

INDEPENDENT TASK FORCE REPORT

# A Roadmap for US Engagement with Colombia



## CO-CHAIRS

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**Senator Roy Blunt**  
(R-MO)

**Senator Ben Cardin**  
(D-MD)

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# A Roadmap for US Engagement with Colombia

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(R-MO)

**Senator Ben Cardin**  
(D-MD)

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# POLICY MAKERS SPEAK OUT

“Colombia has made impressive economic, social, and security transformations in the past two decades. Now, peace building will require the international community’s financial and political support.”

**SECRETARY MADELEINE ALBRIGHT** served as US Secretary of State from 1997 to 2001 and as US Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

“Plan Colombia helped facilitate Colombia’s remarkable transformation as a legacy of conflict has receded and a new era of prosperity taken root. This success is thanks to the resilience of the Colombian people. Now, the task force provides a smart roadmap for Peace Colombia to help deepen these gains and build a strong foundation for shared progress, durable peace, and lasting partnership with the United States.”

**TONY BLINKEN** served as US Deputy Secretary of State and Deputy National Security Advisor for President Barack Obama.

“Investing in Colombia pays dividends far beyond national borders. Advancing peace in Colombia will require a sustained, strategic investment in the government and people of Colombia with tough, principled diplomacy.”

**RUDY GIULIANI** served as Mayor of New York City from 1994 to 2001.

“Plan Colombia is an example of a visionary, bipartisan strategic framework that has supported the Colombian people and government as they have transformed Colombia into a peaceful democracy. In the future, its historic turnaround in governance and security, will be viewed as a model for countries who are struggling to establish peace in their own fragile nations.”

**STEPHEN HADLEY** served as National Security Advisor under President George W. Bush.

“The US private sector should see peace as an opportunity to build on the US-Colombia free trade agreement, with exciting new investment potential in rural areas. Peace will also build on Colombia’s role as a strategic partner in international affairs.”

**VICKI HOLLUB** is Chief Executive Officer of Occidental Petroleum Corporation and Chair of the US-Colombia Business Council.

“As it embarks on the implementation of the Peace Agreement, Colombia will face a number of challenges that will require the continued cooperation of longstanding international allies like the United States. In Colombia’s case the peace dividend is not immediate and it will only materialize if the country is able to make critical investments and get ahead of risks that could undermine the benefits of the agreement such as a growing political polarization. This report describes several of those key areas where collaboration with the United States can help to ensure robust implementation in Colombia, including working to counter rising coca production and the destabilizing impact of social and political conflict in neighboring Venezuela. The task force’s recommendations build on the generous bipartisan support given to Plan Colombia, which has allowed, amongst others, for the Government of Colombia to assist other countries in areas such as citizen security (witness the Alliance for Prosperity with the Northern Triangle countries) and humanitarian relief. The Inter-American Development Bank, in cooperation with other international financial institutions, stands ready to support this endeavor.”

**LUIS ALBERTO MORENO** is President of the Inter-American Development Bank and served as Ambassador of Colombia to the United States from 1998 to 2005.

“Colombia has long been a strategic partner for the United States, and its success in combating the FARC has been a significant mutual achievement. Colombia’s experience in that fight and in its campaigns against the illegal drug trade and organized crime have given the country considerable security expertise. As a result, Colombia now helps train and prepare security forces elsewhere in the region and throughout the world — and that is one more way in which America’s investment in Colombia has paid off handsomely.”

**GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS** is a retired four-star General in the United States Army and served as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 2011 to 2012.

“Our partnership with Colombia over the past two decades has made the Western Hemisphere safer and more prosperous. Our relationship with Colombia must remain a priority as it is critical to the national security interests of the United States.”

**GENERAL COLIN POWELL** is a retired four-star General in the United States Army and served as US Secretary of State from 2001 to 2005.

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# FOREWORD

**Senator Roy Blunt**  
(R-MO)

**Senator Ben Cardin**  
(D-MD)

The United States faces a wide range of challenges in the world today. As members of the United States Senate we believe our nation's response to these challenges should be guided by America's values and principles, and informed by a rigorous evaluation of our past commitments, current capabilities, and future imperatives.

This report strives to provide precisely such an assessment of US policy toward Colombia. After nearly two decades of close partnership under the Plan Colombia framework, our countries' relationship is at a defining moment. At the very moment a new Administration in the United States is establishing its foreign policy priorities, Colombia is embarking on an ambitious effort to build peace and consolidate security at home while expanding its footprint in the world. The implications for US national security interests are manifest and extensive.

On December 8, 2016, under the auspices of the Atlantic Council, we met in the Capitol with an impressive group of senior policy makers from current and former administrations, the ambassadors of both countries, leaders of the private sector, and experts from civil society for the first time as the Colombia Peace and Prosperity Task Force. Colombia's Congress had just approved a peace accord ending over half a century of armed conflict between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of

Colombia (FARC) and the newly elected United States President was beginning to put his foreign policy team in place.

The far-reaching implications of both these events were prominent in the task force's deliberations, and brought urgency and focus to our work. Members of the task force agreed that Plan Colombia provided a compelling example of the transformative impact of US diplomacy and foreign assistance, and remained a remarkable template for sustained, successful, and bipartisan foreign policymaking. However, we also knew that resting our laurels on the virtues of continuity was insufficient. We needed to understand the factors that made Plan Colombia successful and apply those lessons to changing times and current realities. The goal: forge a rebooted strategy tailored to secure U.S. interests and maximize the return on investment for American taxpayers.

**After nearly two decades of transformative partnership under the Plan Colombia framework, our countries' relationship is at a defining moment.**



A view of Colombian capital Bogotá. Colombia is one of the United States closest allies.

Our report focuses on how the relationship with Colombia impacts the national security interests of the United States, and how those interests can be advanced most effectively. As such, our report is directed primarily at US policy makers responsible for navigating the transition from Plan Colombia to its successor strategy, Peace Colombia.

The members of our task force reflected a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives. Members differed at times on issues such as counternarcotics strategy and their analysis of the peace accord. We agreed, however, on three fundamental tenets. First, vital US interests—security and the fight against drugs, regional stability and geopolitics, democracy and human rights, and American jobs—remain very much at stake in Colombia. Second, safeguarding

and advancing these interests will require an engaged United States that combines sustained, strategic investments in the government and people of Colombia with tough, principled diplomacy. Third, that Colombia is one of our closest allies and investments in Colombia pay dividends far beyond national borders. These conclusions underpin the report that follows and our recommendations for US policy makers.

This is a moment of great promise for the rapport between Colombia and the United States. But as we navigate together through new waters, our relationship will require attention and skillful policymaking. We hope the work of this task force will serve to underscore the enduring U.S. stake in Colombian peace and prosperity, and provide a roadmap for a new era of success in our engagement with Colombia.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**A**lmost two centuries after the United States and Colombia first pledged to unite in the cause of friendship and peace,<sup>1</sup> the two nations' destinies have never been so intertwined. As a result of Plan Colombia, a visionary strategic framework sustained over almost two decades by US leaders of both political parties, both countries have consolidated a mutually beneficial relationship that has also succeeded in safeguarding vital US interests.

Two political realities came together under Plan Colombia: Colombia achieved an impressive national consensus to build state capacity, and the US decided to embark on a firm bipartisan commitment to combat organized crime, drugs, and violence. Together, these transformed Colombia from a nation on the brink to an increasingly peaceful and prosperous democracy.

Though Colombia contributed more than 95 percent of funds for the joint strategy, the political leadership, technical advice, military assistance, and intelligence sharing role of the United States in this transformation adds up to an important US foreign policy achievement of

global proportions. Although final victory still cannot be declared — and Colombia still has to deal with a number of challenges, including increased coca cultivation — the United States has made itself stronger and more secure in standing by Colombia.

Today, the United States is presented with the opportunity to maintain a major stake in the next phase of Colombia's transformation. Solidifying a strategic partnership with Colombia offers the United States enviable opportunities to reap the national security benefits of its \$10 billion Plan Colombia investment: sustaining the fight against transnational organized crime, leveraging the accumulated expertise of the Colombian armed forces to confront threats to peace and security in the Americas and around the world, harnessing Colombia's growing market to create American jobs, and advancing US geostrategic objectives with the cooperation of a like-minded democracy of increasing international stature.

Seizing these opportunities is not a foregone conclusion, however. Nor is it simply a question of dusting off the Plan Colombia playbook. New realities demand an updated strategy for changing times. President Trump's world vision, competing US global priorities at a time of shrinking budgets, resurgent Colombian coca cultivation, and an uncertain peace process with the National Liberation Army (ELN) are all factors that need to be considered in a new strategic vision.

Perhaps most notably, the Colombian government recently concluded an historic and ambitious, if polarizing, peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The peace agreement aims to address

**Today, the United States is presented with the opportunity to maintain a major stake in the next phase of Colombia's transformation.**



The Colombian government now faces the challenge of implementing a peace agreement with the FARC.

the root causes of the half-a-century conflict, namely the stark economic inequalities, the rural-urban divide, and the historical exclusion of Afro-Colombians, indigenous people, women and poor farmers. The accord includes provisions for full disarmament of the FARC and renunciation of drug trafficking, reparations and land restitution for more than 8 million victims and 7 million internally displaced people (IDPs).

Applied robustly, the peace accord represents an historic opportunity to extend state presence and democratic institutions throughout Colombia's territory, with corresponding peace dividends in security, stability, counter narcotics, economic development, and measures to address the long-term roots of violent conflict that cost more than 220,000 lives. Applied poorly, the agreement may sap government resources while leaving gross war crimes unpunished and allowing new illegal armed groups to appropriate the FARC's territory and illicit activities.

To meet this challenge, a new framework — Peace Colombia — has emerged to guide the next chapter of US-Colombia relations. To succeed, Peace Colombia must, like Plan Colombia, be sustained, bipartisan, and adequately resourced. It must identify clear goals and meet benchmarks that demonstrate its value to US taxpayers. And it must be narrowly tailored to advance the vital US national security interests at stake in Colombia, starting with safeguarding Plan Colombia's security and counter narcotics achievements.

Support to Colombia should not be a blank check. To be politically sustainable, it must provide a clear return on investment and address key concerns of US policy makers. These concerns include: securing the Colombian government's continued cooperation in the fight against transnational organized crime at a time of record high Colombian coca cultivation (188,000 hectares in 2016)<sup>2</sup> as well as seizures;

demonstrating that the US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) benefits American workers; and ensuring that Colombia continues to operate as a force for stability in a region still prone to outbreaks of anti-American authoritarianism. Catalytic US foreign assistance must be combined with tough, principled diplomacy.

The Colombia Peace and Prosperity Task Force set out to define how the Trump administration and the United States Congress can most effectively advance US national security, economic, and geopolitical interests while supporting Colombia at an inflection point in its history. The task force concluded that advancing US interests and consolidating Plan Colombia as a foreign policy success will require a strategy of sustained, principled engagement with the Colombian government and people. Therefore, this report aims to provide a roadmap for continued bilateral strategy and recommends that US policy makers take the following actions:

**1 Establish Peace Colombia as the ongoing strategic framework for US policy**, fully funding the strategy with a near-term assurance of resources to safeguard US interests in the critical post-conflict period. This will maintain a sustained, bipartisan vision for US policy toward Colombia that builds on the success of Plan Colombia and addresses the areas where improvement is necessary.

**Advancing US interests and consolidating Plan Colombia as a foreign policy success will require a strategy of sustained, principled engagement with the Colombian government and people.**

**2 Recognize that robust peace accord compliance and implementation is critical to US national security interests and regional stability.** Assistance and monitoring by US authorities can be decisive in helping Colombia meet concrete benchmarks, including expanded state presence in post-conflict areas, credible transitional justice processes and victims' protections, and the verifiable disarmament, demobilization, and reincorporation of former FARC members. These actions are imperative to enhanced democratic governance, rule of law, and to realizing a lasting peace.

**3 Put forward policies that expand US-Colombia cooperation in order to achieve concrete victories against transnational criminal networks**, including reducing coca cultivation and trafficking, and other sources of violence such as human trafficking, illegal mining, and corruption. Recognize that achieving these security gains entails a joint effort and requires continued strengthening of the capacity of the Colombian justice system.

**4 Deepen US commercial and economic cooperation through Peace Colombia and the existing TPA framework** to maximize US business opportunities, spur Colombian market expansion, reignite economic development, protect labor rights, and bolster job creation in post-conflict and historically marginalized areas.

**5 Expand the shared security portfolio in international hotspots where Colombian military and peacebuilding expertise can play a pivotal role to advance US interests globally.** Deepen diplomatic coordination on the most urgent issues facing Latin America: democratic institutions under assault, judicial corruption, and human rights abuses in Venezuela.

# INTRODUCTION

**“W**e don't win anymore,” said Donald Trump as he campaigned for president of the United States. Then-candidate Trump was channeling the nation's frustration with drawn-out military deployments and inconclusive outcomes in the Middle East. But here in the Americas there exists a clear and compelling — if still incomplete — victory for US national security policy. The Trump administration and Congress now have an opportunity to consolidate that victory.

In 1999, the United States confronted the reality that a hemispheric ally, Colombia, had lost control of two thirds of its territory to competing terrorist organizations — the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a Marxist-Leninist insurgency that had been fighting the central government since the 1960s, and the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), a right-wing paramilitary umbrella organization sometimes operating in collusion with government security forces.<sup>3</sup> Already the world's leading producer of coca leaf,<sup>4</sup> Colombia flirted with being declared a failed state.<sup>5</sup>

The Colombian government, beset by insurgency, drug cartels, and a deep economic recession, appeared ill equipped to respond. In 1999, then-President Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002) initiated a peace process, during which the FARC took advantage of a series of concessions but continued its criminal and terrorist activities. Pastrana's ill-fated negotiations convinced US policy makers that the Colombian government had gone the extra mile for

peace. US leaders in Congress and the Clinton administration also recognized that Colombia required assistance to confront the growing threat posed by the FARC and other guerrilla groups well financed by their involvement in narco-trafficking.

The possibility that Colombia might falter in this fight and the potential of an outflow of refugees galvanized US leaders to protect US security, geopolitical, commercial, and law enforcement interests. Carefully balancing the interests and concerns of both political parties as well as Congress and the executive, Plan Colombia was born in 1999 as a package of assistance to help Colombia combat drugs, guerrilla and paramilitary violence, and underdevelopment, and to strengthen its military and democratic institutions and the rule of law.<sup>6</sup>

Over the next decade and a half, Plan Colombia emerged as a rare feat in polarized times: a bipartisan, sustained foreign policy success. Colombia's transformation during this period was undeniable. With US support totaling \$10 billion over fifteen years — less than 2 percent of the cost of the Iraq War over

**Plan Colombia emerged as a rare feat in polarized times: a bipartisan, sustained foreign policy success.**

the same period<sup>7</sup> and less than 5 percent of the total expenditures on Plan Colombia — the Colombian government's territorial control expanded and its democratic institutions became stronger. A liberalized economy quadrupled in size, poverty fell 55 percent, and homicides and kidnappings declined 56 percent and 90 percent, respectively.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps most significantly — under a “democratic security” strategy championed by

former President Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) with President Juan Manuel Santos as his defense minister (2006–2009) — thousands of guerrilla fighters were demobilized, state power was projected to areas once abandoned to guerrilla operations, and the balance of forces between the government and the FARC steadily tilted toward the government. Still, the humanitarian toll of a five decade-long war totaled 220,000 lives, 8 million victims and some 7 million IDPs, the second highest in the world after Syria.

For the United States, the benefits of a stronger Colombia have extended beyond stabilizing a hemispheric ally, disarming a hostile guerilla group, and attacking the cocaine trade at its root. Colombia is one of the United States' most consistent and capable hemispheric partners. It collaborates on US diplomatic objectives at the United Nations on issues such as Ukraine, Syria and North Korea, cooperates in the fight against transnational organized crime, provides an expanding market for US products and services, and contributes security expertise to Central America, Afghanistan, several countries in Africa, and the United Nations. Colombia is



Former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe pushed for a “democratic security” strategy.

also soon-to-be a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a major international stamp of approval for a country's economic stewardship.

The contrast with neighboring Venezuela could not be more stark. Colombia is a model for responsible global citizenship — open, integrated, democratic, increasingly prosperous, and committed to the rule of law — and for the benefits of partnership with the United States.

Today, Colombia again finds itself at a crossroads, as does the US-Colombia partnership. Late last year, after four years of negotiations directed by President Juan Manuel Santos (2010–present), the Colombian government reached an historic agreement with the FARC to end Latin America's longest running armed conflict. Colombia has transformed from a country ravaged by violence to one capable of controlling its territory and advancing shared interests with the United States. Our alignment ranges from combating transnational organized crime to promoting a peaceful, prosperous, and stable hemisphere.



Anti-narcotics police work to uproot coca production.

Still, Colombia faces significant challenges, including a sharp rise in coca cultivation, attacks on social leaders and human rights defenders, the need to implement a complex peace accord amid political polarization, and the emergence of new illegal networks that benefit from drug trafficking, extortion, human trafficking, and illegal mining, and that seek to co-opt FARC territory, members, and criminal enterprises.<sup>9</sup> The Colombian government will have to keep building its own capacities in previously forgotten and marginalized areas, largely populated by Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. The United States has a direct stake in how Colombia resolves each of these challenges.

The United States has the opportunity to maintain a major stake in the next phase of Colombia's transformation, thus ensuring US interests are protected in the process. The Peace Colombia framework — a successor strategy to Plan Colombia announced by President Barack Obama in February 2016 — opens the door for a new plan of engagement. The strategy aims to consolidate Plan Colombia's security gains and reinvigorate counter narcotics efforts while providing a near-term surge in catalytic US assistance

to help Colombia "win the peace."<sup>10</sup> Its three pillars include: 1) consolidating and expanding progress on security and counter narcotics while reintegrating the FARC into society; 2) expanding state presence and institutions to strengthen the rule of law and rural economies, especially in former conflict areas; and 3) promoting justice and other essential services for conflict victims."<sup>11</sup>

The United States has much to gain — but also much to lose — from the outcome of Colombia's efforts to end a decades-long armed conflict while continuing to fight drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. The Trump administration has a unique opportunity to set its own direction around US engagement with Colombia, creating a path forward that builds on past successes while addressing areas where outcomes have fallen short.

In this context, members of the Atlantic Council's Colombia Peace and Prosperity Task Force — elected and appointed officials from both political parties and leaders from government, business, and civil society — set out to provide independent analysis and recommendations regarding US policy toward Colombia at a critical juncture: the first months of the Trump administration in the United States, and the start of the post-conflict period in Colombia.

The task force members believe, emphatically, that advancing US national security interests and consolidating Plan Colombia as a foreign policy success — continuing to "win" in Colombia and the Americas — will require a strategy of sustained, principled engagement with the Colombian government and its people. Peace accord implementation will be hard and at times unpopular, requiring painful sacrifices. Nonetheless, the United States is uniquely positioned to help support rigorous compliance with the peace agreement, and in doing so to advance US interests and sustain Colombia's emergence as an increasingly important strategic partner of the United States.

# FROM THREAT TO OPPORTUNITY

## THE STRATEGIC CASE FOR US ENGAGEMENT IN COLOMBIA

**A**lmost two decades after Plan Colombia was created to protect US interests, Colombia's democratic institutions are increasingly strong, but need continued strengthening. While Colombia faces undeniable challenges, including consolidating the rule of law and combating resurgent coca cultivation, it has become a successful, entrepreneurial country that, in a decade, could well become one of Latin America's first higher income nations.

Today, a strong partnership with Colombia represents not just a chance to manage ongoing challenges but to seize opportunities. Growing economic, diplomatic, and governance capacity makes it an attractive partner for the United States. Having accompanied Colombia in hard times, an engaged United States stands to profit from Colombia's emergence in a number of ways. But, it will require more than just business as usual. What is needed is a renewed long-term investment in the US-Colombia partnership, focused on four areas: robust peace accord implementation; security, counter narcotics, and transnational organized crime; enhanced economic cooperation; and collaboration on US geopolitical interests. Such an investment, detailed in this report's recommendations, will position the United States to seize a number of strategic opportunities.

The first opportunity is renewed momentum in the fight against transnational networks of organized crime. Colombia's past success and more recent challenges in combating coca cultivation serve as a reminder that progress is possible but not inevitable. Colombia remains at

the epicenter of a global cocaine trade that fuels organized crime across the Americas, in the United States, and beyond.

The peace accord presents a platform to weaken the illicit drug trade in and beyond Colombia. But this is only possible if the Colombian government has the political will and resources to do so. It must quickly invest in post-conflict areas, prevent the National Liberation Army (ELN) and successors to illegal paramilitary armed groups from seizing former FARC territory and its illicit businesses (including drug trafficking, human trafficking, and illegal mining),<sup>12</sup> enlist former FARC members in counter narcotics activities, and enforce the FARC's commitment — as required by the peace accord — to turn over assets and provide full information about criminal operations.

Accomplishing these objectives would provide the United States with an unprecedented opportunity to disrupt the broader global trafficking of illicit drugs. Yet, part of the controversy over the peace accord is whether the ex-FARC leadership will abide by their commitment to terminate involvement in the lucrative drug trade and surrender the funds derived from criminal activities. On balance, this task force believes that the opportunities outweigh the dangers. Following Ronald Reagan's admonition to "trust but verify," the United States must closely monitor the milestones in the implementation of the peace accords to ensure that both FARC and government are complying with the spirit and letter of the agreements.

A second opportunity is to take advantage of Colombia's emergence as an important security



Colombia's exports have diversified far beyond the fruits and vegetables on display at this Bogotá market.

exporter in areas of vital strategic interest to the United States, particularly in Central America,<sup>13</sup> Mexico, Afghanistan, and African countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa.<sup>14</sup> In 2013, for example, the US-Colombia Action Plan on Regional Security Cooperation delivered 39 capacity-building activities in four Central American countries, focused on areas such as asset forfeiture, investigations, polygraphs, and interdiction.<sup>15</sup> By 2016, this cooperation had expanded to include over 271 activities in six countries in Central America and the Caribbean.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, Colombia signaled its intention to increase participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions with the signing of a framework agreement in 2015. Colombia's long-standing deployment of hundreds of peacekeepers in the Sinai Peninsula,<sup>17</sup> its short-term commitment to send additional personnel to Haiti and Guinea Bissau,<sup>18</sup> and its medium-term plan to contribute up to 5,000 troops<sup>19</sup> creates an opportunity for a high-capacity, US-trained military to help the United Nation's

(UN's) chronically under resourced Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Colombia has also moved to expand cooperation with NATO. Currently, a NATO "global partner" — the only one in Latin America — Colombia recently opened talks on a cooperation agreement with NATO, one step short of full membership.<sup>20</sup> Peace with the FARC and potentially the ELN should, in time, free the Colombian military to play a greatly expanded role on global security initiatives of interest to the United States. As the new United States Administration reviews its role in such activities, Colombia stands ready to boost its presence.

Third, the Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) with Colombia — the fourth biggest market in Latin America<sup>21</sup> with an economy that grew an average of 4.3 percent per year from 2007 to 2015<sup>22</sup> — provides increasing opportunities for US firms. US goods exports to Colombia totaled \$13.1 billion in 2016, more than double the figure in 2005.<sup>23</sup> Trade with Colombia supported an estimated 77,000 American jobs in 2014, the last year for which data was available.<sup>24</sup>

Effective implementation of the peace accord and eventual accession to the OECD, once Colombia implements all market access and labor rights requirements, will enhance investment opportunities for US businesses in areas such as infrastructure, the extractive sector, agriculture, and tourism. This will not be a small achievement. The OECD is an elite global club of countries that follow responsible economic policies. Only two Latin American countries (Chile and Mexico) are currently members.

A recent study by Control Risks on Colombia's peace dividend notes, for example, unexplored onshore oil potential in areas such as the Caguán-Putumayo Basin and immense mining potential in zones previously off-limits to large private sector projects. The Colombian government is investing in these areas. Expected infrastructure investments include \$1 to \$2.3 billion to pave tertiary roads in 281 priority municipalities and plans to modernize airports, seaports, and railroads.<sup>25</sup> The study also notes that local communities, empowered by the peace accord and Constitutional Court rulings, will have a significant say in the development of projects, necessitating strong community consultation and corporate responsibility practices by US firms seeking to do business.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, Colombia is today one of the United States' most consistent diplomatic partners in the Americas. State Department analyses of voting practices in the UN General Assembly show Colombia coincided with the US on 80 percent of important votes in both 2014 and 2015, the highest in Latin America for 2014 and second highest for 2015.<sup>27</sup> Some key instances where Colombia has backed the US on global challenges are Ukrainian territorial integrity and human rights issues in North Korea and Syria. Within the Americas, Colombia is a consistent, if not uniformly, like-minded voice on issues of democracy, human rights, trade, defense cooperation, and the environment. Colombia was a founding member of the Pacific Alliance and

supports a strong Organization of American States.

Of particular relevance is Colombia's potentially critical role in addressing the economic, governance, and humanitarian crisis in next-door Venezuela. Colombia's equities with Venezuela are broad and complex, including border security, migration, and the ELN peace negotiations. Nonetheless, Colombia will have an essential role to play in responding to the deepening humanitarian catastrophe in Venezuela, as well as galvanizing a more forceful regional response to President Nicolás Maduro's attacks on human rights, civil society, and democratic institutions and the devastation inflicted by food and medicine shortages and violence.

More broadly, the Colombian example is an undervalued source of soft power for the United States and a powerful counter example to failed, authoritarian, anti-American governments like Venezuela. The United States has a deep stake in Colombia's continued progress. But success will depend in large part on meeting the challenges and seizing on peace implementation to generate market-based sustainable growth, extend economic opportunity to the poor and excluded, create jobs and social mobility, formalize the economy and improve tax collection, and strengthen the rule of law to fight corruption, crime, and violence.<sup>28</sup>

Led by a Nobel Peace Prize recipient and carrying out a peace process that enjoys near universal international support, Colombia's international standing has arguably never been higher than it is today. A close diplomatic partner of the United States appears poised to become a more formidable regional and international player. At a moment of unprecedented challenges on the global stage — and in a world seemingly plagued by bad news — a deepening partnership with an increasingly capable and democratic Colombia is of growing strategic value to the United States.

# THE SECRET BEHIND PLAN COLOMBIA

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## CAN IT BE REPLICATED?

**I**t is tempting to believe that Plan Colombia was hatched in some idealized pre-partisan Washington. It was not. The strategy's initial adoption and subsequent renewal, year after year, were subject to intense debate and scrutiny. Plan Colombia's bipartisan support, clear goals, and longevity — ultimately fundamental to its success<sup>29</sup> — were made possible by high-minded national security policy making and visionary leaders in both parties, but also by old-fashioned political coaxing and compromise, and crucially, the strong perception that US taxpayer dollars were well-invested in a committed partner achieving measurable results that benefited US interests.

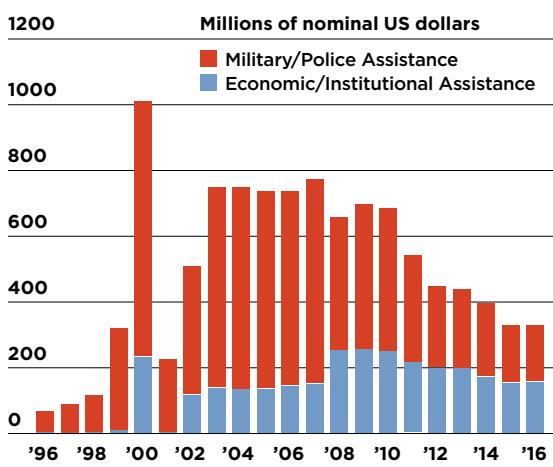
Plan Colombia enjoyed significant bipartisan support from the outset. Proposed by the Clinton administration, it was strongly supported by then House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) and then Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS), and ultimately approved with votes from members of both parties in the House and (especially) the Senate.<sup>30</sup> Its first big test came when the strategy survived an almost immediate change in administration. President George W. Bush, taking office the year after Plan Colombia was born, embraced the plan as well. By the end of 2001, senior members of both parties had provided Plan Colombia a firm bipartisan foothold in US national security strategy.

The obstacles to a sustained, strategic commitment to the US-Colombia partnership seem formidable today, but the challenges were perhaps even greater at the outset of Plan Colombia. At that time, Congressional leaders

and a lame-duck administration, fresh off a bruising impeachment battle, joined together to approve almost \$1 billion in US assistance for an uncertain partner and an unproven strategy. What policy makers lacked in proof of concept, they overcame through a shared appreciation of US interests and a willingness to mold a policy response to the domestic political environment and evolving on-the-ground realities.

Plan Colombia's initial approval benefitted from a particular political context and legislative cocktail, but sustaining it year after year required additional ingredients. Most crucially, Plan Colombia benefitted from consistently strong leadership, political will, and policy continuity in Colombia, as well as a perception of steady success. Crucially, Colombia would itself contribute an estimated 95 percent of the total expenditure on Plan Colombia.<sup>31</sup> President Uribe brought unprecedented focus to the security and counter narcotics effort, even imposing a special tax on the wealthy to supplement the defense

**The obstacles to a sustained, strategic commitment to the US-Colombia partnership seem formidable today, but the challenges were perhaps even greater at the outset of Plan Colombia.**

**FIGURE 1. US Aid to Colombia**

Source: securityassistance.org/colombia.

budget.<sup>32</sup> This tax totaled \$4.3 billion from 2006 to 2010 and \$3.5 billion from 2011 to 2015.<sup>33</sup>

Plan Colombia quickly began to show positive results. By one estimate, illegal armed groups lost about 25 percent of their fighters in President Uribe's first year in office (2002–2003), with attacks by the FARC, ELN, and paramilitaries diminishing significantly. Coca cultivation declined 47 percent between 2000 and 2003, and by 2004, the Colombian police had a presence in every municipality in the country.<sup>34</sup> By the end of Uribe's term in 2010, both war-related civilian deaths and the size of the FARC were cut in half — though the number of IDPs ballooned to between 3.6 and 5 million.<sup>35</sup>

Still, the counterinsurgency efforts stemming from Plan Colombia were not without controversy, mainly focused on continuing, well-documented human rights concerns — whether army collusion with paramilitaries, targeted violence against human rights defenders and other vulnerable groups, or the continued forced displacement of millions of victims. One deeply troubling development involved the extrajudicial execution by the military of thousands of innocent civilians disguised as combat kills

(so-called “false positives”). In light of these concerns, a final source of Plan Colombia's durability lay precisely in its capacity to adapt in response to circumstances on the ground and evolving Colombian and US policy interests.

While it was conceived as a holistic strategy, Plan Colombia expenditures during the early years were weighted heavily toward expensive military hardware and intelligence capabilities to the Colombian armed forces. Beginning in 2008, Plan Colombia came to be more evenly balanced between such “hard side” expenditures and funding for economic, institution building, and humanitarian ends (see Figure 1).<sup>36</sup>

Plan Colombia allowed Colombia to expand and professionalize its military and police, but it also helped to “strengthen investigations of organized crime and human rights violations, implement a landmark Victims and Land Restitution Law, provide opportunities to Afro-descendant and indigenous communities, and establish a program to protect journalists, labor leaders, human rights defenders, and other targeted individuals.”<sup>37</sup>

Human rights conditionality and enforcement of the Leahy Law — a vetting process to prevent funding from reaching human rights abusers<sup>38</sup> — have proven effective, though not foolproof, tools for advancing adherence to international norms and accountability for human rights violations.

Today, US policy makers have the advantage of hindsight — the knowledge that a sustained strategy with clear goals can produce a return on investment for US taxpayers, and the confidence that the Colombian government is equally committed to those goals. And they can take encouragement from the experience of Plan Colombia, which overcame similar political turbulence to emerge as perhaps the foremost bipartisan foreign policy success story of the past twenty years.

# THE ROAD AHEAD

## PEACE, DRUGS, AND KEY ISSUES FOR US POLICY MAKERS

### Political Polarization

Consistent with the bipartisan legacy of Plan Colombia, in April 2016, the US Senate adopted by unanimous consent a resolution marking the fifteenth anniversary of Plan Colombia and “supporting efforts by the Government of Colombia to pursue peace and the end of the country’s enduring internal armed conflict.”<sup>39</sup> A year earlier, a US special envoy had been named to facilitate the negotiations, while Congress has continued to appropriate hundreds of millions of dollars annually in assistance.<sup>40</sup> But, support in the United States should not hide growing fissures in Colombia.

Cracks began to appear in the policy consensus,<sup>41</sup> potentially complicating US support at a critical juncture. To some extent, these fault lines reflect the fissures and polarization in Colombia itself. On October 2, 2016, the Colombian people rejected the government’s peace accord with the FARC in a national plebiscite — albeit by a slender margin of 50.2 to 49.8 percent with over 60 percent abstention.<sup>42</sup> On November 24, 2016, a new, “definitive” peace accord was announced, and on December 1, the Colombian Congress voted overwhelmingly to approve it.

**The peace deal begins life with the country deeply divided over the price paid for an agreement with the enormously unpopular FARC.**

Congressional ratification of the peace accord may have marked the formal conclusion of negotiations with the FARC,<sup>43</sup> but the peace deal begins life with the country deeply divided over the price paid for an agreement with the enormously unpopular FARC.<sup>44</sup>

### A Double-Edged Sword: Peace Implementation

Political polarization in Colombia presents a serious challenge to successful peace implementation — and, by extension, to objectives such as greater security, development, state presence, and institutionalization of the rule of law, which directly impact US interests as well. Implementing an agreement of great complexity will require sustained focus, funding, and political commitment. Peace implementation will be expensive; estimates run from \$27 billion to \$90 billion over ten years.<sup>45</sup> It will also stretch the institutional capacity of the Colombian state.

The peace accord is a 310-page, multi-faceted agreement comprised of chapters on: 1) rural development; 2) political participation, including mechanisms to facilitate the FARC’s transition into electoral politics; 3) the end of conflict and FARC disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; 4) illicit drugs, including the FARC’s commitment to end any relationship with drug trafficking and contribute to solving the drug problem; 5) conflict victims, including procedures for sanctioning serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by the FARC and other conflict actors; and 6) implementation and verification of the accord.<sup>46</sup>



Deep-seated hatred toward the FARC, as shown in this anti-FARC march in 2008, will make reconciliation a daunting task. .

The agreement commits the Colombian government to stand up dozens of new institutions, commissions, and plans in areas as varied as land distribution;<sup>47</sup> rural infrastructure, health, and education;<sup>48</sup> a national electoral tribunal;<sup>49</sup> reincorporating the FARC into civilian life;<sup>50</sup> investigating and dismantling criminal organizations;<sup>51</sup> security guarantees for political participation;<sup>52</sup> crop substitution;<sup>53</sup> drug abuse treatment;<sup>54</sup> combating money laundering and illicit financing;<sup>55</sup> searching for the missing and disappeared;<sup>56</sup> removing land mines; truth seeking;<sup>57</sup> prosecuting war criminals;<sup>58</sup> and monitoring and verification of the peace accord.<sup>59</sup>

The peace accord deals not just with the mechanics of ending the fighting. It is a permanent ceasefire that lays out the steps for FARC disarmament and demobilization, the transition to a political movement, and so on. The agreement also addresses the root causes of the conflict, particularly the long-standing absence of democratic institutions and economic opportunity in swaths of rural Colombia, as well as the seeds

of continuing instability and conflict such as the drug trade, illegal armed groups, and targeted political violence.

The Colombian peace accord is far from perfect, but it is the law of the land. While some task force members do not support the agreement, working to implement it as effectively as possible is now imperative.

At its best, the accord is a blueprint for long-term stability, broad-based prosperity, and social inclusion, and a vehicle for safeguarding shared Colombian and US interests on counter narcotics and other issues. However, sustaining the level of investment and institutional commitment required for adequate implementation — perhaps by instituting a “peace tax” to replace Colombia’s “war tax” — will be difficult without a national consensus behind the peace accord and despite the 2017 tax reform. US support is a vital stamp of approval and an important signal to the Colombian political class regarding the importance of overcoming polarization to work toward successful implementation.

## Poor peace implementation would diminish any peace dividend and impact US interests directly and negatively.

### Why Peace Matters for the United States

The partnership between the United States and Colombia is such that Colombia's potential "peace dividend" — in security, counter narcotics, foreign investment, human rights, and long-term development and stability — will accrue to the United States as well. The reverse is also true: poor peace implementation would diminish any peace dividend and impact US interests directly and negatively. Peace in Colombia, to the extent it can be sustained over the long term, is a substantial benefit of the peace accord; however, it can only be attained if the Colombian state addresses current and future violations and complies with its commitments to develop and to extend security and services to areas of past conflict.

Unsuccessful peace accord implementation would represent a missed opportunity to build a more inclusive, equitable, economically vibrant — and by extension less conflict-prone — society. It could lead to either a formal break in the process or, more likely, a gradual migration of disenchanted FARC members into new or existing criminal organizations. It would undermine Colombian efforts to bring state presence and democratic institutions to areas of the country long beyond the government's reach. And ultimately, it would permit the expansion of new sources of organized crime, violence, and

instability, undermining US law enforcement and national security interests.

US policy — exercised through diplomacy, foreign assistance, and soft or hard conditionalities — must promote robust implementation. This is especially true in those areas of most tangible impact for US interests, greatest concern to US policy makers, and maximum propensity to produce quick and visible benefits and benchmarks.

### What is at Stake? Key Issues for US Policy makers

Given the strong US stake in rigorous enforcement of the peace accord, policy makers should pay particular attention to the following issues as metrics for serious and effective peace implementation and areas requiring US diplomatic and programmatic engagement:

#### PRIORITY 1: DECREASE COCA CULTIVATION

After several years of decline, coca cultivation increased dramatically during the years of the peace talks, with the area under cultivation more than doubling between 2013 and 2016, according to the United States Office on National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP).<sup>60</sup> ONDCP estimates for 2016 indicate that coca cultivation rose 18 percent to 188,000 hectares, a record high.<sup>61</sup> Indisputably, Colombia is today once again the number one coca and cocaine producer in the world,<sup>62</sup> though the Colombian government has been successful with other drug interdiction efforts. It seized 421 metric tons of cocaine and cocaine base and destroyed 4,613 cocaine base laboratories and 229 cocaine hydrochloride (HCl) laboratories in 2016.<sup>63</sup>

As previously discussed, the counter narcotics mission was fundamental to both Plan Colombia's genesis and its longevity. Early in the strategy's rollout, declining coca cultivation

provided a metric of the strategy's effectiveness and a justification for its continuation. Coca cultivation rose again between 2005 and 2007 before declining sharply, and to this day Plan Colombia's success as a state building and counterinsurgency strategy is more straightforward than its counter narcotics legacy.

The recent dramatic increase in coca cultivation has led some to question whether Colombia has taken its eye off the ball and allowed the counter narcotics investments of Plan Colombia to slip away. Of particular concern to US policy makers, ONDCP has detected a recent slow rise in cocaine use in the United States.<sup>64</sup> This moment represents a unique opportunity for Colombia and the United States to redouble their joint efforts on coca eradication.

The US government and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) cite a number of explanations for increased coca cultivation, including the FARC urging farmers to grow more coca (in anticipation of post-peace accord crop substitution benefits), the rising price of coca leaf, efforts by coca growers to resist eradication, a declining Colombian manual eradication budget, and local factors affecting other cash crops, such as fuel shortages, localized drought, and the general lack of alternative development activities.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps the explanation that has generated the greatest discussion is President Santos' decision, in May 2015, to halt aerial spraying of coca fields after the World Health Organization found that the chemical employed, glyphosate, likely causes cancer in humans; the US Environmental Protection Agency has determined that there is a lack of convincing evidence for this finding.<sup>66</sup> A year later, Colombia reauthorized manual



Rural workers have joined eradication efforts in Taraza, Colombia.

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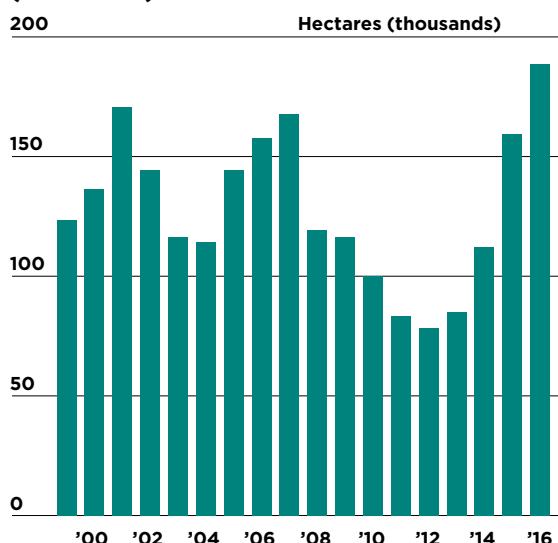
spraying with glyphosate,<sup>67</sup> but President Santos has continued to publicly reject a return to aerial spraying, citing a Constitutional Court decision that may preclude it.<sup>68</sup>

Quickly and permanently reversing the upward trend in coca cultivation in Colombia is now imperative. US officials should urge it, effective peace accord implementation will require it, and any significant US aid package is unlikely to be politically sustainable without it. At the same time, US officials must acknowledge that the illicit drug trade is a shared responsibility, and one ultimately driven by demand.

Finding an enhanced, workable and effective counter narcotics strategy should be a matter of top priority. The strategy should focus on holistic alternative development programs — including crop substitution initiatives where this is economically viable. This can only work in areas where there is access to markets and highways, and where security and technical assistance is provided to the communities involved. If necessary, these programs should be complemented by law enforcement and manual eradication.

Consistent with the peace accord, targeted use of aerial eradication should only be an

**FIGURE 2. Coca Production in Colombia (1999-2016)**



Source: US Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report

option of last resort when other tools such as crop substitution and manual eradication have proven unviable. Demobilized FARC members must be held to their peace accord commitment to become part of the coca solution rather than the problem,<sup>69</sup> including by turning over information on drug profits, methods, and collaborators, and by participating directly in manual eradication efforts.

### PRIORITY 2: ENSURE FARC DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION

Achieving the disarmament of the FARC, according to the timeline laid out in the peace accord,<sup>70</sup> will be an important early test for accord implementation. Properly executed, this process can convey a powerful message about the sincerity of the FARC's commitment to transition to civilian life. In contrast, widespread migration of former FARC members into or-

ganized crime would significantly undermine public confidence and dent hopes for a security dividend in the country. Failures of verification during the paramilitary demobilization process of 2003 to 2006 led to precisely this sort of migration, sowing the seeds for the new, illegal armed groups that today pose the biggest threat to security in Colombia.<sup>71</sup>

Beyond the immediate effort to disarm and demobilize thousands of FARC members lies the longer-term challenge of keeping them away from a life of crime and violence. Colombia has demonstrated an impressive capacity to reintegrate tens of thousands of former combatants into society.<sup>72</sup> However, the government will need to combine the positive incentives of reintegration programs with a demonstrated willingness and capacity to capture and punish FARC members who return to crime, including by extraditing them to the United States.

### PRIORITY 3: ENFORCE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CONFLICT-RELATED CRIMES

Punishing wartime atrocities by the FARC, state actors, and other parties to the conflict was perhaps the most complicated issue at the negotiation table, and one of the most contentious away from it. Former President Uribe called the agreement on transitional justice a “veiled amnesty”,<sup>73</sup> Human Rights Watch termed it “agreeing to impunity.”<sup>74</sup> Other respected legal scholars and human rights advocates defended the agreement as a necessary compromise consistent with international law.<sup>75</sup> The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has initially issued a guardedly positive statement on the peace accord.<sup>76</sup>

US policy makers have a clear interest and stake in the peace deal’s resolution of accountability issues. Congress regularly conditions assistance to Colombia on punishing conflict atrocities, and the US Senate called on

Colombia to “hold accountable perpetrators of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and ensure that they are appropriately punished.”<sup>77</sup> The US and Colombian governments stated publicly that the peace accord should comply with international law and ensure accountability for human rights violations on all sides.<sup>78</sup>

The credibility and durability of the transitional justice process will reside largely in the interpretation and enforcement of key concepts such as “effective restriction of liberty” and “full truth,” especially by the judges and prosecutors of the Special Peace Tribunal. If those convicted of serious crimes have their movements tightly restricted and closely monitored, if they declare their illicit assets and make reparations to victims, if those who fail to strictly comply are promptly remanded back to the ordinary justice system, and if Colombians regularly see images of them carrying out taxing work that benefits society and conflict victims — such as manual coca eradication or humanitarian demining — the transitional justice agreement will gain credibility.

For this to happen, the United States must continue to stress consistently the need for the peace accord to comply with international law and to ensure accountability for human rights violations on all sides.<sup>79</sup> It must also employ both diplomatic and programmatic tools — including technical assistance for transitional justice bodies, funding to support victims’ rights, and limited conditionality — to further the cause of accountability.

The United States should continue to urge Colombia to comply with the recommendations of the specialized international bodies with jurisdiction to monitor the transitional justice proceedings, including the ICC, the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. US law enforcement officials should seek permission to participate in the questioning of demobilized

## **The United States must continue to stress consistently the need for the peace accord to comply with international law and to ensure accountability for human rights violations.**

FARC members, who have agreed to disclose the “full truth,” regarding their criminal operations in return for substantially reduced sentences. At the same time, placing the rights of the victims of the conflict front and center, the US must also keep a close eye on the accountability for state actors and third parties.

### **PRIORITY 4: FOCUS ON SECURITY, RULE OF LAW, AND TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME**

Colombia’s homicide rate in 2016 was 25 percent lower than when peace negotiations began, aided by the ceasefire that accompanied the peace talks.<sup>80</sup> In fact, at 25 per 100,000, today’s homicide rate is the lowest in forty years.<sup>81</sup> Over the same period, kidnappings dropped over 30 percent and acts of terrorism fell over 75 percent.<sup>82</sup> If this downward trend can be sustained, it will represent a compelling measure of the concrete benefits of peace for both Colombians and the broader region.

Continued progress in reducing crime and violence in Colombia, particularly transnational organized crime, will depend in large part on successfully reintegrating FARC ex-combatants into civilian life and limiting the migration of ex-guerillas into criminal groups. It would be a failure of the process if demobilized fighters

form or join armed groups that fill the vacuum left by the FARC and continue criminal activities such as drug trafficking, extortion, human trafficking, and illegal mining.<sup>83</sup> A decade ago, a flawed paramilitary demobilization process gave birth to today's new illegal armed groups, sometimes referred to as BACRIM (*bandas criminales*). Both these groups and the ELN view the FARC's demobilization as an opportunity to recruit seasoned warriors and expand their territory.<sup>84</sup>

This poses a huge risk across the hemisphere. Colombian criminal entities do not operate in a silo; they are connected to transnational organized crime networks that pose a threat to the United States. With rising tensions in Venezuela, the region faces an imminent challenge to contain sources of illegality, in particular along the Colombia-Venezuela border. With the repression and human rights abuses, escalating crime, and food shortages in Venezuela, Colombia will play a pivotal role in any eventual transition that occurs.

The United States can help ensure Colombia has the law enforcement and military capacity to be an important player in regional stability as well as pursue illegal groups and halt their transnational flow of resources. Severely disrupting the narcotics trade is critical as is working to eviscerate human trafficking organizations, illegal mining flows, and money laundering schemes. Another priority is to support Colombia's push to bring enhanced security as well as development and democratic governance

**The United States can help ensure Colombia has the law enforcement and military capacity to be an important player in regional stability.**

to post-conflict areas.<sup>85</sup> Backing Colombia's efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace with the ELN is critical if nascent talks advance.

The United States has unique capabilities to contribute. Increasing the Colombian military's airlift capacity was a key component of Plan Colombia, and will be similarly important as the national police assume greater responsibility for combating illegal armed groups. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has a proven ability to support the extension of democratic institutions, government services, and rule of law to former conflict areas, and can scale up these efforts with the required resources.

The United States should also continue capacity-building efforts to improve Colombia's ability to investigate and prosecute complex financial crimes. These include the laundering of money, which derives primarily from Colombia's illicit drug production, and illegal mining, which continues to penetrate the economy.<sup>86</sup> Assisting Colombia's efforts to locate and repatriate any undeclared FARC assets should be a particular priority, and can help fund peace implementation.

## PRIORITY 5: PROMOTE INVESTMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Delivering a measurable economic peace dividend will be instrumental to maintaining investments in peace implementation and support from Colombia's influential business leaders. Colombia's finance minister and some economists have predicted that peace could add approximately 1 percent per year to Colombia's gross domestic product (GDP), a figure disputed by others.<sup>87</sup>

A growing Colombian economy benefits the United States by providing an expanding market for US goods and services. It also positions Colombia to invest more heavily in areas that



The town of Arauquita, on the border with Venezuela, is increasingly affected by the instability unleashed by the Maduro government.

directly impact US priorities, whether expanding counter narcotics operations, securing former FARC territory, expanding state presence and institutions to address the root causes of crime and violence, dealing with the humanitarian fallout from the situation in Venezuela, or exporting security expertise to Central America and beyond.

As such, the United States has an interest in ensuring the proper functioning of the TPA in both countries. It should also employ commercial diplomacy tools to advance opportunities for US firms and promote economic development in Colombia, particularly in areas historically marginalized. At the same time, the United States can help create economic opportunities in these underdeveloped and post-conflict areas largely populated by Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations, women and poor farmers, through trade capacity building under the framework of the TPA and the US-Colombia Action Plan on Racial and Ethnic Equality.

The United States should work closely with the recently formed US-Colombia Business

Council, comprised of business leaders from both countries,<sup>88</sup> to stress the private sector's importance to the success of peace implementation, including by investing in post-conflict areas and providing employment opportunities for reintegrated former combatants. By supporting the development of integrated economic development plans for regions with potential for growth and market expansion, the United States can provide opportunities for US companies in areas such as infrastructure, construction, and agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and machinery.

The United States can also provide an even playing field for American workers, encourage responsible business conduct, and promote high standards for global commerce through enforcement of the Labor Action Plan, the US National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, and the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). Colombian participation should be encouraged in the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative and Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights.



Palm oil extraction is another source of economic activity in the countryside.

## PRIORITY 6: PROTECT TARGETED COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS

In December 2016, thirty-seven members of the US House of Representatives sent a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry expressing deep concern about the escalation of killings and assaults on human rights defenders, LGBT and women activists, labor leaders, and other social leaders in Colombia.<sup>89</sup> A few days earlier, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia had expressed similar alarm, noting that it had recorded fifty-two murders of human rights defenders in the first eleven months of the year, particularly in rural areas.<sup>90</sup> *The Washington Post* reported that only a handful of suspects had been arrested, but that shadowy right-wing militias were thought to be responsible.<sup>91</sup>

Increasing gender-based violence against women, in particular, has been identified by the UN as a serious obstacle to lasting and stable peace.<sup>92</sup> As illegal groups try to co-opt the

FARC's territory and illicit profit making — the most powerful criminal gang, the Clan del Golfo or Los Urabeños, is reportedly offering former FARC fighters salaries of \$600 per month — community leaders and social activists in rural areas are often the ones to speak out and put up resistance, putting them in harm's way.<sup>93</sup>

The international community in Colombia, including the United States Embassy, has reacted strongly to the attacks on human rights defenders, notably through an initiative called Ambassadors with Defenders (*Embajadores con Defensores*) designed to bring visibility to the work of human

rights advocates and call for prompt investigations of attacks against them.<sup>94</sup> In addition, the National Unit for Protection (*Unidad Nacional de Protección*), a Colombian agency designed to provide various forms of protection to at-risk civil-society leaders, should continue to receive special technical assistance and funds.

The peace accord with the FARC anticipates the risk of violence against peace advocates and former FARC members, including by contemplating US support for the newly created National Commission on Security Guarantees (*Comisión Nacional de Garantías de Seguridad*) and the Special Investigation Unit (*Unidad Especial de Investigación*).<sup>95</sup> This is of particular importance to avoid repeating the story of the political party Union Patriótica in the late 1980s and 1990s, when paramilitary agents systematically killed demobilized left-wing guerillas.

UN Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 1325, reaffirm the important role of women in post-conflict reconstruction and stress the importance of their equal participation and

full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.<sup>96</sup> The United States should voice strong support for such participation while continuing to participate actively in the Ambassadors with Defenders initiative, constantly supporting the National Unit for Protection, and providing the assistance contemplated in the peace accord.

### PRIORITY 7: FACILITATE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The peace accord includes a series of measures designed to facilitate the FARC's transition from illegal armed insurgency to legal political party. Most contentiously, it guarantees the FARC's eventual political movement a minimum of ten seats — five in the Senate, five in the House — in the Colombian Congresses to be elected in 2018 and 2022.<sup>97</sup> One week before the plebiscite, High Commissioner for Peace Sergio Jaramillo identified this provision as the one generating the greatest resistance among Colombian citizens.<sup>98</sup> Former President Uribe and other "no" campaigners claim that the FARC's entry into politics represented a Cuban-Venezuelan Trojan horse.<sup>99</sup>

The FARC leaders have made clear that they have not abandoned their political agenda. Many Colombians harbor deep misgivings about the FARC's impact on the Colombian body politics,

the illicit support they have received from regimes in Cuba and Venezuela, or the potential — as "no" campaigners have warned — that a former guerrilla or a political ally could one day occupy the Colombian presidency.

The question for US policy makers is to what extent such sentiments should influence policy toward Colombia. The United States has tools for opposing the FARC's tactics and criminality, including the FARC's designations as a foreign terrorist organization and as a significant foreign narcotics trafficker under the Kingpin Act.<sup>100</sup> The United States should be in no rush to delist the FARC before the strict criteria for such a step are met. If and when the FARC fulfill their obligations under the peace accord and meet the criteria for delisting, however, US policy makers should be prepared to apply the law, taking into due consideration of the impact such a decision will have on this and future peace processes.

These policy issues, though by no means exhaustive, provide a notion of the priorities facing US policy maker and the choices that will confront US leaders as they craft future strategy toward Colombia. The risk of failing to forge consensus is not so much a breakdown in bilateral relations or a wild deviation in strategy, but more likely a relative paralysis in policy making. The consequence would be a steady reduction in US support and engagement at a juncture where core US interests and investments are at stake.

Only by maintaining a close relationship with Colombia can the United States ensure joint interests are advanced in the hemisphere and beyond. As the recommendations that follow aim to demonstrate, common sense consensus is achievable and would maintain the long-term bipartisan strategic perspective that has characterized US policy toward Colombia for almost two decades.

**Only by maintaining a close relationship with Colombia can the United States ensure joint interests are advanced in the hemisphere and beyond.**

# TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Colombia Peace and Prosperity Task Force set out to discuss and define how the Trump administration and the United States Congress can advance US national security, economic, and geopolitical interests while best supporting Colombia at a defining moment in the country's history.

The recommendations that follow are based on our analysis, reflected in this report, of why Colombia matters to the United States, what we can learn from the successes of Plan Colombia, and how the United States can best safeguard its interests and sustain a tradition of bipartisan policy making on Colombia. Our premise is that while the United States has achieved success, continuity is not the answer. A strategy reboot for new times is required to maximize the return on investment for US taxpayers.

The Task Force's recommendations pursue four broad objectives. First, they seek to replicate the factors that made Plan Colombia a foreign policy achievement though with counter narcotics success still pending, namely an appropriately resourced strategic vision that can be sustained over time and addresses core concerns of both Republicans and Democrats. Second, they seek to reverse a backslicing, and re-establish the hard-won progress of Plan Colombia on security and earlier success on counter narcotics. Third, the recommendations identify areas where catalytic US assistance can ensure that Colombia has the tools necessary to achieve robust implementation of, and strict compliance with, the peace accord. Finally, our recommendations aim to position the United States to partner with an increasingly prosperous and capable Colombia to advance our mutual economic and geopolitical interests.

The Colombia Peace and Prosperity Task Force recommends US policy makers take the following actions:

**1 Establish Peace Colombia as the ongoing strategic framework for US policy, fully funding the strategy with a near-term assurance of resources to safeguard US interests in the critical post-conflict period. This will maintain a sustained, bipartisan vision for US policy toward Colombia that builds on the success of Plan Colombia and addresses the areas where improvement is necessary.**

- Use the \$392 million fiscal year (FY) 2017 appropriation for assistance to Colombia as a baseline to protect Plan Colombia's investments in security and counter narcotics, maximize US national security interests, and achieve a peace dividend. Such assistance must be accompanied by a multi-year spending plan that describes uses of funds by fiscal year, an estimate of the commitments and expenditures of the Colombian Government to implement the peace agreement, and a coordination plan with other international donors. It should also be complemented with contributions by the Department of Defense.

**A strategy reboot for new times is required to maximize the return on investment for US taxpayers.**



OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro in Colombia in 2015. Peace accord compliance is crucial to regional security.

The US should use diplomatic and programmatic engagement to help enforce peace accord implementation.

- Focus Peace Colombia assistance on unique, catalytic US support for Colombia's efforts to "win the peace" by successfully establishing a state presence, democratic institutions, and new economic opportunities in post-conflict areas, and combating the transnational criminal organizations that will inevitably seek to fill the security vacuum left by the FARC.
- The funding burden should be shared by engaging and coordinating with other supporters of Colombia's peace and prosperity such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS), the international financial institutions (particularly the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank), the US-Colombia Business Council, and other major bilateral and multilateral donors such as the European Union and Norway.

**2** **Recognize that robust peace accord compliance and implementation is critical to US national security interests and regional stability. Assistance and monitoring by US authorities are necessary to help Colombia meet concrete benchmarks, including expanded state presence in post-conflict areas, credible transitional justice processes and victims' protections, and the verifiable disarmament, demobilization, and reincorporation of former FARC members. These actions are imperative to enhanced democratic governance, rule of law, and to realizing a lasting peace.**

- Technical assistance should be provided to prevent other armed and criminal groups from appropriating FARC territory. This will require supporting the timely and verifiable disarmament, demobilization, and reincorporation of former FARC members, and scaling up efforts to quickly bolster state presence, democratic institutions, and investment in areas most impacted by the conflict. Put pressure on Colombia to make headway in these areas if momentum lags.



Lasting peace includes reparations to minorities such as the indigenous people who inhabit this village..

- Security and economic development in post-conflict areas should be strengthened by continuing to partner with Norway to lead the Colombia Global Demining Initiative. Seek continued United Nations Security Council support for the UN Special Political Mission to Colombia.
- Credible transitional justice processes should be promulgated for FARC combatants and state actors to ensure meaningful justice for the worst conflict-related crimes and glean maximum information for ongoing law enforcement efforts. Continue to call for compliance with national and international legal and human rights obligations, providing technical assistance for the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (*Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz*), and tying congressional conditionality to Colombia's compliance with such standards on an achievable timeline. In fact, 20 percent of the funds appropriated for FY17 under the Foreign Military Financing Program may be obligated only if the Secretary

of State certifies and reports to the Committees on Appropriations on the independence of the Peace Tribunal, its attention to the victim's rights and the sentences it carries out for perpetrators of gross human rights violations on all sides. The Task Force encourages Congress to encourage the administration to strictly apply such measures.

- Maintain support for the Victims Unit and Land Restitution Unit in order to continue building Colombia's capacity to provide reparations to conflict victims, particularly those most impacted by the conflict such as women, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, and IDPs.
- The protection of human rights defenders and peace advocates is essential in safeguarding the peace process from potential spoilers. The United States must contribute to this effort by institutionalizing the Ambassadors with Defenders program, continuing to support the National Unit for Protection, and delivering the technical assistance contemplated in the peace accord.

**3 Put forward policies that expand US-Colombia cooperation in order to achieve concrete victories against transnational criminal networks, including reducing coca cultivation and trafficking, and other sources of violence such as human trafficking, illegal mining, and corruption. Recognize that achieving these security gains entails a joint effort and requires continued strengthening of the capacity of the Colombian justice system.**

- Push for an enhanced, comprehensive and politically sustainable Colombian counter narcotics strategy that uses all means at its disposal to reduce coca cultivation levels back at least to the levels of the early 2010s. Work through presidential and cabinet-level engagement, bilateral mechanisms such as the High-Level Strategic Security Dialogue (HLSSD), and regular diplomatic, military, and law enforcement exchanges. Agree with the Colombian government on specific benchmarks to measure progress on counter narcotics. Incorporate lessons learned, including on balloon effects and coordination with other countries in the cocaine supply and demand chains, from the Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission, when officially launched. Leverage confessions by demobilized FARC members for actionable information on transnational drug trafficking and money-laundering networks.
- Pursuant to the FY 2017 Appropriations Act, 20 percent of the funds appropriated under International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement may be obligated only if the Secretary of State certifies and reports to the Committees on Appropriations that the government of Colombia has established and is implementing a counter narcotics strategy to reduce illicit drug cultivation and production.
- To combat the threat from new illegal armed groups, transnational organized crime, and illicit activities such as extortion and illegal mining, support a comprehensive strategy that combines support for the Colombian

**The United States should push for an enhanced, comprehensive and politically sustainable Colombian counter narcotics strategy.**

security services, particularly the National Police and a potential new rural police force, with economic opportunities for former combatants and vulnerable communities in post-conflict areas.

- Verify that Colombia has the technical capacity and resources to investigate money laundering, corruption, illicit financing of political campaigns, and undeclared FARC assets and financial networks. Strengthen internal controls and accountability mechanisms in security services to screen for corruption and collusion with criminal groups, and the capacity of the independent press and civil society to report corruption. Coordinate with the US Department of Justice, US Department of the Treasury, and US law enforcement to crack down on these illicit schemes. This is necessary to repatriate illegal assets, to invest in post-conflict areas, and to effectively make reparations to victims.
- Ensure that US justice is served — particularly as it advances accountability of ex-FARC guerrillas. US officials should continue to make Colombian counterparts aware of individuals who are subject to pending or potential indictments, with the understanding that they could be extradited if involved in similar crimes in violation of the terms of the peace accord.

## The United States can advance stability and licit rural economies in Colombia while creating business opportunities for US infrastructure and agricultural firms.

### **4 Deepen US commercial and economic cooperation through Peace Colombia and the existing TPA framework to maximize US business opportunities, spur Colombian market expansion, reignite economic development, protect labor rights, and bolster job creation in post-conflict and historically marginalized areas.**

- Maximize US private sector engagement and opportunities in Colombia by leveraging the Trade Promotion Agreement, the commercial diplomacy and export promotion tools of the US government, and the US-Colombia Business Council. Continue to support Colombia's OECD accession while encouraging full compliance with OECD and TPA market access requirements, and at the same time keeping close attention on how these economic tools and platforms can benefit vulnerable populations such as women, Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples.
- Advance stability and licit rural economies in Colombia while creating business opportunities for US infrastructure and agricultural equipment and services firms. Promote sustainable livelihoods in post-conflict areas and the development of the Colombian agricultural sector by engaging in trade capacity building and supporting rural infrastructure improvements such as tertiary roads, including through public private partnerships. Encourage the multilateral development banks to provide coordinated support for post-conflict development in Colombia. All the while ensuring strict

compliance of labor rights and addressing existing labor rights violations.

### **5 Expand the shared security portfolio in international hotspots where Colombian military and peacebuilding expertise can play a pivotal role to advance US interests globally. Deepen diplomatic coordination on the most urgent issue facing Latin America: democratic institutions under assault, judicial corruption, and human rights abuses in Venezuela.**

- Leverage Colombia's acquired security expertise, while reducing costs for the United States, through efforts such as continued and expanded Colombian cooperation on security in Central America, the Caribbean, Afghanistan, and Africa. Expand on its growing cooperation with NATO and UN Peacekeeping Operations. Consider designating Colombia a major non-NATO ally.
- Advance US regional and global priorities, double down on working with Colombia to support hemispheric defense and security cooperation, global anticorruption, regional economic cooperation (including through the Pacific Alliance), and the Sustainable Development Goals. Revitalize the High-Level Partnership Dialogue as a vehicle for concrete bilateral and multilateral cooperation with meaningful deliverables, rather than an exchange of talking points.
- Collaborate to address the crisis in Venezuela and work closely to mobilize a hemispheric response to violations of inter-American democracy and human rights norms and to manage any humanitarian emergency stemming from Venezuela's violence and economic crisis. Jointly affirm that any solution to the crisis in Venezuela should be peaceful, constitutional, and democratic, and must include freeing of political prisoners, restoring institutions, and protecting human rights.

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