

Colombia and the War-to-Peace Transition

Cautionary Lessons from Other Cases

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In 1948, Colombia entered a period of civil war from which it has never fully emerged. Since 1964, a key contributor to the violence has been the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC). Although motivated originally by high levels of inequality between rich and poor, and guided strategically by Marxist-Leninist ideology and people's war theory, FARC's struggle evolved over several decades to increasingly emphasize drug trafficking and violence against the people. Due to various missteps and missed opportunities by the government, the group grew in strength, reaching its peak during the first years of the presidency of Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002). Thereafter, it declined precipitously as it was mauled by the Colombian military during a national resurgence that reached its peak in the course of the initial administration of President Álvaro Uribe (2002–2006) and continued in the second Uribe administration (2006–2010).

President Juan Manuel Santos (2010–2014) had initially pledged to continue Uribe's policies, but instead he startled all with a commitment to an open-ended peace process that continues to this day. Santos was narrowly

re-elected to a second term (2014–2018) but now finds himself faced with the stubborn refusal of FARC to commit definitively to ending the conflict. This has placed the increasingly unpopular Santos administration in the awkward position of needing a deal at all costs, yet one that will retain legitimacy with a people skeptical about FARC's intentions.

The skepticism is warranted. While there have been many claims of irreversible progress in the talks, progress on substantive issues remains limited, not least on the actual demobilization of FARC as an armed organization and its integration into the nonviolent political process. This deadlock is not surprising: after years of decline, FARC's leadership appears to have realized that their armed struggle had no prospects of success. As part of its revised emphasis on the political aspects of the struggle, it conditionally accepted new peace talks but remained determined to obtain as much advantage as possible by exploiting the government's eagerness to seal a deal.

Specifically, FARC's proposals reflect three objectives: a desperate attempt to gain legitimacy before the Colombian people and the international community; to



(Photo by Luis Acosta, Agence France-Presse)

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas listen during a class on the peace process between the Colombian government and their force 18 February 2016 at a camp in the Colombian mountains.

be given *de facto* (if not *de jure*) political and geographic control over various areas and populations, particularly over important rural regions in the southern part of the country where it has long been active; and to have a constitutional convention called with sectoral representation (ideally with FARC having reserved seats). By satisfying these goals, FARC leaders think they will have better chances to gain political power through elections so as to change the nature of the state—the goal being to turn Colombia into a socialist polity resembling the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. FARC leadership has not abandoned its Marxist-Leninist goals, only cloaked its ideology with language appropriate for the twenty-first century.¹

In its effort to recast its struggle, FARC has claimed throughout the talks that the inequities and brutality of the state compelled it to wage its insurgency. It purports to speak for a broad social base and simply denies the extent to which it has, for decades, espoused assault on the innocent as its principal methodology for

waging war. There is no crime that it has not committed: from torture and murder, to laying extensive (and normally unmarked) minefields throughout the country, to kidnapping and rape, to drug trafficking and extortion.² All these crimes it refutes, insisting instead that the facts of history be decided by various truth commissions and international panels. Against all polling and public expressions of support, the state is to be made the enemy of the people.

Because of the long duration of the negotiations and the excessively high hopes raised by the prospect of peace, the government finds itself in the position of being gradually made to give way. The backdrop for peace talks is anything but auspicious, but most analysts agree that some form of agreement will be signed in 2016—a forecast that is reflexively celebrated because of its seeming promise of Chamberlain-like “peace in our time.” Needed is a deeper appreciation of history, particularly concerning war-to-peace transitions, as the record in comparable settings (such as Sri

Lanka, Nepal, and El Salvador) raises difficult questions regarding Colombia's way ahead.

Peace as a Continuation of War

All capable insurgent groups understand that the use of force—or violence—is only strategically relevant in so far as it creates political space and influence. These goals can equally be obtained through other ways, such as the exploitation of negotiation to achieve protection, immunity, or political concessions incommensurate with a group's military achievements and social standing.

The approach can be seen most forcefully in the conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government, which involved four periods of negotiation, all mediated by foreign powers, and all deeply problematic in implementation and intent, certainly on the part of LTTE. During the final truce, initiated by LTTE in February 2002, it used the restrictions on Sri Lankan security forces to move aggressively into Tamil areas from which it had previously been denied.³ In October 2003, LTTE issued a proposal, *Interim Self-Governing Authority* (ISGA), which would have pushed beyond de facto realities to make it the de jure power in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.⁴ Following the devastating 26 December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the ISGA proposal took on all the trappings of statehood, as the LTTE sought to channel the international aid pouring in to Sri Lanka through its own counterstate bureaucracy.⁵ Throughout, psychological operations targeting the state continued, all while LTTE used the cease-fire as cover to eliminate those who stood in its way, including the Sri Lankan foreign minister and literally hundreds of Tamil politicians and activists.

The point is that LTTE remained committed to war, whatever the verbiage connected with the peace process. In his annual 27 November 2005 speech, delivered on LTTE Heroes Day, "President and Prime Minister of Eelam" (as Tamil media billed him) Velupillai Prabhakaran warned that LTTE intended to renew hostilities if the government made no tangible moves toward peace.⁶ At the same time, prominent LTTE suicide attacks, including an attempted assassination of the commander of the Sri Lankan Army Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka, and the successful targeting of the army number three, pushed the situation beyond redemption. Still

grasping for an ever-more unlikely diplomatic victory, Norway—the lead facilitator of the attempted settlement—made last-gasp efforts at mediation that predictably faltered. As violence increased, suicide attacks hit even targets in the deep south of Sri Lanka, and by August 2006, the country was again at war.

Colombia should be familiar with the strategy employed by LTTE. Peace negotiations have been attempted several times prior to the present round, most recently during the Pastrana administration, but these always came to naught. To break with "repression" and pursue peace, Pastrana complemented negotiations with excursion tours for FARC leaders to meet with European officials, particularly those of social-democratic persuasion, so the FARC leaders would see and hear for themselves how such regimes functioned in the modern political world. It was hoped that such visits would speak to FARC's own revolutionary aspirations and inspire peaceful mediation of grievances. FARC nominally accepted the government's gesture but pushed it further—it demanded the establishment of a *zona de distensión* (demilitarized zone, or *zona*). The government yielded to FARC control over an area the size of Switzerland and a population of some one hundred thousand. In reality, FARC's intent was to buy time to prepare for its "final offensive." As amply documented by Colombian intelligence, it utilized its trips abroad to make new contacts and open new routes for its narcotics shipments. Its *zona* became an unassailable staging ground for further criminal enterprise and attacks.⁷

After more than three years of negotiations, Pastrana and his advisers were no closer to peace. FARC leaders continually introduced new issues and allegations that were disruptive and counterproductive to actual progress. The point, of course, was to prolong the process and allow the movement to reorganize and strengthen its military capabilities, as well as to expand its involvement in the drug cycle. In one of his last official acts, Pastrana ordered the military to reoccupy the *zona*. By this time, however, and in spite of ongoing military operations, major FARC forces were deployed even around Bogota, the capital, blockading the most important national highways and stifling trade and travel. Steep rises in crimes, such as kidnapping and drug trafficking, led to increased fear and even panic, as there was a sense that FARC was the most powerful organization in Colombia.



(Photo by Luis Acosta, Agence France Presse)

Cuban President Raul Castro (center) oversees a handshake between Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos (left) and FARC leader Timoleón Jiménez (right) regarding an agreement in principle to negotiate an end to the FARC insurgency at a meeting held in Cuba, September 2015.

Is there a chance that the current negotiations, now four years old, are also a ruse? The FARC leadership, through its secretariat (also known as the Central High Command), is experienced and deft in managing, or distorting, perceptions. Nevertheless, evidence strongly suggests that FARC's objective, to which all FARC activity is directed, remains ideologically and politically to seize state power. For many years, FARC leaders thought this goal could be reached only through force and a protracted guerrilla war funded through criminality, particularly the drug trade—a connection, it is worth noting, that FARC continues to deny.⁸ Yet, following its military defeat during the Uribe years, FARC's approach shifted to the nonkinetic and focused upon altering the frame and narrative of their fight through information warfare, simultaneously recruiting Lenin's "useful idiots" in promising Colombian sectors: coca growers, marginalized members of organized labor, and alienated left-wing elements such as radical professors and students.⁹ Externally, the movement established reasonably secure bases in Venezuela and Ecuador

so that FARC could survive no matter what blows it suffered on its own soil.

This has remained the FARC strategy and raises questions about the organization's nature and goals. What, for instance, motivates FARC's strict demand for several "peace zones" (it has asked for as many as eighty), ostensibly disarmament zones, but where the group will dominate until it volunteers to give up its arms? Similarly, FARC has negotiated an end to aerial and even manual eradication of coca crops, which is now to be undertaken by local communities, but only if the provision of services by an increasingly cash-strapped government is deemed sufficient. In the meantime, coca cultivation is skyrocketing, replenishing FARC's coffers after years of punishing counterinsurgency operations. Finally, the truth and reconciliation process promises to shield most FARC leaders from prosecution; so long as they admit to their crimes, the agreement merely enforces various restrictions of liberty short of jail time. It is difficult not to see the ongoing peace talks as "war by other means," allowing a group the



(Photo courtesy of Ingmar Zahorsky, Flickr)

Maoists from Nepal's Young Communist League rally against the government of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal 11 September 2009 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The first Maoist government had collapsed just a few months prior as the president had refused to dismiss the army chief over a dispute.

gains that were militarily beyond its reach. In such a context, what is peace?

The case of Nepal offers a cautionary and relevant tale. The “people’s war” waged by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) is normally associated with only the 1996–2006 period of overt hostilities. Since then, Nepal has been technically at peace. This though is a false dichotomy because what has occurred in Nepal since 2006 offers a significant illustration of the changing character of insurgency, particularly as it concerns the use of terrorism across the phases of war and peace.

Though they ostensibly reintegrated into normal politics following the ceasefire and comprehensive peace accord of 2006, the Maoists continued to state (publicly and in their private sessions) that they were involved in an armed revolutionary struggle strategically and were only proceeding by a different path tactically (i.e., political struggle).¹⁰ They moved aggressively to use covert violence—terrorism carried out against local political opponents—as opposed to overt guerrilla warfare to solidify their position and win parliamentary votes. They used specially constituted forces, notably the paramilitary Young Communist League (YCL)—comprised overwhelmingly of combatants who were transferred and “reflagged”—to carry out these attacks.¹¹

The Maoists were effective to the point that they were able to control elections and twice held the prime ministership, which allowed their party to neutralize still further remaining resistance within the demoralized security forces and to expand its influence and solidify its finances. Although statistics have not been officially tabulated, the numbers of victims for the period of “peace” appears to be in the thousands, most assaulted as opposed to killed.¹² There is little an anti-Maoist citizen can do or expect by way of

protection of his or her person and property. The state displays either indifference or incapacity to popular security needs, but Nepal is, officially, at peace.

Translating Military Gains into Political Settlement

On the topic of peace, St Augustine wrote, “There is no one who does not love peace ... It is for the sake of peace that men wage wars and even brigands seek to keep the peace with their comrades.”¹³ The implications for Colombia are obvious. An ambiguous term, “peace”



(Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

A Maoist slogan in Kathmandu, Nepal, just opposite the U.S. embassy. The first line reads “Long live MA[r]LE[nin]MA[o]ism and Prachanda Path.”

is not inherently auspicious. To be celebrated, it must do more than provide illegitimate organizations a path to unobstructed power. Tactically, some predatory actors may need incentives not to spoil the peace, but strategically, peace must reflect a commitment to higher ideals, benefiting the political system more than its most violent players. This in turn requires a common vision of the country's future, one that can bridge ideological divides and bring warring elites together. It is questionable whether Colombia has reached this point, not least because of the uncompromisingly revolutionary ideology underpinning the FARC struggle and its duplicitous strategic approach.

In El Salvador, it took a decade of conflict and fundamental political shifts to unite the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the government in the quest for peace. Following the outbreak of war in 1981, the two sides met first in 1984, and again in September 1989, to discuss peace. Both times, too much distance separated the two sides, and neither felt militarily compelled to compromise. In La Palma in 1984, FMLN pointedly reminded the government that they still “maintain[ed] control of a third of a national territory (sic), ha[d] significant popular support in the cities and the countryside, maintain[ed] their own armed forces, and enjoy[ed] important support and recognition from the international community.”¹⁴ Confident, FMLN posited inclusion in the government as a precondition for peace, something that would have invalidated the elections of the previous year and the freshly penned constitution. The talks collapsed, and positions on both sides hardened.

The government also did not pursue talks with much commitment. The Reagan administration was ideologically opposed to accommodating FMLN, and, regardless, the Salvadoran elite was never compelled to support the reforms needed to get FMLN off the battlefield. In part, this was rooted in an unwillingness to amend the recently altered constitution, but it related also to the U.S. and Salvadoran governments' faith in an eventual victory. For both the White House and San Salvador, attrition was deemed preferable to change, if only to deny FMLN an opportunity to regenerate.

What allowed for productive talks were various local and international developments, for example, the end of the Cold War threatened FMLN's funds and compelled the United States to push for a negotiated

settlement so as to extricate itself from a suddenly far less urgent conflict.¹⁵ Reacting to these shifts, FMLN in 1989 dropped its demands for transitional power sharing and integration into the army, but it still insisted that talks precede a cease-fire and that the elections, planned for later that year, be postponed to aid FMLN's participation. The government balked, dismissing FMLN as “a small reality [that] cannot oblige the government to change the republic's constitutional system.”¹⁶ FMLN was also not willing to yield: “We are flexible,” a spokesman said, “but they are making a mistake if they think we are negotiating from weakness.”¹⁷

In the end, it took an embarrassingly high-profile human-rights scandal by the El Salvadoran military and a failed but symbolically potent FMLN offensive into the capital, San Salvador, to make the stalemate sufficiently painful for both sides to compel compromise. FMLN had to accept that the country's democratic parameters were immutable, and the government that constitutional reforms were necessary to depoliticize the military, reform the police, and investigate wartime abuses. Compromises such as these were possible because both sides now shared a vision of the future that was preferable to continued fighting, and therefore committed themselves to the agreements necessary for its actualization.

It is questionable whether the present situation in Colombia has reached this point. Although Uribe's Democratic Security Policy inflicted severe losses on FARC—one may speak of decimation—the government failed to translate the military advantage into unambiguous bargaining power.¹⁸ FARC therefore persists with its project, and the Santos government, having squandered its advantage, appears powerless to set the terms necessary to move forward. If anything, FARC is now empowered by Colombia's strong security sector, as it uses the internationally resonant language of human rights and government repression to offset its profound military weakness and negotiate from a position of strength.

Thus, harking back to the violent targeting of its surrogate party, the Patriotic Union, in the 1980s, FARC now insists on retaining its weapons in the peace zones that it will then control and the military will be restricted from entering. Whereas allegations of government repression certainly were fitting in earlier phases of Colombia's conflict, and there have been

abuses in the recent past, this rhetoric appears far more instrumental than earnest, producing strategic advantage rather than needed protection.

Indeed, when evidence emerged of FARC organizing armed political rallies in the peace zones and the government sought to prohibit such activity, FARC objected that the government was changing the terms of the agreement and was “basically seeking a surrender.”¹⁹ Again the government had to retreat. Surrender may indeed have been the preferred conclusion of the Democratic Security Policy, given FARC’s military-weakened position at the time and its lack of resonance in Colombian society, and yet—much as the United States and its NATO allies experienced in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya—translating military gains into political victories proved far too challenging. In this, lack of will and misguided assessment by the Santos government certainly played a key role.

This point raises another difference between El Salvador and Colombia. In El Salvador, FMLN emerged as the main opposition party in the very first elections that followed the war-to-peace transition, reflecting its support across Salvadoran society. As a former FMLN commander explained, even though its party came in a distant second, it felt empowered by the support and able from this new position to effect political change, obviating further conflict.²⁰

In contrast, FARC has very little public support. In an August 2015 poll, more than 90 percent of respondents indicated FARC leadership should go to jail.²¹ Mass rallies have denounced FARC, and its

unfavorable rating since 1998 has seldom slipped below 90 percent and has often been higher.²² Whereas by 1989 in El Salvador, 83 percent of the Salvadoran population wanted a negotiated settlement, in Colombia, only 57 percent of the country would vote “yes” in a hypothetical plebiscite on the FARC peace accord; 33 percent are opposed.²³

Given FARC’s lack of support and legitimacy, coupled with its much diminished military position, negotiations as equals was never the optimal framework for peace making in Colombia. This forces the question of what a military and political defeat of FARC would have required.



(Photo by Rodrigo Abd, Associated Press)

Members of the 36th Front of the FARC trek to a new camp in Department of Antioquia, in the northwest Andes of Colombia, 6 January 2016. Big guerrilla camps are a thing of the past; the rebels now move in smaller groups. The 36th Front is comprised of twenty-two rank and file fighters, four commanders, and two dogs. Constant military, social, and political pressure by the Colombian government on FARC for more than a decade, together with loss of covert support from Venezuela, has greatly reduced the geographic scope of FARC influence.

Sri Lanka again provides precedents, given its total military and political defeat of both the LTTE and of Janathā Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a Maoist insurgent group. First, in its design and execution, a military victory must avoid offering the defeated threat group precisely the type of support (particularly international support) that it so sorely lacked beforehand and that may help it offset its military losses. In the case of the



(Photo courtesy of Chamal Pathirana, Wikimedia Commons)

Sri Lankan soldiers carry their unit flags 19 May 2012 during the annual parade in Colombo, Sri Lanka, marking the anniversary of the civil war victory over Tamil Tiger rebels.

final confrontation with LTTE from 2006 to 2009, the lethality and manner of execution by the Sri Lankan armed forces sowed the seeds for a longer-term contestation of government legitimacy and raised red flags across the West as to the need for concessions and compromise. Even as it was losing militarily, LTTE was given a leg up in terms of international legitimacy, which may well fuel a further round of violence in the future. While international pressures have abated following the unexpected change of government in 2015, the question remains whether the narrative of genocide in Sri Lanka can yet provide LTTE or a successor organization a fresh lease of life.

Second, a total military victory would not—and indeed should not—preclude the types of reforms necessary to address the sources of alienation and drivers of violence. The key, however, is that such reforms are undertaken in a manner benefiting not the armed group but the people that it claims to represent. The question for Sri Lanka, therefore, is whether its government has done enough, in the aftermath of LTTE's military defeat, to co-opt a Tamil population and to avoid a re-emergence of armed mobilization as a means to redress grievances in a closed political opportunity structure.

Sri Lanka's crushing of the JVP in 1971 provides a cautionary precursor, given the resurgence of that group and the launch of a far more potent insurgency

in 1987. Similarly, Syria's crushing of the Muslim Brotherhood, thought disturbingly conclusive, also produced over time a renewed and far more intractable insurgency, involving many of the same communities and some of the same organizations that were supposedly crushed in 1982.²⁴ Military victory does not obviate the requirement for reform.

In Colombia, the government neither completed its military victory nor inflicted sufficient harm to produce

a definitive balance of power in the attendant negotiations. The concessions that it has made since then, perversely, have largely benefited FARC rather than the people, whose link to the government (i.e., legitimacy) constitutes the center of gravity of almost all irregular confrontations of this type and whose grievances have remained more or less unchanged and may, during peace, grow worse. Tellingly, the inhabitants of FARC's new peace zones were never consulted as their community was given, like political fodder, to the narco-traffickers now in charge.

Vulnerabilities of a Postconflict Society

This brings us to a final consideration. Even if the negotiations with FARC succeed in achieving a compromise that results in the formal termination of conflict, the historical record reveals several reasons to worry about the fate of postconflict Colombia. First, postconflict societies are in most cases fragile and violent—often more so than during the final years of conflict.²⁵ Where peace agreements are signed, the state is asked to undergo deep-rooted political and economic reforms even while maintaining public order in a society traumatized and powerfully shaped by violence. New or mutated sources of instability must be carefully managed, and public security must be

maintained, if not by local forces then by competent and numerically adequate outsiders.

In El Salvador, an admixture of desperation, opportunism, and revanchism fueled a postconflict crime wave that brought death tolls greater than the average war year and contributed to long-term social and economic dislocation.²⁶ Amid the enthusiasm for peace, a disarmament and demobilization program overseen by the United Nations (UN) dismantled the coercive

the Congo, and more recently, in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. Indeed, the transmutation of forms and types of violence following the formal conclusion of war is a typical peacebuilding challenge. This risk is particularly high in Colombia. Homicide rates have fallen to record lows, and incidents between FARC and the government have virtually ceased since July 2015. Yet coca plantations are growing, reflecting a surging illicit economy underpinned by violence. As Adam Isacson

and Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli note, “The U.S. government measured 159,000 hectares (613 square miles) of territory planted with coca bushes in 2015, the third-highest annual amount ever.”²⁸ New paramilitary groups are also increasing their activity, capitalizing on the gaps left by FARC and the government. Isacson and Sánchez-Garzoli note a “terrifying spike” in the month of March against human rights defenders, most of them in rural zones and urban areas where the state’s presence is weak.²⁹

Meanwhile, *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), a smaller but nonetheless significant



(Photo by Tom Marks)

A Colombian military urban patrol member interacts with the populace in Pereira, Department of Risaralda, Colombia, September 2003.

capacity of the state and rebel forces, resulting in a power vacuum at an acutely fragile moment, particularly as the creation of new forces, predictably, became a drawn-out and complex affair.²⁷ Because the UN operation was also not mandated, tasked, or structured to provide public security, there were in effect no forces present to check the mounting crime wave. While the criminality did not trigger renewed war, its effects—violence, gangs, and government illegitimacy—haunt El Salvador, and the region, to this day.

A lack of postconflict security was seen also in Guatemala and Panama, the Democratic Republic of

Colombian guerrilla group, has, despite engaging in peace talks with the government, also carried out more attacks of late and “appears to be increasing its presence in zones of FARC influence.”³⁰ FARC points to these developments when it insists on retaining its weapons during and after the peace agreement, so as to ensure its protection, but for the same reason it also expects the military to transition from counterinsurgency to external threats—to adopt the role it would play in a safe and secure democracy. The convergence of risk factors and security sector reform may produce a perfect storm of insecurity and violence, all in a time of peace.



(Photo by Naves Chitraka, Reuters)

Supporters of Federal Alliance, a coalition of Madhes-based parties and other ethnic political parties and organizations, protest against the constitution near the Singha Durbar office complex that houses the prime minister's office and other ministries 15 May 2016 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Despite the historically consistent trend of increased violence following conflict termination, inflated expectations of peace often bring rushed measures intended to revitalize the economy. Given the unique vulnerabilities of a postwar society, such efforts are typically counterproductive, and their ill effects tend to be felt particularly by those most likely to remobilize against the state or resort to criminal enterprise to make ends meet.

In El Salvador, the government quickly embarked on structural adjustments to modernize its economy in line with the prevalent market principles of growth and development. Though its gross domestic product (GDP) increased threefold between 1986 and 1994, poverty levels rose and economic inequality worsened. Underestimated at the time was the economic dislocation of the country and the need for longer-term government-led reconstruction and rehabilitation—socially and economically—to heal the wounds of protracted war and preclude the type of societal bifurcation that had spawned conflict in the first place.

Instead, encouraged by the international financial institutions, El Salvador harmed a very vulnerable population at a highly combustible time. While war has not resumed, the failure to manage postconflict vulnerabilities has contributed to the rise of new sources of instability: further disintegration of the Salvadoran society, destruction of property, government illegitimacy, uncontrolled migration, and the rise of gang structures and violent crime.

As Mats Berdal has found, “the formal end of armed conflict, especially if reached through a negotiated settlement, rarely entails a clean break from past patterns of violence, nor does it mean that the grievances which gave rise to conflict in the first instance have been entirely removed.”³¹ In Colombia, the talks have focused heavily on what concessions to offer FARC, but the populations on which it has preyed continue to struggle and are unlikely to be adequately cared for by the state. Given Colombia's current economic slump, the government may very well prove unable to reach and incorporate critical

communities in a manner that inures them from violent alternatives.³²

This matters, as it was precisely the government relation to its people that underpinned the Democratic Security Policy. Locating government legitimacy as its center of gravity, the counterinsurgency campaign extended the state to long-neglected communities, through the imposition of a war tax upon the well-off, socioeconomic opportunities, and creation of more societal and geographic inclusion than Colombia had ever known historically.³³ From 2002 to 2010, the years of the Democratic Security Policy, average economic growth, per capita GDP, and health coverage doubled, all while poverty rates decreased from 53 percent to 37 percent, and inflation from 6.9 percent to 2.5 percent.

In contrast, in March 2016 inflation hit 8 percent, its highest level since October 2001. Foreign direct investment has continued despite currency fluctuations but benefits mostly those areas where business is already deemed attractive. Meanwhile, Colombia's *gini* coefficient—a measure of income inequality—remains the second worst regionally, despite some improvement in recent years.³⁴

The economic insecurity of Colombia today, and the added sources of instability typical of a postconflict society, look likely to produce a mass of dispossessed and marginalized communities, forced either to embrace crime as a way of life or susceptible, at the very least, to FARC influence in a future electoral contest (particularly where these populations reside in or near one of the peace zones). Given Santos's own unpopularity, a change in government may be just what Colombia needs, but FARC looks more likely to exploit rather than address the country's continued grievances.³⁵

Indeed, FARC has demonstrated a growing awareness of the security and economic vacuum created by the state's failure to sustain the democratic mobilization that typified Uribe's first term. FARC has thus dramatically increased its efforts to mobilize *cocaleros* (cultivators of coca), marginalized indigenous elements, and the extreme left wing of labor and of the political spectrum (e.g., students). These efforts, accompanied by a robust information warfare campaign, have allowed FARC to interject itself into national politics in the same manner as Hezbollah or the Nepali Maoists—or any other political party that also fields its own armed forces. The future of Colombia's long-standing democratic tradition is at risk. ■

Biographies

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Notes

1. Nothing in such an assessment of FARC need be treated as mere opinion. Anyone may access the group's extensive online presence and that of its fellow travelers. Indeed, FARC essentially boasts of its Cold War approach. See, for example, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), the official FARC website, accessed 10 May 2016, <http://farc-ep.co/>.

2. Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, *Sobreviviendo al Infierno: Las FARC Desde Adentro* [Surviving Hell: Inside the FARC], (Bogotá: MINDEFENSA, 2015), accessed 10 May 2016, <https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/Mindefensa/Documentos/descargas/Prensa/Documentos/SobreviviendoAlInfierno.pdf>. This report contains twenty testimonies of former FARC members.

3. One of the best treatments of this period is G.H. Peiris, *Twilight of the Tigers: Peace Efforts and Power Struggles in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

4. "LTTE's Proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority in the Northeast Region of Sri Lanka," South Asia Terrorism Portal, 1 November 2003, accessed 10 May 2016, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/document/papers/LTTE_northeast.htm.

5. Zachariah Mampilly, "A Marriage of Inconvenience: Tsunami Aid and the Unraveling of the LTTE and the GoSL's Complex Dependency," *Civil Wars* 11(3) (September 2009): 302–20, accessed 10 May 2016, <https://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=1a8e58d7-62da-44d7-a0ce-241774a7a6fe%40sessionmgr106&vid=3&hid=107>.

6. Kasun Ubayasiri, "An Elusive Leader's Annual Speech," speech at Central Queensland University, 2006, found on Tamilnation.org website, accessed 10 May 2016, <http://tamilnation.co/lte/vp/mahaveerar/06ubayasri.htm>.

7. Carlos Ospina, "Colombia and the FARC: From Military Victory to Ambivalent Political Reintegration?," in eds. Michelle Hughes and Michael Miklaucic, *Impunity: Countering Illicit Power in War and Transition* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2016).

8. Timoshenko, "La discusión que se viene sobre el narcotráfico," *Artículos y Opinión, Hablando Claro*, 11 December 2013, reposted on FARC-EP, accessed 10 May 2016, <http://farc-ep.co/?p=2662>. During the peace talks in Havana in 2013, Iván Márquez, the leading FARC negotiator, has denied such links and denounced the allegations as false.

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10. "Baburam Bhattarai: On Nepal's Social Revolution," interview by World People's Resistance Movement, 12 December 2009, The Marxist-Leninist website, accessed 10 May 2016, <https://marxistleninist.wordpress.com/2009/12/12/baburam-bhattarai-on-nepals-social-revolution/>. A particularly useful explanation for the change may be found in the lengthy interview given to World People's Resistance Movement (Britain) by the Maoists' then-chief ideologue and "Number Two," Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, wherein he stated directly that all accommodation was tactical for the strategic pursuit of power.

The Party leadership repeated this same position in November 2010 at the Maoist Sixth Plenum—well after "peace" agreements had been signed—and has more recently been reiterated in the bitter Central Committee/Politburo debates of January 2012. In the latter, intraparty agreement was reached to use "revolt" (i.e., urban insurrection) if the stubborn rival parties did not give in to Maoist demands concerning the shape of the "new order."

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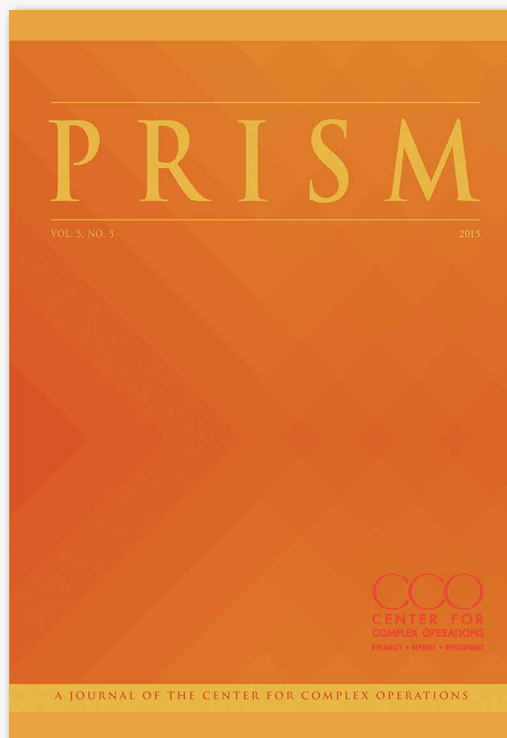
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MR We Recommend

For those interested in reading more background and analysis of a potential peace settlement to Colombia's long-standing Marxist insurgency, your attention is invited to the displayed article published in Vol.5, No. 3 (2015) of *PRISM*, a publication of the Center for Complex Operations.

http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_5-3/Prism%20Vol%205%20No%203.pdf



Colombia

A Political Economy of War to an Inclusive Peace

BY DAVID KILCULLEN & GREG MILLS

Such progress has been made in Colombia that it is hard to remember that only 20 years ago, the country was renowned not for its practical people or its wonderful cities and rainforests, but for its cocaine-fuelled murder rate. At the height of the drug war in the 1990s, Colombians suffered ten kidnappings a day, 75 political assassinations a week, and 36,000 murders a year (fifteen times the rate in the United States).¹ The military and police competed with an array of guerrillas, gangs, *ranchos* and paramilitaries. Guerrillas had so isolated the largest cities that urban-dwellers traveling as little as five miles out of town risked kidnapping, or worse. Twenty-seven thousand two hundred thirteen people died in 1997-2001 alone.² Colombia entered the 21st century at risk of becoming a failed state. Since then, national leaders have turned the situation around, applying a well-designed strategy with growing public and international support. Kidnappings, murders and cocaine cultivation are down, government control has expanded, and the economy is recovering. Talks in Havana, Cuba, offer the hope of peace, even as fighting continues on the ground in key areas. But the situation is shakier than it seems—indeed the very success of Colombia's current campaign carries the risk of future conflict.

In this paper, which draws on fieldwork in Colombia between March 2009 and August 2014, we examine Colombia's turnaround, explore current issues, and offer insights for the future and for others facing similar challenges. We consider the conflict's political economy, by which we mean the dynamic social-political-economic system that frames people's choices within incentive structures created by two generations of war. Our key finding is that, with some significant exceptions, key commanders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known widely by their Spanish acronym, FARC) and others have become what we call "conflict entrepreneurs," seeking to perpetuate war for personal gain rather than to win (and thereby end) the conflict. Therefore, remarkable as it is, today's military progress won't be enough to end the war in a way that guarantees Colombia's peaceful future. We argue that a comprehensive conflict transformation is

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