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## The Future of US-Colombia Relations

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# THE FUTURE OF U.S.- COLOMBIAN RELATIONS

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### Introduction

Colombia has been one of the United States' closest allies in the region, stretching back to the 1950s. Colombia was the only Latin American country to join the Korean War in a direct military role. In 1951, the first 1,000 Colombian soldiers disembarked in South Korea where they maintained a military presence until the end of the war. During the 1960s and 1970s, Colombia became one of the largest recipients of United States assistance in Latin America. The assistance was designed to enable Colombia to develop economically through industrialization, agrarian, and social reforms and helped solidify Colombian-U.S. military relations.<sup>1</sup> Colombia's support of the United States during the war and the U.S.' economic support of Colombia during the 1960s and 1970s fostered a multi-faceted, long-lasting diplomatic and military relationship between the two countries that has evolved, but remained strong for over half a century.

A turning point for the U.S.-Colombia relationship was the adoption of Plan Colombia in 2000. More than an assistance program, Plan Colombia was a partnership between the U.S. and Colombian governments to combat narcotics trafficking, insecurity and terrorism and shore up the Colombian state's capacity to control its territory. That relationship has led to long-standing and deep connections between both countries' militaries, close professional and personal relations among the armed forces, diplomats, businesspeople, academics, and policymakers and ultimately contributed to the success of Plan Colombia in achieving its primary objectives. It was those close relationships that also led to the Colombia-U.S. Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA), Colombia's observer status in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its pending accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Political, security, and diplomatic conditions have shifted in both countries. The peace agreement and efforts to peacefully integrate the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas* (FARC) into Colombian society and economy have changed the security dynamics and challenges. So too has the on-going collapse and humanitarian crisis across the border in Venezuela, leading to—as of this writing—1.3 million Venezuelan refugees living in Colombia and illicit connections between the other guerrilla group in Colombia, the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), former FARC combatants, and other illegal groups on the Venezuela-Colombia border.

According to a report by Insight Crime: “Since the mass influx of desperate Venezuelan migrants began in this region, gangs have operated under the premise that whoever controls the international crossings controls everything. Also, the border's official closure by Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro in February turned into the perfect opportunity for groups like *La Línea* to gain strength.” Recently, according to the report, the criminal group *La Línea* has gained the upper hand on illicit commerce and transport along the Colombian-Venezuelan border. They have been able to do this by battling another criminal organization, *Los Rastrojos*, “which led to several homicides in Cúcuta and Puerto Santander” and by allying with *La Frontera* gang.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Colombia's traditional two-party system has become attenuated, leading to the rise of new movements and polarization between the democratic left and the democratic right. Diplomatic gaffes and insults from the White House have also rocked relations, ricocheting across Colombian media.

Despite these changes and potential tensions, Colombian-U.S. relations will remain strong, based on the extensive foundation of security, diplomatic and economic cooperation that has developed over the past 60 years. However, the nature of the relationship will change, and factors such as political uncertainty and change should be carefully observed. Contingency planning and potential adjustments in the relationship across sectors may become necessary.

Colombia remains both institutionally, and at the level of popular opinion one of the most pro-American countries in the region, and its armed forces are closely tied to the U.S. Defense Department, its military and its different institutions including the U.S. Southern Command—through training, operations, equipment, and collaboration outside Colombia. However, as was seen in the case of Venezuela—which also had one of the most pro-American publics in the region—change can occur quickly and unexpectedly, as was the case in Venezuela after 1999. Well-established points of U.S.-Venezuela military-to-military collaboration, professionalism of the armed forces and separation between the military and politics was quickly rolled back in the service of an ideological political project. Will or even could that happen in Colombia in the next ten years?

That is what we set out to answer here. We do this primarily by examining Colombia and Colombian-U.S.

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1. *Relations with the United States*. U.S. Library of Congress, [www.countrystudies.us/colombia/98.htm](http://www.countrystudies.us/colombia/98.htm) [Last accessed 6/18/19]

2. Olaya, Angela, “‘La Línea’ Gang Takes Deadly Hold on Colombia-Venezuela Border.” *InSight Crime*, May 21, 2019, [www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/la-linea-gang-colombia-venezuela-border/](http://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/la-linea-gang-colombia-venezuela-border/) [Last accessed 6/18/19]

relations through five channels: politics and public opinion; security; economy and trade; multilateral relations; and diplomatic relations. We start with politics and public opinion because Colombian politics and its party system are undergoing change. That change will affect the other elements of the U.S.-Colombian relationship, including security cooperation and economics.

### Politics and Public Opinion

While Colombia's second-round presidential election in 2018 gathered most of the public attention for the choices—between a staunchly conservative candidate, Iván Duque, and a strongly leftist candidate, Gustavo Petro—the roots of the polarization received less attention. In the past twenty years, Colombia's traditional two-party system has been in decline. Since independence, the Conservatives and Liberal parties—or, perhaps more aptly, party machines—had dominated Colombian politics, their fierce rivalry even erupting in 1948 to 1958 into the civil war known simply as *La Violencia*. The internecine bloodletting was ended when General Rojas Pinilla (from 1952 and 1957) and the Liberal and Conservatives eventually agreed to form a power sharing agreement called the National Front. In the democratic years that followed the National Front, the Liberals and Conservatives effectively swapped the presidential office between themselves and the two parties dominated the nation's bicameral legislature. The National Front ended in 1974, leading to the beginning of the end of their bipartisan dominance. The Constitution of 1991 effectively put the nails in the coffin of the two-party system. Decentralization reforms<sup>3</sup> and popular anger over corruption and the inability of the state to control crime, narcotics trafficking and insecurity led to the growth of a series of small local movements. The 1991 Constitution allowed for the registration of dozens of political parties including the former guerrilla movement, M-19, which had played a role in the drafting of the new constitution.

The decline of the two-party system and its dispersion to other movements and candidates became apparent in the 1998 presidential elections when the two leading candidates only received a combined 49.1 percent of the popular vote in the first round. The party system briefly converged again with the candidacy and two-term presidency of Álvaro Uribe who, while running as an “independent Liberal,” brought elements of the Conservative Party base with him after the public failure of Conservative President Andrés Pastrana's peace process in the previous term. Uribe's term temporarily halted the

dispersion of votes across the party system but ended the two-party system by creating a new party and drawing from both of Colombia's traditional parties. Uribe's Partido de la U split both the Conservative and Liberal parties, and both struggled to reach 18% in the Senate while Uribe's personal vehicle Partido de la U (a supposed reference to unity but everyone knew the U stood for Uribe) received 20 percent. In both of Uribe's elections, the votes of the top two vote getters in the first round totaled slightly over 84 percent. By 2014, in the re-election of Uribe's former Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos, the two top candidates only received 44.9 percent of the vote in the first round.

The vote totals rebounded in the first round of the 2018 elections to a combined 64.2 percent, but by that time there was one crucial difference: neither of the top two vote-getters, Duque or Petro, represented the traditional Liberal or Conservative parties. The only candidate representing one of the two once-mighty party machines, Humberto de la Calle of the Liberal Party coalition, received only 2 percent of the votes or just 399,180 of the ballots cast. Unlike the convergence toward the center that marked the Liberal-Conservative era, the second round in 2018 presented two stark choices, one from the right promising to undo elements of Santos' peace agreement with the FARC, Duque, and the other a former mayor of Bogotá who had been removed from office representing a new party, the Progressive Movement, Petro.

With this fraying of Colombia's two-party system have come two consequences. The first is the dispersion of seats in Congress to a range of parties. Fragmentation had already started, but it took a while to trickle into the presidential system. In 2002, there were 15 parties in the Senate and 21 in the lower chamber. Conservatives and Liberals populated both Chambers, but the inability to reach a majority made it difficult to pass legislation. As a result of the 2018 elections, there are now 11 parties in Colombia's upper house and 13 parties in its lower house. Should this continue, the fracturing of the national legislature raises long-term concerns over effective democratic governance.

The second consequence of growing electoral volatility is fragile popular support for presidents. This fragmentation of presidential support has taken a toll on the current president. According to surveys conducted at the end of Duque's first 100 days in power, the president's popularity had already sunk to 22 percent, the lowest of any Colombian president that

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3. Sabatini, Christopher, “Latin America's Lost Illusions: Decentralization and Political Parties” *Journal of Democracy*, April 2003, Vol. 14, (2), pp. 138-150 <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/?s=Sabatini&orderby=score> [Last accessed 6/5/19]

early into his term. Moreover, according to a May 21, 2019 survey, 60 percent of Colombians disapproved of Duque and his policies. The president is particularly unpopular with voters between the ages of 18 and 34, with 25 to 26 percent of Colombians in that age group supporting the president, according to a February 2019 survey.<sup>4</sup>

The policy reasons for the president's unpopularity are multiple. For one, Duque is trapped in the polarized public opinion surrounding the peace deal. According to surveys—and the October 2016 popular referendum on a previous version of the peace deal which lost—the country is almost evenly split, 50/50 over the final deal. Duque and his Democratic Center Party were critical of the peace agreement during the campaign, but in office, he has only taken modest steps to weaken the deal by underfunding some projects and offices that were part of the deal and criticizing the special justice system set up to balance justice and reconciliation in trying former combatants. However, in doing so, he has pleased neither side. For Colombians critical of the deal, Duque has not done enough to repeal it (the FARC still has its ten congressional seats, for example). For supporters of the peace deal, Duque's criticisms of it and attempts to limit the power and activities of several of the offices charged with implementing it are undermining a deal in which they believe in.

There have also been some policy stumbles that have cost Duque popular support. One of them was the presentation and then retraction of a tax plan. The controversial proposal, to increase value-added tax, split the president's party in Congress and was then withdrawn, creating the impression of the president's political clumsiness. According to one survey, the president's popularity dropped by 26 points as a result of the ordeal.<sup>5</sup> Colombians have also become critical of the government's lack of efforts to combat corruption. According to a March 2019 survey, 67 percent of Colombians disapprove of how Duque has tackled state corruption, with only 27 percent of Colombians approving of his methods. During the campaign and early in his administration, Duque had promised a new initiative to address corruption. Instead of bringing forth a package of new policies and regulations as promised, Duque's party members have chosen to support bills that are already in Congress,

which many Colombians feel do not do enough to hold politicians accountable.<sup>6</sup>

All of this raises the question of how and if Colombia's party system will re-constitute itself. Elsewhere on the continent, Peru's democracy has limped along for over two decades without a functioning, stable party system. In that case, presidents have often finished their terms with near-single-digit-levels of popularity, and one president has resigned; yet with every election, centrist, democratic candidates have prevailed. To win, candidates, including former presidents Alan García and Ollanta Humala, have tacked to the center, thereby precluding the election of more extremist candidates. Could the same occur in Colombia should a new stable, party system fail to emerge from the ashes of the past one?

For one, Peru's limited experience may indicate that just because a candidate came in a close second in one presidential election, he or she does not automatically emerge as the front runner on the heels of an unpopular president's end of term. In the case of Colombia, this could mean that Petro or even an ally is not automatically positioned to coast to the presidential palace should Duque and his Democratic Center Party tank in its first or possible second term. Other centrist candidates will likely emerge to attract moderate voters across the ideological spectrum. According to surveys conducted by Mitchell Seligson at Vanderbilt University, Colombians tend to be more conservative than citizens in other countries—a tendency proven by the lack of a strong democratic leftist party until recently.<sup>7</sup> This conservative or moderate political culture will likely favor the emergence of centrist presidential candidates even in the absence of an institutionalized, stable party system.

The 2018 elections also demonstrated the extent to which the peace accord between the Colombian government and the FARC has polarized the country. As we describe below under security, President Santos' peace negotiations and the resulting deal became deeply divisive. Part of this stems from popular and political concerns over the balance between justice and reconciliation struck in the deal that many—on both sides of the ideological spectrum—felt was too light on former combatants involved in the killing of citizens, kidnapping, narcotics trafficking, and other illicit

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4. Alesma, Adrian, "Duque's Approval Recovers Significantly" *Colombia Reports*, February 4, 2019, <https://colombiareports.com/duques-approval-recovers-significantly/> [Last accessed 6/10/19]

5. June S., "Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations" *Congressional Research Service*, February 9, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43813.pdf> [Last accessed 6/10/19]

6. Aux, Juan Jose, "Aprobación De Duque, De Nuevo a La Caída" *El Colombiano*, April 5, 2019, <https://www.elcolombiano.com/zolombia/politica/desaprobacion-y-aprobacion-presidente-ivan-duque-marzo-2019-GM10496550> [Last accessed 6/10/19]

7. Garcia Sanchez, Migue Rodriguez Raga, Juan Carlos, and Seligson, Mitchell, "Political Culture of Democracy in Colombia, 2013" *Latin America Popular Opinion Project*, Vanderbilt University, p. 71.

activities. These concerns extended to the agreement to permit former FARC leaders who had not been accused of participating in crimes to form a political party and participate in electoral politics. As an incentive to agree to give up their arms for the ballot box, the deal gave the FARC party five representatives in each chamber of the bicameral national legislature.

These fears were stoked by the strident public opposition of former President Uribe (and Santos' former boss when he was Defense Minister). That the negotiations were conducted in Communist Cuba and needed the implicit support of the governments of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro across the border in Venezuela, where many FARC leaders had sought refuge, also fed into fears among one of Latin America's conservative-leaning populations<sup>8</sup> that Santos had given *chavismo* an electoral route to power in Colombia.

The charge was largely alarmist given the deep unpopularity of the FARC in Colombia. Indeed, in the first congressional elections in which they participated as a political party, as the Alternative Revolutionary Party of the Community (*Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común* or FARC) the FARC political movement only won .18 percent of the vote for the lower house and .29 percent of the vote for the upper house, not enough to gain any seats in either house, but enough for the five seats guaranteed under the peace deal.

Just as Colombians in their political opinions tend to skew more conservative than citizens from the majority of Latin American countries, they also tend to be more pro-U.S. In 2017, according to Pew World Values surveys, after President Trump's election, Colombia remained one of the most pro-American countries in the region, with 51 percent of Colombians having favorable views of the United States, tied with Peru and above the regional median of 49 percent. Colombia was followed by Brazil (50 percent have a favorable view), Venezuela (47 percent have a favorable view), Chile (39 percent have a favorable view), Argentina (35 percent have a favorable view) and Mexico at the bottom, with 30 percent of Mexicans having a favorable view of its neighbor to the north. The same report also revealed that 56 percent of Colombians have favorable views of Americans themselves. At the same time, though, according to a Pew World Surveys report, only 17 percent of Colombians trust President Trump to do the "right thing in world affairs"—in contrast to an average of 56 percent of Colombians in surveys conducted

between 2014 and 2016 that trusted former President Barack Obama to "do the right thing."

These positive attitudes toward the U.S. are due in no small part to the large numbers of U.S. citizens of Colombian descent and Colombians living in the United States. As of May 2015, just under 1 million Colombian immigrants and their children live in the United States. Colombia is the largest South American source of immigration, 14th largest source overall, and represents 1.7 percent of the U.S.-foreign born population. Most immigrants arrived fleeing the narcotics-fueled violence and civil war of the 1980s and 1990s and are heavily concentrated in greater Miami and New York City areas. As a reflection of their importance to families in Colombia and their attitudes toward the United States, Colombia's U.S.-based diaspora is their most significant source of remittances, in 2012 totaling \$1.3 billion.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, public opinion and attitudes toward a country and its people are thin reeds to lean on for sustaining healthy, productive bilateral relations. Public opinion can be fickle, especially when there are external stresses that can affect it. And Colombia currently has plenty of pressures, many of which are likely to mount. Among them: Venezuelan refugees, imperfect disarmament and integration of FARC, rising criminality and insecurity along the border area with Venezuela, and a potentially unpredictable and inconsistent ally, the United States. In the case of the latter, U.S. domestic politics—in good and bad ways—can also help to shape Colombian attitudes toward the country, especially given the close relations between the two countries.

At the same time, Colombians demonstrate concerning levels of distrust, if not a rejection, of their political system and its politicians. This pool of festering citizen frustration is evident in the most recent surveys by Vanderbilt University's Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). According to their 2016-2017 surveys, only 10 percent of Colombians have confidence in their political parties, making them one of the most distrustful of their party system in the hemisphere. Only Brazilians (9 percent), Chileans (8.5 percent) and Peruvians (7.5 percent) have less confidence in their political parties. Accordingly, only 24 percent of Colombians say that they trust elections, the third lowest in the region, just above Brazil (23.4 percent) and Haiti (18.4 percent).<sup>10</sup> At the

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8. García Sanchez, Miguel, et al.

9. *The Colombian Diaspora* in the United States. Migration Policy Institute, May 2015, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/RAD-ColombiaII.pdf> [Last accessed 6/18/19]

10. Cohen, Mollie, Lupu, Noam, and Zechmeister, Elizabeth, "The Political Culture of Democracy in the Americas, 2016/17," *Latin America Popular Opinion Project*, August 2017, Vanderbilt University, pp.15 [https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2016/AB2016-17-Comparative\\_Report\\_English\\_V2\\_FINAL\\_090117\\_W.pdf](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2016/AB2016-17-Comparative_Report_English_V2_FINAL_090117_W.pdf) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

same time, 74.9 percent of Colombians believe half or more of their politicians are corrupt, the fourth highest in the region after Brazil (83.4 percent), Mexico (72.2 percent) and Peru (77 percent).<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps it is no surprise then that just a bare majority of Colombians, 53.3 percent, agree with the statement “... democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government...” More positively, though, despite citizen concerns over security and low levels of support for democracy, support for a military coup to address crime remains relatively low in Colombia. When responding to the statement, “When there is a lot of crime, a military take-over of the state would be justified” only 33 percent of respondents agreed, compared to regional highs of 59.3 percent in Jamaica and 55.3 percent in Peru, and the regional low of 23.3 percent in the United States.

Large segments of Colombians are distrustful of the police. According to surveys, 17.4 percent of Colombians felt victimized by corruption as a whole and 12.4 percent felt that they had been specifically victimized by a police officer through actions such as being asked for a bribe. 18.3 percent of Colombians felt that bribes are justified and had some degree of tolerance toward police corruption. Confidence in police efficiency was also low, 16.6 percent of Colombians felt that the police would take more than three hours to respond to their call. Colombians also have a deep distrust of the judicial system, with 69 percent of Colombians believing that the Colombian justice system would give little to no punishment to a guilty person.<sup>12</sup> According to a 2017 Universidad de los Andes report, in Tumaco and Mestizas, a port city and rural town, citizens have little to no trust in most public institutions, particularly those who have played some part in the peace agreement. Citizens have no trust in “criminal groups” or the national police, and have very little trust in the ELN, armed forces, parliamentary groups, and FARC.<sup>13</sup> The report concludes that there are “low levels of social trust, as well as low levels of trust toward both local and central governing institutions.”<sup>14</sup> This distrust is likely the outcome of citizens’ heightened sense of insecurity as the country goes through various social and political changes.

### Security

The Colombian armed forces have roughly 481,000 members across its three branches—army, navy and

air force—with its intelligence service. Also, Colombia has a national police force of 180,000. Each of these forces—all under the Defense Ministry’s purview—work closely with the United States armed services and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). After almost two decades of close collaboration under Plan Colombia, Colombian, and U.S. officers, civilian defense officials and soldiers are closely intertwined professionally and even personally.

U.S.-Colombian military cooperation and collaboration remains strong and is one of the closest military-to-military relations in the hemisphere, if not the closest. Colombia’s participation in military training and exchange programs goes back to 1820 when Colombian military officers and youth came to the United States to attend the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and other educational institutions. During the Cold War, Colombia was the largest supplier of students to the U.S. Army School of the Americas, and connections led to the creation of training programs in Colombia, such as the Lancero course. The relationship has evolved, especially after Plan Colombia, from what the National Defense University described in 2017<sup>15</sup> as shifting from “mentorship” or “tutorial” to one of collaboration and “advice” between “sovereign equals in pursuit of common interests.”

So, while Colombia has gone from one of the most active Latin American countries in U.S. military training programs, those numbers have declined in recent years as a reflection of that evolving, maturing relationship. In a sign of the closeness and confidence in this relationship, SouthCom has named a Colombian officer, Brigadier General Juan Carlos Correa Consuegra, as the Director of the J7/9 Exercises and Coalition Affairs Directorate. That relationship between all levels of the military hierarchies in both countries is unlikely to change, for reasons of institutional ties, personal relations, and shared visions of strategy and role. In speaking with Colombian civilian defense experts and military officers, the respect for the U.S. military and the relationship is evident.

As part of those maturing ties, the U.S. and Colombian militaries have conducted joint operations outside Colombia or outside Colombia-specific areas. Through SouthCom, the U.S. and Colombian militaries collaborate in Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Crisis Response Africa (SPMAGTF), and for the

11. Cohen, Mollie, et al., pp.60.

12. Cohen, Mollie, et al.

13. Binningsbø, Helga, et al, *Perceptions of and Experience with the Peace Process in Colombia*, PRIO & Universidad De Los Andes, 2018, [www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=1568&type=publicationfile](http://www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=1568&type=publicationfile) [Last accessed 6/24/19]

14. Binningsbø, Helga, et al.

15. Miklaucic, Michael and Pinzón, Juan Carlos, “Partnership: The U.S.-Colombia Experience” November 20, 2017, *The National Defense University*, <https://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/1375948/14-partnership-the-colombia-usexperience/> [Last accessed 6/5/19]



**FIGURE 1**  
**U.S., China and Russia military sales to Latin America, 2008-2018**

COUNTRY	U.S.	China	Russia
Argentina	\$106 million	\$1 million	\$14 million
Bolivia	\$8 million	\$46 million	N/A
Brazil	\$478 million	N/A	\$175 million
Colombia	\$611 million	N/A	\$34 million
Peru	\$37 million	\$15 million	\$232 million
Venezuela	\$6 million	\$588 million	\$2.748 billion

SOURCE: "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database." SIPRI, [www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers](http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

first time, Colombian officials have been integrated into the leadership team directing that mission. Every year, the U.S. military hosts meetings and training sessions at U.S. military bases for Colombian troops. Most recently this included a 2018 training with Colombian-U.S. air forces at Davis-Monthan Airforce Base. This year (2019), Colombian Defense Chief Luis Navarro Jiménez visited SouthCom to discuss U.S.-Colombia defense cooperation and joined a roundtable with other SouthCom leaders to discuss the command's mission and its cooperation with Colombia and other partners in the region. Colombian military officers and doctors also provided support for the hospital ship USNS Comfort's medical assistance mission in 2018 and the ongoing, civilian-led delivery of humanitarian aid for vulnerable populations in the region, including for Venezuelan refugees.

Another sign of the close U.S.-Colombia military relationship is arms sales. The United States remains the largest supplier of military equipment to Colombia and higher per capita than any other country in Latin America. That commercial relation—and the maintenance and upgrade ties that come with it—has also meant that compared to other countries in the region, including U.S. allies, China and Russia are less important providers of military materiel. (See Figure 1.) Most of the equipment purchased from China, according to Frank Mora, is "[d]rones, transport vehicles, boots, camouflage."<sup>16</sup> While this does give Chinese arms and materiel manufacturers access,

they are still not the suppliers of heavy, critical equipment. Much of this materiel and personal relationship deepened through Plan Colombia. According to the State Department, the original interagency assistance package included \$390.5 billion to assist the Colombian government gaining control over drug-producing regions of the country and weakening the networks and organizations involved in their production and shipping. Those funds supported training and equipping the second and third counter-narcotics battalions in the Colombian army and "the procurement and

support of 14 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters (\$208 million); procurement, refurbishment, and support of 30 UH-1H Huey II helicopters (\$60 million); and support for 15 UH-1N helicopters (\$60 million) for use by the Colombian army." The assistance package also provided support to enhance U.S. and Colombian narcotics interdiction efforts, in particular: upgrading the radar systems in four U.S. Customs Service P-3 airborne early-warning interdiction aircrafts used to detect and monitor suspect targets destined for the United States from cocaine source zones; improving the Colombian Air Force OV-10 aircraft; supporting Colombia's riverine interdiction program; and, enhancing the Colombian navy's counter-narcotics intelligence infrastructure. The Colombian National Police also received extensive inter-agency assistance under the initial phases of Plan Colombia that included funds for: the procurement, training, and support for two UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters and for 12 UH-1H Huey II helicopters; the purchase of Ayers S2R T-65 agricultural spray aircraft and OV-10 aircraft; and for communications equipment, ammunition, spare parts, training, and logistical support.<sup>18</sup>

Arguably, as a sign of the two countries' maturing relationship, U.S. military assistance now only constitutes a small percentage of Colombia's overall defense budget. In 2017, total counter-narcotics, security, and military aid to Colombia was \$279 million.<sup>19</sup> Against Colombia's overall defense budget that same year of \$9.7 billion,<sup>20</sup> U.S. assistance represented only around

16. Interview conducted by author with Dr. Frank Mora, April 2019.

17. "Plan Colombia." *U.S. Department of State Archive*, U.S. Department of State, March 14, 2001, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/2001/1042.htm> [Last accessed 6/5/19]

18. *Ibid*

19. "U.S. Foreign Aid by Country." *Foreign Aid Explorer: Dashboard*, USAID Data Services, April 11, 2019, [explorer.usaid.gov/cd/COL](http://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/COL) [Last accessed 6/5/19]

20. "Colombia- Defense." *Colombia Country Commercial Guide*, International Trade Administration, August 17, 2018, [www.export.gov/article?id=Colombia-Defense](http://www.export.gov/article?id=Colombia-Defense) [Last accessed 6/5/19]

2.8 percent. Plan Colombia was relatively successful in countering the country's multiple insurgencies, extending justice to rural areas and reducing insecurity generally, but it was largely unsuccessful in reducing narcotics production and trade. Cocaine continues to flow into U.S. markets at high rates.<sup>21</sup> USAID has focused its efforts on crop substitution, but aerial spraying was suspended under the Santos administration, though President Duque has promised to restart it with the assistance of DEA and the Defense Department who have provided intelligence and surveillance by providing tools such as Scan Eagle, an aerial machine that can track drug trafficking.<sup>22</sup>

### Shifting Security Challenge

The peace agreement between the FARC and the government negotiated by former President Juan Manuel Santos remains controversial. As cited earlier, Colombian citizens remain split nearly evenly on their support/opposition to the peace deal. According to a Gallup poll from May 2019, 63 percent of Colombians felt that under Duque, the implementation of the peace deal was going badly. 65 percent of Colombians felt that it would be better to create a peaceful dialogue with guerrilla and rebel groups until the peace deal is fully implemented. Seventy four percent of Colombians felt that the peace deal would not give a definitive solution to drug trafficking. 63 percent of Colombians did not feel that the complete truth would come out through the peace deal. This same percent also did not think that the peace deal would lead to fair reparations for victims of the FARC.<sup>23</sup> In the Colombian city of Tumaco, 45 percent were little satisfied with the peace agreement, and felt that implementation of some or most of the peace accord components, including but not limited to land and coca reforms, were off track.<sup>24</sup>

While the former president and his supporters maintain that the peace is irreversible, it is unarguably weakened, both in terms of key government programs intended to ease the implementation of peace and the commitment among former combatants. Part of this is the relentless opposition to the agreement by con-

servatives—led by former President Álvaro Uribe and his mentee and current president Iván Duque—that first led to the popular rejection of the peace deal in an October 2016 popular referendum.<sup>25</sup> In response, the Santos government re-negotiated parts of the agreement and submitted it to the Congress for its approval.

That opposition has continued with Duque now in the presidency. Issues of justice for crimes against humanity committed by the FARC during the 50-year conflict and the participation of former guerrillas in the political system—including five guaranteed seats in each house of the bicameral Colombian Congress—have bred resistance to the deal and the special Jurisdictions for Peace (*Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* – JEP) established under the agreement to limit the prosecution of combatants for crimes committed during the conflict. Reflecting this opposition, in response to the JEP's 2019 budget request of \$116 million, Duque only provided \$92 million. That lack of funding has forced DEP to cut its presence in half. The Duque government has also funded the Truth Commissions and the Special Unit for the Search for Missing Persons at below their requested budget amounts.

Opposition to the peace deal also springs from its imperfect implementation so far. According to a 2018 report by Notre Dame University's Kroc Institute, only 23 percent of the "578 peace accord commitments have begun implementation."<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the unique and toxic mix of guerrillas, criminal networks and organized crime, involved not just in drug production and transport but also money laundering, extortion, arms trafficking, and illegal mining has meant that violence and insecurity have not decreased as much as hoped. The demobilization of the FARC and its integration into peaceful, legal civilian life remains incomplete. An estimated 3,000 militants have resumed illicit activities and violence; some of them de-commissioned FARC combatants who turned their supposed ideological battle into now baldly illicit activities.

Moreover, some are new recruits. That 3,000 represents only about 40 percent of the FARC forces that

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21. Gagne, David. "On 15 Year Anniversary, Govt Asks for New Plan Colombia." *InSight Crime*, 2 Feb. 2016, [www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/on-15-year-anniversary-colombia-asks-for-new-plan-colombia/](http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/on-15-year-anniversary-colombia-asks-for-new-plan-colombia/) [Last accessed 6/18/19]

22. U.S. Counternarcotics Assistance Achieved Some Positive Results, but State Needs to Review the Overall U.S. Approach. United States Government Accountability Office, December, 2018, [www.gao.gov/assets/700/695952.pdf](http://www.gao.gov/assets/700/695952.pdf).

23. *Gallup Poll Colombia #130*, Gallup Colombia, May 2019, [imgcdn.larepublica.co/cms/2019/05/17085310/031800190000-GALLUP-POLL-130.pdf](http://imgcdn.larepublica.co/cms/2019/05/17085310/031800190000-GALLUP-POLL-130.pdf) [Last accessed 6/24/19]

24. Binningsbo, Helga, et al. *Perceptions of and Experience with the Peace Process in Colombia*. PRIO & Universidad De Los Andes, 2018, [www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.aspx?id=1568&type=publicationfile](http://www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.aspx?id=1568&type=publicationfile) [Last accessed 6/24/19]

25. Brodzinsky, Sibylla. "Colombia Referendum: Voters Reject Peace Deal with Farc Guerrillas." *The Guardian*, October 3, 2016, [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/02/colombia-referendum-rejects-peace-deal-with-farc](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/02/colombia-referendum-rejects-peace-deal-with-farc) [Last accessed 6/18/19]

26. "Second Kroc Institute Report Shows Steady Progress of Peace Accord Implementation in Colombia." *Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies*, University of Notre Dame, August 9, 2018, [kroc.nd.edu/news-events/news/second-kroc-institute-report-shows-steady-progress-of-peace-accord-implementation-in-colombia/](http://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/news/second-kroc-institute-report-shows-steady-progress-of-peace-accord-implementation-in-colombia/) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

existed just before the completion of the peace deal. To be sure, insecurity and violence have improved, and the country is no longer officially at war with the FARC, a war that claimed over 220,000 lives over its 50-year span. Their partial continued activity as an armed, criminal presence has brought into doubt one of the central hopes of the peace process: the achievement of security and peace, especially in rural Colombia, where varying levels of conflict have raged since *La Violencia*. At the same time, according to a May 17, 2019 report by *The New York Times*, more than 500 activists have been killed and 210,000 people displaced by violence since the adoption of the peace plan.<sup>27</sup>

Popular and political reaction to continued insecurity in part sparked the controversial and now rescinded policy of the military to increase its kill count. According to a *New York Times* story, the chief of the armed forces named by Duque, Nicacio Martínez Espinel, briefly issued an order for soldiers to “double the results” of their combat missions against guerrillas, paramilitary groups and illicit organizations. The revelation added to human rights concerns surrounding Martínez Espinel. Earlier, Martínez Espinel had been linked to the “false positives” scandal under President Uribe when military commanders ordered their units to boost their kill rates and offered them incentives for meeting the targets. The policy allegedly led to 5,000 extra-judicial killings including of civilians that soldiers dressed as guerrillas to increase their “numbers.” Between October 2004 and January 2006, Martínez Espinel held a top post in a brigade accused of, at least, 283 extrajudicial executions in the Caribbean departments of La Guajira and Cesar.<sup>28</sup> Martínez Espinel says he only served in an administrative capacity in the unit.

Across the border in Venezuela, there are also numerous security challenges, and with them, political challenges. Irrespective of the outcome of the political, economic and humanitarian crisis, illicit armed groups, narcotics trafficking, a deeply corrupted and politicized Venezuelan military, and the proliferation of weapons and paramilitary groups in Venezuela are threatening Colombian security. Should the Maduro regime either remain in power or violently collapse, the presence of these weapons in corrupt hands will likely present severe challenges to Colombia’s security situation and political system. Former FARC leaders accused of narcotics corruption, including Luciano Marín (“Iván Márquez”) and Hernán Darío Velásquez (“El Paisa”), who have refused to integrate

as part of the peace plan, have taken up residence across the border in Venezuela, where they continue their illegal and violent activities, including supporting violent, illicit networks and former combatants in Colombia. Meanwhile, the ELN also continues to operate in Venezuelan territory from where it launches attacks and coordinates operations with the Venezuelan military.

The most violent and polarizing example of this was the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional’s* (ELN) attack on the police-training center in Bogotá in January 2019. Thousands of Colombians marched in opposition to the attacks that killed 22 people and was allegedly hatched across the border in Venezuela. It is there that the ELN has taken refuge and operates with impunity. The incident ended the peace talks with the ELN, with President Duque demanding the extradition of ELN negotiators from Cuba. The event both reinforced suspicion and fear about what is brewing across the border with Venezuela and cast even further doubt on the peace plan with the FARC.

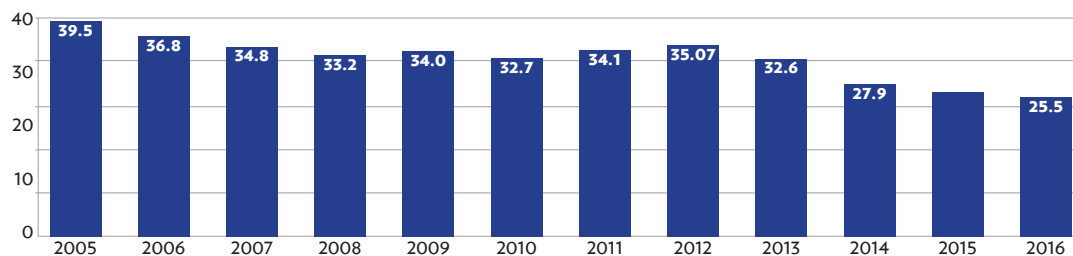
Under the governments of former President Hugo Chávez and current President Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela has also become chock-full of a wide range of weapons. While many of them are already in the hands of criminals and paramilitary groups, given the corruption in the Venezuelan military, many more will likely be sold to criminals in the event of a regime change and find their way across the border. According to a May 2, 2019, Foreign Policy article, Venezuela’s government has “purchased Russia’s state-of-the-art S-300 anti-aircraft missiles; imported hundreds of thousands of Kalashnikov rifles and ammunition; and acquired 5,000 Igla-S MANPADS (man-portable air defense systems.)” This may only be the tip of the iceberg. The count of the above-mentioned weapons is based on what has been seen, though there are likely more weapons of various types in the hands of paramilitary groups like the collectives and criminal networks, and a long-anticipated Russian-built Kalashnikov factory is finally expected to start churning out rifles by the end of 2019 at a supposed rate of 25,000 guns per year. Many of the weapons are already in the hands of unaccountable agents—including the military—with some of them already being acquired by neighboring criminal groups such as Brazil’s *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC). A further deterioration of the situation in Venezuela will likely mean that even more of these weapons will find themselves into the hands of criminal groups.

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27. Casey, Nicholas, “Colombia’s Peace Deal Promised a New Era. So Why Are These Rebels Rearming?” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, May 17, 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/world/americas/colombia-farc-peace-deal.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/world/americas/colombia-farc-peace-deal.html) [Last accessed 6/5/19]

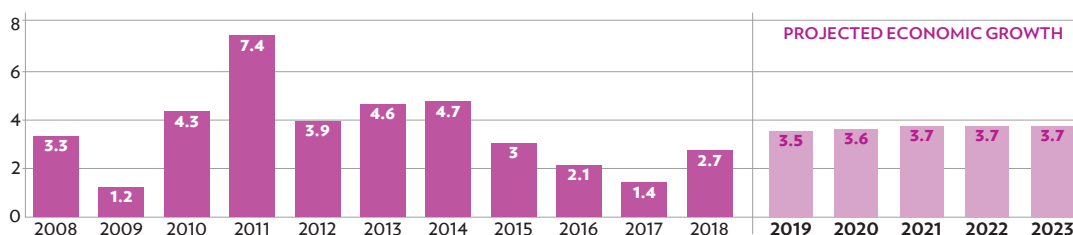
28. Manetto, Francesco, “El Jefe Del Ejército De Colombia Dirigió Una Brigada Acusada De Matar a Civiles.” *El País*, Ediciones *El País* S.L., June 5, 2019, [http://elpais.com/internacional/2019/06/04/colombia/1559607159\\_600734.html](http://elpais.com/internacional/2019/06/04/colombia/1559607159_600734.html) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

**FIGURE 2**  
**Homicide rate (per 100,000 people) 2005 to 2015**



SOURCE: "Intentional Homicide Victims | Statistics and Data." UNDOC, United Nations, [dataunodc.un.org/crime/intentional-homicide-victims](http://dataunodc.un.org/crime/intentional-homicide-victims) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

**FIGURE 3**  
**Colombia's GDP Growth 2008 to 2023**



SOURCE: World Economic Outlook." International Monetary Fund, IMF, 2019, [www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP\\_RPCH@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEO/WORLD](http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEO/WORLD) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

Most troubling is the potential transfer of the MAN-PADs to terrorist and criminal organizations.

The persistence of criminal and guerrilla groups (often indistinguishable) across the border and the presence of weapons in insecure hands will increase security challenges in Colombia, regardless of what may occur in Venezuela in the medium term. Eventually, in some form, regime change will occur in Venezuela. That change will inevitably lead to a shift in power that will reshuffle criminal elements associated with the Maduro government and those given safe harbor passively or actively within its borders.

For the moment, however, homicides continue to decline. The most recent statistics reveal that in 2017, the homicide rate per 100,000 people had dropped to 24, an all-time low according to the UNDOC. (See Figure 2 for numbers before 2017.) Nevertheless, despite this impressive data, according to a 2018 Cámara de Comercio de Bogotá survey, 53 percent of Colombians

believed crime had increased, a 3 percent increase from 2017. According to the Brookings Institution, Venezuelans have committed 0.4 percent of crimes in Colombia in 2018 and make up just 0.9 percent of the total population. The crime rate is actually lower among refugee and migrant Venezuelans.<sup>29</sup> A survey completed in April 2019 by the Brookings Institution indicated that 63 percent of Colombians support the current government's, under President Duque's, policy toward Venezuela, which has generally welcomed Venezuelan refugees.<sup>30</sup>

### Economy

Because of its ties to several developed and regional markets, Colombia's economy avoided the economic contraction that Brazil and other countries that had come to depend on Chinese and Indian markets have suffered. While economic growth slowed to 1.4 percent in 2017, it bounced back the following year to 2.7 percent growth and is predicted to grow at a steady rate of 3.5 percent or more in the next four years. (See Figure

29. Bahar, Dany, et al. *Integrating Venezuelans into the Colombian Labor Market*. Brookings Institute, December, 2018, [www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Venezuelan-Migrants\\_English.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Venezuelan-Migrants_English.pdf) [Last Accessed 6/18/19]

30. Dhont, Arthur, "Impact of Venezuelan Migrant Flows on Colombia." *IHS Markit*, April 17, 2019, [www.ihsmarkit.com/research-analysis/impact-of-venezuelan-migrant-flows-on-colombia.html](http://www.ihsmarkit.com/research-analysis/impact-of-venezuelan-migrant-flows-on-colombia.html) [Last accessed 6/18/19]

**FIGURE 4**  
**Chinese investment since 2005**

COUNTRY	
Argentina	\$19,000,000,000
Bolivia	\$611,000,000
Brazil	\$22,000,000,000
Chile	\$150,000,000
Colombia	\$75,000,000
Ecuador	\$10,800,000,000
Paraguay	N/A
Peru	\$2,300,000,000
Uruguay	\$10,000,000
Venezuela	\$56,300,000,000

SOURCE: Gallagher, Kevin P., and Myers, Margaret, "China-Latin America Finance Database," Washington: Inter-American Dialogue, 2019, [https://www.thedialogue.org/map\\_list/](https://www.thedialogue.org/map_list/) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

re 3.) In addition to avoiding the trap of dependence on China's market, Colombia has also been on the lower end of receiving Chinese investment. (See Figure 4.) Since 2005, Colombia has only received \$75 million in foreign direct investment from the People's Republic of China. Per capita it is the lowest in South America and in absolute terms is the second lowest after Uruguay (\$10 million). At the same time, according to the Inter-American Dialogue's database, during the same period, Argentina received \$19 billion; Brazil \$22 billion; Chile \$150 million; and Peru \$2.3 billion. In short, at a moment when economists, observers, citizens, and the United States are raising concerns about the reliability and agenda of Chinese investment, Colombia has avoided the temptation—and potential risks.

Part of this is due to Colombia's extensive network of free trade agreements (FTAs) with diverse countries. Colombia has FTAs with the Central American Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), Canada, Mexico, Chile, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries (Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein), and the European Union. Colombia has also signed FTAs with South Korea in February 2013, with Costa Rica in May 2013, with Panama in June 2013, and with Israel

in September 2013—though these are yet to enter into force. Moreover, Colombia is currently negotiating trade agreements with Turkey and Japan. Colombia also has Bilateral Investment Treaties with Switzerland, Peru, and Spain.<sup>31</sup>

In 2006, the U.S. and Colombia signed a bilateral free trade agreement, and in 2001, the U.S. Congress approved it. The FTA marked the culmination of a series of bilateral agreements, some related to the agreement, others to separate issues, relating to environmental protection, asset sharing, chemical control, ship-boarding, renewable and clean energy, science and technology, and civil aviation.

Partially as a result, U.S.-Colombian economic relations remain strong. In 2016, Colombian imports from the U.S. totaled \$11.6 billion (27 percent of total imports, making it Colombia's largest import partner). So while China has become the number one export market for countries like Brazil, Chile, and Peru, the U.S. is still Colombia's number one export market, buying \$10.5 billion in goods and services should be services, or 32 percent of the country's total exports.

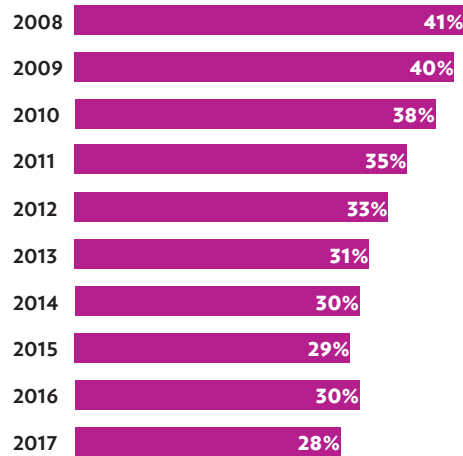
Part of the reason that Colombia has been able to avoid the risks of Chinese FDI is that investment from other countries has grown. From 2015 to 2017, the number of foreign companies investing in Colombia grew by 17.65 percent, and the number of projects rose by 12.37 percent. In 2017 alone, FDI inflows grew, reaching \$14.5 billion, with a total stock of FDI currently estimated at 58.8 percent of the Colombian GDP.<sup>32</sup> The largest share of that investment went to raw materials and more specifically, to fossil fuels. Also, there has been a diversification of sectors and production, beyond hydrocarbons, metals, and minerals. While 40.2 percent of 2017 flowed to oil and mining, another 17.5 percent went to manufacturing, another 12.2 percent to financial services, and 10.2 percent flowed to transportation and communications.

President Duque has also set out an ambitious national development plan, *Pacto por Colombia, Pacto por la Equidad*. The four-year, \$325 billion plan aims to guarantee macroeconomic stability and boost entrepreneurship and equality. It includes investments in science, technology, innovation, transport and logistics, public services in water and energy, and environmental sustainability. The plan is to be financed through a multi-annual investment plan between 2019 and 2022.

31. "Colombia- Trade Agreements." *Colombia Country Commercial Guide, International Trade Administration*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Colombia-Trade-Agreements> [Last accessed 6/5/19]

32. "World Investment Report 2018." *United Nations Conference on Trade and Development*, The United Nations, 2018, [http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2018\\_en.pdf](http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2018_en.pdf). [Last accessed 6/10/19]

**FIGURE 5**  
**Colombia's Poverty Rate (2008-2017)**



SOURCE: Poverty & Equity Brief, Latin America and the Caribbean, World Bank Group, April, 2019, [http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global\\_POVEQ\\_LAC.pdf](http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_LAC.pdf) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

Nevertheless, despite the years of steady economic growth and the resolution of the civil war with the FARC, poverty and inequality remain stubborn problems for the Colombian economy and society. (See Figure 5.) While poverty rates have dropped from 41 percent of the population as recently as 2008 to 28 percent by 2017—an impressive gain—rural poverty remains a serious challenge. So too do ethnic and racial marginalization. Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations are overrepresented among the poor. Part of the peace deal attempts to address these issues of social exclusion and lack of access to markets and services for rural populations.<sup>33</sup> The plan proposes \$7 billion for farmers and rural development, and Duque's *Pacto por Colombia* includes programs to work with ethnic groups and improve access and equality for women and people with disabilities. At the same time, however, Duque has announced

plans to eliminate several agencies created to oversee rural development and instead house their activities in the Ministry of Agriculture.<sup>34</sup>

Though Colombia's poverty rate has decreased significantly in almost a decade, unemployment and underemployment continue to be of concern. According to the Colombian government, the unemployment rate in Colombia rose to 10.3 percent in April 2019 from 9.5 percent in April 2018. The number of unemployed increased by 154 thousand to 2.52 million while the number of employed declined by 775 thousand to 21.89 million.<sup>35</sup> Not only is the unemployment rate increasing, but the number of under-employed workers is also increasing. As of 2018, 26 percent of workers were considered underemployed by the Colombian government,<sup>36</sup> many of them likely working in the informal sector.

Colombian economist and head of Colombia's post-conflict commission on rural development, José Antonio Ocampo, states that although poverty has fallen in recent years, the agricultural sector has weakened and urban-rural inequality has increased. About 90 percent of rural producers are smallholders who control less than 10 percent of the overall land, with many farming plots barely able to support a single family.<sup>37</sup> He emphasizes the importance of eliminating rural-urban gaps in basic social services, providing more opportunities for smallholder farmers, and creating more jobs for youth.<sup>38</sup> In 2016, the agricultural sector in Colombia represented 6.1 percent of the country's GDP and 16.3 percent of employment.<sup>39</sup> These figures have the potential to be higher. Ocampo argues that unfortunately, the government is not carrying out the necessary rural reforms to maximize the success of the rural sector. According to the Latin America working group, there are a number of initiatives being introduced by the current administration that go against the rural reform chapter of the peace accords, which was intended to promote the economic integration of Colombia's poor rural communities through

33. "Bases Del Plan Nacional De Desarrollo." Departamento Nacional De Planeación, 2019, [colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/CDT/Prensa/BasesPND2018-2022n.pdf](http://colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/CDT/Prensa/BasesPND2018-2022n.pdf). [Last accessed 6/10/19]

34. "Risky Business: The Duque Government's Approach to Peace in Colombia." *International Crisis Group*, International Crisis Group, June 21, 2018, [www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/67-risky-business-duque-governments-approach-peace-colombia](http://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/67-risky-business-duque-governments-approach-peace-colombia) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

35. "Gran Encuesta Integrada De Hogares (GEIH) Mercado Laboral." *Dirección Nacional De Estadística, DANE*, May 31, 2019, [www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/mercado-laboral/empleo-y-desempleo](http://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/mercado-laboral/empleo-y-desempleo) [Last Accessed 6/18/19]

36. "Labor and Unemployment Statistics." *Colombia Reports Data*, July 23, 2018, [www.data.colombiareports.com/colombia-unemployment-statistics](http://www.data.colombiareports.com/colombia-unemployment-statistics) [Last accessed 6/18/19]

37. Haggart, Kelly, "José Antonio Ocampo: Social, Economic Inclusion Key to Peace in Colombia." *IDRC*, October 11, 2015, [www.idrc.ca/en/article/jose-antonio-ocampo-social-economic-inclusion-key-peace-colombia?PublicationID=1424](http://www.idrc.ca/en/article/jose-antonio-ocampo-social-economic-inclusion-key-peace-colombia?PublicationID=1424) [Last accessed 6/24/19]

38. "Misión Para La Transformación Del Campo Colombiano." *DNP Departamento Nacional De Planeación*, 2016, [www.dnp.gov.co/programas/agricultura/Paginas/mision-para-la-transformacion-del-campo-colombiano.aspx](http://www.dnp.gov.co/programas/agricultura/Paginas/mision-para-la-transformacion-del-campo-colombiano.aspx) [Last accessed 6/24/19]

39. "Investing in Rural People in Colombia." *International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD*, 2016, [www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/39972349/Investing in rural people in Colombia.pdf/ee2fe52b-dab3-436c-8a2b-5f91e40d5c6d](http://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/39972349/Investing%20in%20rural%20people%20in%20Colombia.pdf/ee2fe52b-dab3-436c-8a2b-5f91e40d5c6d) [Last accessed 6/24/19]

land-titling, a land fund, and the extension of state services to the countryside.<sup>40</sup> The Land Fund, which was created in the peace accords to increase small farmer land ownership, has only officially received 200,000 hectares, less than 7 percent, of the 3 million hectares it is supposed to receive by 2028. Other important agricultural initiatives have not even been approved by Congress yet. The lack of importance that Duque's administration is putting on the rural sector will impede the future economic growth of those living and working in rural Colombia, as well as the country's overall economy.

Duque's *Pacto por Colombia* aims to generate 1.6 million jobs in order to bring down the unemployment rate<sup>41</sup> in the next four years. While this is an important goal to achieve, it will likely need to be rethought in light of the increasing number of Venezuelan refugees in Colombia. While there are complaints about recent arrivals lowering wages and reducing jobs, as Antoni Estevadeordal<sup>42</sup> argues in *The Global Americans*, the influx of refugees could actually be a boom to the Colombian economy and the economies of surrounding countries. Venezuelan refugees are younger and tend to have at least a secondary education, which would yield economic growth in the long run. For now, unfortunately, most refugees work in the informal employment sector, causing tensions to grow in towns like Cúcuta. As Estevadeordal writes, however, with the proper mix of public policies and private sector collaboration, these new arrivals could become an economic asset.

### U.S.-Colombia Diplomatic Relations

The U.S. established diplomatic relations with Colombia in 1822, shortly after its independence from Spain. As one of the region's oldest democracies, those relations remained strong after World War II. The brief moments of interruption were the diplomatic spat over U.S. demands for the extradition of major drug lords. In the 1980s, this pattern was exemplified best by Pablo Escobar's movement "los extraditables" that led to the murder of dozens of policymakers including Senator Luis Carlos Galán and Rodrigo Lara Bonilla—and the de-certification of Colombia during the presidential term of President Ernesto Samper, accused of accepting campaign funding from narco-traffickers. Bilateral relations rebounded with

the election of President Andrés Pastrana and deepened with the initiation of Plan Colombia in 2000; a plan hatched and developed jointly between the then-administrations of President Bill Clinton and Andrés Pastrana. In an example of bi-partisan collaboration and its benefits, Plan Colombia was fully implemented and expanded upon under the administration of George W. Bush, with the U.S. president developing a close ideological and personal bond with President Álvaro Uribe who succeeded Pastrana. A result of that affinity was closer ties between the two countries and militaries on issues of anti-terrorism—the latter after Uribe formed a common bond with U.S. President George W. Bush to designate the FARC a terrorist group and the negotiation of a free-trade agreement.

### Multilateral Relations

Colombia's stable, mature relations with the United States are not just a bilateral phenomenon. Due in large part to the country's policy consistency across administrations, going back to the term of Pastrana (1998-2002) and the country's professional, highly respected diplomatic leadership, Colombia has integrated itself into regional and global organizations beyond its multiple free trade agreements. Within the region, Colombia has played a lead role in the creation and evolution of the Pacific Alliance that unites Chile, Peru, Mexico, and Colombian economies. By 2020, tariffs between the four countries will have been eliminated, and the stock markets are integrating.

Globally, Colombia is also in the process of becoming a member of the OECD. President Santos initially pushed for Colombia to become a member, believing that doing so was essential for Colombia's development by establishing incentives for modernized standards and policies. In 2018 both houses of Congress approved the accession, and it is currently under review by Colombia's Constitutional Court.<sup>43</sup> In the meantime, Colombia has made progress in rewriting or reforming laws and regulations to meet OECD standards in areas of intellectual property rights, pharmaceuticals, fuel and trucking, labor, corporate liability and anti-bribery.<sup>44</sup> In the words of Angel Gurría, the OECD Secretary-General, "Through the OECD accession process, Colombia has made impressive strides in, for example, reforming its justice system and reducing informality

40. Aponte, Andrea, "Peace Accord Implementation in Colombia: Urgent Need to Adhere to the Spirit of the Accords." *Latin America Working Group*, March 12, 2019, [www.lawg.org/peace-accord-implementation-in-colombia-urgent-need-to-adhere-to-the-spirit-of-the-accords/](http://www.lawg.org/peace-accord-implementation-in-colombia-urgent-need-to-adhere-to-the-spirit-of-the-accords/) [Last accessed 6/24/19] 41. "Government Presents to Congress 'Pact for Colombia, Pact for Colombia, Pact for Equity.'" *BNamericas*, February 8, 2019, [www.bnamericas.com/en/news/banking/government-presents-to-congress-pact-for-colombia-pact-for-equity](http://www.bnamericas.com/en/news/banking/government-presents-to-congress-pact-for-colombia-pact-for-equity) [Last accessed 6/18/19]

42. Estevadeordal, Antoni, "Latin America: The opportunity of migration," *The Global Americans*, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2019/06/latin-america-the-opportunity-of-migration/> [Last accessed 6/22/19].

43. Beittel, June S., "Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations" *Congressional Research Service*, February 9, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43813.pdf> [Last accessed 6/10/19]

44. *Ibid* pp. 42

in the labor market.”<sup>45</sup>

Colombia has also been granted observer status in NATO, helping to integrate its military into the operations and activities of the militaries of the NATO countries. The designation allows Colombian military and civilian defense officials to take part in training, education, and exercises with NATO allies and to develop interoperability among member armed forces. Colombian personnel regularly take part in courses in the NATO school in Oberammergau, Germany, and the NATO Defense College in Rome. The collaboration has also helped bring Colombian regulations and practices in line with NATO norms and standards, reinforcing the professionalization and operation of the armed forces and defense policy.<sup>46</sup>

### An Outlier: Venezuela’s Future and Venezuelan Refugees

Colombia has currently taken in over 1.3 million Venezuelan refugees, almost half of the total number of refugees that have fled the country. Some predictions suggest that 7 million more migrants will continue to make the trek out of Venezuela by 2020, with many of them heading to Colombia. The country’s proximity has made it the easiest escape route out of Venezuela. While many of the Venezuelan refugees have settled along the border in Norte de Santander, many others have continued to other areas. Because many of the refugees are arriving as families and the social and economic situation in Venezuela is not expected to improve in the near term—even with a change in government—many expect that the refugees are likely to remain in the countries they have fled to: Colombia, other countries in the region, and Europe.

The Colombian government and people are to be commended for their acceptance of Venezuelans fleeing the chaos and humanitarian crisis in their country. However, the arrival of so many often-destitute migrants is creating strains on Colombia’s public services in health, education, housing and the labor market. Colombia has said that it requires \$1.5 billion to accommodate the incoming migrants. The needs are immense. For example, in La Guajira, a Colombian border town, residents infected with HIV have increased by 375 percent. Also, today, 75 percent of women giving birth in border towns are Venezuelan, requiring health care, as well as presaging future

educational and labor demands.

With this massive influx have also come security concerns. This refugee crisis has led to a growth of narcotics and arms trades across the border. Without sufficient numbers of officials to patrol the porous border between Colombia and Venezuela, it has become easy for criminal groups of all stripes to operate on the border. A study done by the NGO Paz Activa estimated that almost 200,000 migrants had been victims of human trafficking in 2017 in their pursuit of freedom. The ELN, a Colombian rebel group, has been successful in operating from the Venezuelan border and coordinating attacks in Colombia from Venezuela.

Despite the general openness of Colombia and Colombians to Venezuelan refugees, there have been signs of backlash towards Venezuelans who have arrived and are now competing for jobs and social services with native-born Colombians. Border towns in Colombia such as Riohacha have tried to prevent the arrival of more migrants because they are believed to cut into employment and wage rates in already impoverished areas. To discourage refugees, residents have attacked Venezuelan arrivals, and there have been mob attacks and protests around refugee camps. Colombians have also complained that Venezuelans have driven wages down by providing common jobs for less. “A Colombian will not work for you for less than the minimum wage,” says Arnold Bonilla, a barber in Bogotá’s financial district. “But what I have seen is that in some parts of town, Venezuelan barbers were working for half as much.”<sup>47</sup>

Kelvin Rojas, a 23-year-old migrant, states that people will scream anti-Venezuelan insults and slurs at him on the streets of Bogotá. Kelvin’s story is not uncommon. In the fall of 2018, a Venezuelan man was beaten to death in Bogotá due to rumors that he was a child kidnapper to try and get the man out of the neighborhood.<sup>48</sup> The rumors were not true. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has tried to reduce tensions by running anti-xenophobia campaigns across Colombia, but as the outflow continues and more Venezuelans come and remain in Colombia, the tensions will likely increase and, as they do, they will likely have a political impact. For now, there is no political leader or movement

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45. “Colombia Officially Joins OECD, Becomes 37th Member.” *USCIB*, United States Council for International Business, 6 June 2018, [www.uscib.org/colombia-officially-joins-oecd-becomes-37th-member/](http://www.uscib.org/colombia-officially-joins-oecd-becomes-37th-member/) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

46. “Relations with Colombia.” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO), December 6, 2018, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_143936.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_143936.htm) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

47. Rueda, Manuel, “I Get Screamed at in the Streets’: Colombia’s Patience with Venezuelan Migrants Wears Thin.” *Public Radio International* (PRI), *Public Radio International*, May 10, 2019, [www.pri.org/stories/2019-05-10/i-get-screamed-streets-colombias-patience-venezuelan-migrants-wears-thin](http://www.pri.org/stories/2019-05-10/i-get-screamed-streets-colombias-patience-venezuelan-migrants-wears-thin) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

48. *Ibid*



that is rallying popular opposition to the Venezuelan influx. However, it is possible, as it continues and as tensions increase, that some political leaders at the local and national level will attempt to take advantage of it by mobilizing and fanning nationalist, xenophobic sentiments.

The government has made efforts to try and regulate the crisis by increasing border assistance in healthcare, especially in situations of childbirth, and by allowing documentation requirements to become more flexible to enable child migrants to have access to basic education.<sup>49</sup> Colombia has tried to initiate a policy that is supposed to come into action within the next few years to provide support in areas such as labor integration, healthcare, childcare, and the like.

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49. "OECD Policy Note on the Venezuelan Migration Shock in Colombia and Its Fiscal Implications." *OECD*, Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2019, [www.oecd.org/economy/surveys/Colombia-migration-shock-note-english-2019.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/economy/surveys/Colombia-migration-shock-note-english-2019.pdf) [Last accessed 6/10/19]

## The Future of U.S.-Colombian Relations

### THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY: SCENARIOS FOR COLOMBIA BY 2030

	Most Likely Scenario by 2030	Opportunities	Challenges	Best Case Scenario	Worst Case Scenario
<b>Politics</b>	The party system will stumble along but will produce centrist candidates for the presidency. That will reduce the polarization of presidential elections post-2018. Nevertheless, the party system will remain fragmented and unpredictable.	Centrist governments will allow for U.S. and SouthCom collaboration with Colombia, especially on security issues stemming from the peace deal and Venezuelan migration and reconstruction. This collaboration with SouthCom could also extend to the DEA and provide new strategies and partnerships to combat narcotics trafficking and illicit activities on the border.	Duque's unpopularity opens up the political field to outsider candidates. Without the emergence of a centrist option or centrist candidates, the current array of political forces will favor outsider, populist candidates. There is also the risk of a xenophobic backlash to the flow of Venezuelan refugees to Colombia and the insertion of groups involved in illicit activities into politics.	In the next presidential election, the party system converges back around the center, either around traditional party organizations or newly formed ones, with greater consensus on the country's path forward on matters of security, market-based economic development, and anti-corruption.	In future presidential elections, parties on either side of the political spectrum continue to move to the margins, further polarizing the party system and the electorate, leading to the election of an anti-system president.
<b>Security</b>	The core of FARC are demobilized through the current and upcoming peace agreements, yet the vacuums created are filled by new criminal organizations. Colombia continues to be a leader in cocaine production and commercialization.	The peace agreement offers the unique opportunity to demobilize and disarm combatants. If accompanied with development strategies that contribute to avoiding the creation of economic and power vacuums. The reduced threat of FARC allows the military to engage in a new conceptual security strategy with U.S. collaboration.	As older criminal organizations are dismantled, historical trends suggest that they will be replaced with newer ones as the state struggles to fill the vacuums in rural areas. This difficulty will allow for weapons to find their way across the Colombian border in more significant numbers, further destabilizing the situation and increasing criminal and terrorist groups' fire power.	The peace agreement is successful, and FARC no longer needs to be confronted as a guerrilla movement, allowing Colombia to focus on combatting other illegal activities and groups, allowing for greater collaboration with the United States.	The peace process fails to reduce violence and integrate former combatants into civilian life fully and is rejected politically. This failure leads to the resurgence of armed groups and new criminal organizations, causing violence and criminality to increase drastically. An outsider, anti-system president is elected and attempts to politicize the military, furthering dividing the country.
<b>Economy and Trade</b>	Colombia's GDP and FDI steadily increase, and the economy continues to diversify. Though growth will likely continue, the risk of insecurity from the peace agreements, criminal organizations and corruption will dampen potential. The various trade agreements that Colombia has with other countries will remain important.	Continuing the U.S. and Colombia's strong economic ties allows for the relationship between the two countries in other sectors to remain healthy. If the U.S. continues to invest in Colombia, it will incentivize other countries to do so as well, which would reap benefits for both the U.S. and Colombia	The growth in crime and insecurity from the incomplete implementation of the peace agreement and the crisis in Venezuela become a drag on GDP growth and investor confidence. President Duque's plans to eliminate multiple rural development agencies will undermine efforts to develop the rural sector. OECD accession requirements also constrain public spending in crucial areas.	Colombia's GDP increases as predicted, allowing for the services and manufacturing sectors to continue to grow. The successful implementation of the peace agreement contributes to the development of rural sectors. OECD rules ensure macroeconomic stability and fiscal responsibility without becoming a straight jacket.	The peace process fails, and anti-corruption reforms are unable to address the root causes of corruption and crime, resulting in greater insecurity and public anger, deterring investors. FDI decreases, and GDP increases at a slower rate than predicted. The illicit economy grows and undermining the legal economy, in its access to credit, markets, and fair competition.
<b>U.S.-Colombia Relations</b>	U.S.-Colombian relations across a range of issues—security, diplomacy, and economic—remain strong and close, despite a few bumps due to politics in both countries. The relationship endures even if an outsider candidate is elected in Colombia between now and 2030.	Both the positive and negative developments that flow from the peace plan allow the U.S. and Colombia to re-strategize their security relations. The Venezuelan refugee crisis and the humanitarian crisis inside Venezuela provide an opportunity to deepen those relations through regional and global leadership.	Political volatility in both countries test the relationship, especially if an outsider candidate sympathetic to elements of chavismo, or with ties to nationalism, anti-Venezuelan sentiment or illicit groups become prominent political actors.	Politics and partisanship return to the center, even over the peace deal. The U.S. and Colombia collaborate on a range of bilateral, regional and global issues, including not limited to: Colombian security, regional security, rebuilding Venezuela post-Maduro, anti-corruption, and shoring up liberal international institutions and processes.	As public frustration grows, an outsider, anti-system candidate is elected in Colombia who attempts to roll back collaboration with the U.S. and reduce the country's participation in multilateral projects. Citing national sovereignty an outsider, populist government also reduces its cooperation with the US.
<b>Multilateral Institutions</b>	Colombia becomes a member of the OECD. The Pacific Alliance continues to integrate as tariffs disappear. The CPTPP, however, remains stalled without clear leadership by the United States.	The Venezuela crisis can provide a moment for Colombia to serve a leadership role in helping to channel humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. Colombia's integration into global networks helps sustain the rule of law and economic stability.	Meeting all the governance and fiscal conditions of OECD will challenge Colombia's economic flexibility, especially in meeting its peace agreement obligations and Venezuelan refugee crisis. This could be eased through the OECD's "unusual event clause."	The Pacific Alliance allows for trade relations to deepen within the region. Trade will continue to grow as the tariffs with the U.S. disappear by 2020. Colombia becomes a new member of the OECD. The CPTPP will go fully into effect and will combine the economies of its 11 current signatories.	Colombia fails to adhere to the OECD's fiscal requirements due to the growing migration crisis and is forced to put accession on hold. The election of an outsider candidate leads to Colombia putting the brakes on the Pacific Alliance, NATO cooperation and regional cooperation.
<b>Venezuelan Refugee Crisis</b>	Refugee flows continue to grow as predicted. The border becomes more dangerous. As strains on public services and labor markets become more evident, xenophobia increases. While international support finally arrives to assist host countries, it is insufficient.	SouthCom will have the opportunity to assist in the provision of humanitarian aid. The region will also come together and accept specific amounts of collective responsibility for a coordinated international effort led by regional governments.	The border remains porous, allowing for not only human trafficking but also trafficking in arms and narcotics, which provide a challenge for SouthCom, the DEA and Colombian counterparts. The OECD imposes its fiscal regulations creating a funding constraint for the Colombian government.	The current growing number of refugees stabilizes and allows for Colombia to accommodate the refugees adequately. Xenophobia in Colombia is reduce through anti-xenophobia campaigns. The international donor community coheres and quickly provides the funding at necessary levels.	The numbers continues to rise and spike as Venezuela collapses even further. Colombia struggles to integrate the refugees. Xenophobia increases, with politicians mobilizing voters against the Venezuelan refugee community. Violence overall increases and the border area becomes a hotbed of illicit activity across both countries.

### Recommendations

- **Retain close organizational and personal ties between the Colombian and U.S., armed services.**

By reinforcing training relations, institutional and educational ties, and collaboration both within Colombia and outside, the U.S. military will also be well placed to be a quiet force to address growing human rights concerns in Colombia's military policy. Along with the recent uproar over the memo urging soldiers to increase their kill count—since rescinded—there is also the brewing crisis over the appointment of high-level military officials allegedly linked to the 2008 false positive scandal. By remaining both close to the Colombia military through different levels and in different functions, the U.S. military is well placed to discreetly push for more human rights accountability within its partners' units. Closeness is essential not just in itself but also as a means of preserving the U.S. military's principled place in Colombian politics across future administrations. Given the country's shifting partisan dynamics, it is essential that the U.S. military's ties through training, planning and equipment sharing remain based on issues of U.S. principles and values. A situation in which a future Colombian president and party potentially antagonistic to U.S. influence attempt to dial back relations between the two countries' armed forces based on allegations—true or false—that U.S. military relations had passively or actively undermined human rights would do severe damage to relations for both partners.

- **Develop a bilateral partnership to request and help program international refugee assistance for Venezuelans fleeing the humanitarian crisis in their country.**

The tragedy in Venezuela is an opportunity for Colombia, the United States, and other countries in the region to lead a historic response. This collaboration would work across all the sectors of the relationship, including diplomatic, security, academic, and economic. In this, SouthCom can play an active role in both assisting in the logistics of the delivery of assistance but also in working with counterparts in-country to ensure the security of the areas where assistance is delivered. Insofar as other countries are also brought into the process, SouthCom can build of its relationships with those other militaries for the same purposes, and eventually—optimistically—in the reconstruction of a professional, non-political, civilian-controlled Venezuelan military. In this, the U.S. government should follow Colombia's lead of accepting—so far—1.3 million refugees and grant Venezuelans fleeing the humanitarian disaster Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

- **Work to reduce political polarization.**

Colombia's political polarization that led to the stark 2018 choices in the presidential election stems from two factors: the collapse of the country's party system, and the deep, sharp popular divide over the country's peace plan. While the former is difficult to address through bilateral relations between sovereign nations—though U.S.-Colombia collaboration on some of the issues driving that collapse such as widespread anger over corruption and lack of accountability can help—the U.S. can play a direct role in reducing the polarization over the peace deal. One of the central concerns of Colombians over the deal is that the demobilization of the FARC will lead to greater insecurity and crime. Part of that is already happening. Without necessarily embracing the controversial peace plan, the United States can work to address those concerns. One of the first steps should be for representatives of both countries—civilians and the armed forces—to develop a comprehensive strategy to secure peace and the rule of law in those areas affected post-peace. In short, given the challenges of Venezuelan refugees, other elements of the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, and after the peace deal with the FARC, it may be time for a new partnership between Colombia and the United States. Addressing those pressing issues and popular concerns stemming from them is essential not just for Colombia's security, but also its political health.

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