible—meaningful process. The worry, then, is that this delay may be the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back, even with the talks back up and running.

Even such worries, though, were largely dispelled by the quick resumption of the talks—and the even quicker resolution of the issue of political participation, considered one of the most controversial aspects of the negotiations.

The hope, then, is that the two sides will use the momentum they have built to address the remaining agenda items and proceed through the entire framework for peace.

The coming electoral cycle adds still another dimension of complexity to the negotiations, as well. Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos's hope to ratify the agreement in a public referendum during the national elections in early 2014 puts additional pressure on the process—the accords can be put to a public vote only if they have been concluded well in advance of election day. And because of the January deadline for the peace process—a deadline set by President Santos—the government faces pressure to conclude the negotiations on time. A failure to do so would likely factor into their reelection prospects.

The Report: Colombia: Peace and Stability in the Post-Conflict Era

Ultimately, this report's findings should be useful for both the United States and Colombia. The latter case may be more straightforward. After all, it can hardly be argued that an in-depth look at the effects of decreased U.S. aid to Colombia are anything but pivotal to the South American country's consolidation of the gains it has worked so hard to earn. But the findings are no less valuable for the United States.

At its inception, Plan Colombia was the largest expenditure in the U.S. foreign aid budget outside of Israel and Egypt. The bilateral security partnership model it followed is one characteristic of U.S. efforts around the world—and failure of the partnership could imply the parallel failure of all U.S. partnerships built along the same model. And such a failure would suggest that the billions of dollars in aid the U.S. government has contributed to the efforts toward Colombia's peace and stability were ultimately wasted on an unachievable—or at least as-yet unachieved—goal. Plan Colombia's success or failure, then, represents an evaluation of U.S. regional foreign policy since 2000.

This project set out to evaluate five critical areas, which mirror the key points of President Santos's development plan:

1. Distribution of people, resources, and infrastructure;

2. Effectiveness of public security and the extent of state authority;
3. Development of economic opportunity;
4. Social integration of rural populations;
5. Role and effectiveness of current U.S. security and development assistance.

Through an in-depth analysis of these areas, this project sought to answer a pair of central questions:

1. To what extent have joint U.S.-Colombian efforts succeeded in ending the violence that has plagued the country for a half-century?
2. What should be the role of the United States moving forward in Colombia's efforts to consolidate its gains and affect real and lasting peace throughout its national territory?

What follows is the full explanation of the project's findings.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Given this report's exploration of the current state of Colombia's ongoing conflict and the challenges the government and country will continue to face going forward, the authors propose the following recommendations:

1. The U.S.-Colombia strategic partnership should continue for the foreseeable future—even should the ongoing peace process prove successful in formally ending the principal conflict and resolving the several outstanding issues on its agenda.
 - The political implications of losing influence in Colombia would be significant. Damage to that relationship could include the loss of a key ally who has consistently demonstrated support for policies key to U.S. interests—both in the region and around the world.
 - But furthering their cooperation, the U.S. and Colombian governments must become flexible and agile in dealing with the shifting security challenges the two will face in Colombia moving forward.
 - The recent shifts in the nature of the conflict are largely the reflection of the success of the joint strategy of dismantling the major existential threats to the state—but maintaining the current positive trends will require a constant reevaluation of the national strategy and goals, as well as of resource allocation.
2. In that vein, the following issues will likely emerge as central to the two countries' partnership in the future: land restitution; offensive action against non-guerrilla perpetrators of violence; support for the Colombian judiciary; resource allocation for internally displaced persons; protection for the country's indigenous communities and other vulnerable groups; and the clearing of non-state armed actors from areas of illicit resource extraction.

- *Land Restitution:* The issue of land restitution must remain among the top priorities of the partnership. The recent progress has given the government some breathing room, with an opportunity to establish a positive state presence. Still, the issue has the real potential to develop into a fatal bottleneck. Land disputes deeply affect the Colombian population and are often a primary driver of rural violence. Efforts to resolve this complex and thorny problem must be accelerated, and U.S. aid in this field should ideally focus on providing technological support to these efforts. While the horizon for measuring success remains several years off—at best—the more robust the effort, the more credible the overall strategy becomes.
- *Non-Guerrilla Perpetrators of Violence:* Should the conflict with armed guerrilla forces wind down, the greatest threat to both social inclusion and government consolidation will likely be the continued impunity of the powerful, non-guerrilla landholders whose private security details continue to threaten and attack vulnerable minorities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and recently victims who have returned to their land. Whether these groups are referred to as demobilized paramilitaries, BACRIM, or simply power brokers protecting their perceived interests, their continued impunity demonstrates that the state does not have a monopoly on violence—even despite the departure of guerrillas. It also suggests that the state is unwilling, unable, or both to live up to its promises to treat the excluded and vulnerable as citizens worthy of state protection. Moving forward, the Colombian government needs to build its capacity to pursue, investigate, prosecute, and (if necessary) do battle against those who continue to perpetrate violence.
- *The Colombian Judiciary:* The judiciary has, without a doubt, come a long way since the 1990s. That said, the courts continue to suffer from understaffing. This renders them incapable of keeping up with the need to prosecute perpetrators of crimes and with the demand for specialized legal services as land and property rights issues emerge and develop. Support for paralegal training and scholarships for law school students might be useful steps in addressing these issues in the medium term, building judicial capacity to benefit the country in coming years.
- *Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):* The deficiency of resources for IDPs continues to hamper the process of reintegrating these people into their communities of origin. Regional IDP centers should be set up in more remote areas—perhaps in tandem with other government offices—so that IDPs need not travel long distances to register for and receive the services provided for them. The U.S. and Colombian governments should work together to institutionalize the changes that have already been made and ensure the institutions and personnel that work to better this issue are adequately trained and financially supported.
- *Indigenous and Vulnerable Groups:* Indigenous communities and other vulnerable groups—among them women and Afro-Colombians—remain disproportionately affected by the conflict and its implications, and by the violence and land expropriation in particular. Many Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, especially those seeking to preserve their way of life, remain too poor to adequately represent themselves before the courts or protect themselves from all sides of the conflict. Every effort should be made to ensure the protection of their

traditional lands, ensuring that title to their lands is not improperly awarded to other claimants—and to provide legal services and other forms of support to improve their access to the judicial system.

- *Illicit Resource Extraction:* Efforts should focus, as a military priority, on the clearing of non-state armed actors from areas of illicit resource and mineral extraction. The ability of these groups to access and sell coltan, gold, emeralds, and other minerals both deprives the state of revenue and has served as an economic lifeline for irregular groups that feed into the nation's violence. Illegal mining—when carried out by such armed groups—offers a stream of revenue to these actors and implies few of the risks of being involved in the production and trade of cocaine. The issue must be addressed if the groups are to be deprived of the financial resources they need to continue their operations.

3. It is also imperative that the Colombian government take on a number of initiatives of its own, including: an effective public messaging campaign to alter continued perceptions that the country remains at war; and a monitoring and evaluation framework, to keep track of whether and to what extent progress is being made in the consolidation programs already in place.

Structure of the Full Report

In the full and forthcoming report, we will turn first to a brief history of Colombia's rural conflict, beginning with its roots in the 1920s and continuing through the current Santos administration. The report then goes on to address the issues most central to the country's long conflict in the chapters that follow: security; land tenure; natural resources; infrastructure; governance; and social inclusion. And finally, the report concludes with a set of recommendations for Colombia and the U.S.-Colombia partnership moving forward, in the context of all that has happened in recent years.

Appendix: CSIS Americas Program Experts Workshop Participants

Roberto Angulo, *Director, Ingreso Social, Departamento para la Prosperidad Social*

Alberto Ariza, *Universidad Sergio Arboleda*

Álvaro Balcázar, *Coordinador General, Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena*

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Juan Carlos Betancur, *Magistrado Auxiliar, Consejo Superior, Despacho del Magistrado Néstor Raúl Correa, Sala Administrativa, Consejo Superior de la Judicatura*

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María Victoria Llorente, *Directora, Fundación Ideas para la Paz*

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Jenny Molina, *Centro de Estudios Estratégicos Latinoamericanos (CEELAT)*

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Gilberto Toro Giraldo, *Director Ejecutivo Federación Colombiana de Municipios*

Gabriel Turriago, *Coordinator, United Nations Development Program*

About the Authors

Carl Meacham is director of the CSIS Americas Program. He joined CSIS from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), where he served on the professional staff for Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) for over a decade. He served as the senior adviser for Latin America and the Caribbean on the committee, the most senior Republican Senate staff position for this region. In that capacity, he travelled extensively to the region to work with foreign governments, private-sector organizations, and civil society groups. He was also responsible for managing the committee's relationship with the State Department regarding the Western Hemisphere and overseeing its \$2 billion budget.

Before he joined SFRC, Meacham worked on the staff of two Democratic senators. Prior to his Senate work, he served at the Department of Commerce as special assistant to the deputy secretary, at the Cuban Affairs Bureau of the Department of State, and at the U.S. embassy in Madrid. Meacham is a native speaker of Spanish and was partly raised in Chile, his mother's country of origin. He received his B.A. from the University at Albany, State University of New York, and holds M.A. degrees from American University and Columbia University.

Douglas Farah is a senior associate of the Americas Program at CSIS and president at IBI Consultants LLC. He is an expert on transnational criminal organizations, insurgencies, ungoverned spaces, illicit money flows, and resource exploitation in Latin America. In recent years, he has written extensively about Iran's growing influence in Latin America, the Bolivarian revolution, and transnational criminal and terrorist networks in the region. From 1985 to 2005, he worked as a journalist, primarily as a foreign correspondent and investigative reporter for the *Washington Post*. In addition to several postings in Latin America, he served as West Africa bureau chief, international investigative correspondent, and a member of the investigative unit. Since leaving the *Post* in 2004, Mr. Farah has worked as a consultant to the U.S. government on national intelligence reform, nonstate armed actors, critical infrastructure protection, criminal-terrorist pipelines, bulk cash smuggling to Mexico, and other topics. He has also worked as a consultant with the World Bank, the Rand Corporation, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and other organizations. He is a frequent lecturer to the U.S. military institutions on the FARC and other Latin American insurgencies, and he has testified before Congress on numerous occasions. Mr. Farah is the author of two books: *Blood from Stones: The Secret Financial Network of Terror* (Broadway, 2004) and *Merchant of Death: Money, Guns, Planes and the Man Who Makes War Possible* (Wiley, 2007). He appears regularly in the national and international media and has been published in more than a dozen journals and magazines.

Robert D. Lamb is a senior fellow and director of the Program on Crisis, Conflict and Cooperation at CSIS and a research scholar at the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland. Dr. Lamb studies governance and development amid conflict, with an emphasis on hybrid political systems and complex crises. He has presented his work to policymakers and experts throughout the United States and in Afghanistan, Colombia, France, Germany, Greece, India, Korea, Pakistan, Romania, Russia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. A former Defense Department strategist, he has developed tools to help policymakers pay more attention to local governance and informal systems in places that terrorist, criminal, and insurgent networks use as safe

havens. As a doctoral candidate, he spent a year in Colombia developing new methods for studying gang governance, violence, and legitimacy in the stateless slums of Medellín, then joined CSIS as a visiting scholar after returning to Washington. He earned a Ph.D. in policy studies from the University of Maryland School of Public Policy in a program combining security, economics, and ethics. He received a B.A. in interdisciplinary studies from Gettysburg College, spent half a year in Nicaragua with a microdevelopment project, then worked for nine years as an editor and journalist, winning a National Press Club award in 2001, before changing careers after 9/11.

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