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*Was Failure Avoidable?  
Learning From Colombia's  
1998-2002 Peace Process*

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## WAS FAILURE AVOIDABLE? LEARNING FROM COLOMBIA'S 1998-2002 PEACE PROCESS

*Adam Isacson*

### **A Bitter End**

Colombians had never seen President Andrés Pastrana as angry or as dejected as he appeared on television the night of Wednesday, February 20, 2002. His effort to end nearly 40 years of violence — a conflict with leftist guerrillas and paramilitary vigilantes that claimed over 3,500 lives in 2001 — had just received a fatal blow. More than three years of frustrating negotiations had come to nothing.

That morning, an elite unit of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — FARC), the larger of two leftist insurgent groups active in the country, had hijacked a domestic airliner. Landing it on a highway in the guerrilla-dominated countryside of Huila department, members of the FARC's Teófilo Forero column kidnapped one of its passengers, Liberal Party Senator Jorge Gechem Turbay. That same day, the guerrillas dynamited a well-traveled bridge in Antioquia department. An ambulance, its driver unaware, plummeted into the Danta River. All aboard the vehicle died, including a woman in labor.

That night, as he ended the peace process on which he had staked his presidency, Pastrana did not mince words. "None can doubt that, between politics and terrorism, the FARC has chosen terrorism. We Colombians offered an open hand to the FARC and they have responded to us with a slap."<sup>1</sup>

The Pastrana of February 20 hardly resembled the optimistic new president of three-and-a-half years earlier who frequently declared, "For peace, I risk everything."<sup>2</sup> In mid-1998, as Conservative Party candidate Pastrana fought a tight election runoff against Liberal opponent Horacio Serpa, a war-weary Colombian public made a central campaign issue of possible peace negotiations with the 17,000-member FARC and 4,000-member National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional — ELN). What ultimately lifted the candidate above Horacio Serpa was a June 1998 meeting between Pastrana aide Víctor G. Ricardo and FARC leaders in the jungles of southern Colombia. Serpa knew he had been bested when shown a photograph of maximum FARC leader Manuel Marulanda with Ricardo, a Pastrana campaign watch on his wrist: "Those guys took a big gamble and beat us," the Liberal candidate admitted. "It [was] a perfect political move."<sup>3</sup>

By 2002, though, it was hard to believe that promising to negotiate with guerrillas could ever have helped a candidate's prospects. Long since disillusioned with the talks, Colombians cheered Pastrana's decision to shut them down. In May they elected a new president, Álvaro Uribe, a former governor of Antioquia who promised an all-out antiguerrilla offensive. Uribe — an early critic of Pastrana's peace effort whose views had once relegated him to a hard-line fringe — became the first candidate under Colombia's 1991 Constitution ever to win a first-round majority, avoiding a runoff.

Far from the hope of 1998, Colombia's peace process ended up embittering all involved. None of the participants can be said to have "won." The FARC had entered the dialogues hungry for political recognition after a string of military victories, but emerged with less than ever, especially from an international community horrified by its violations of international humanitarian law. The group also lost momentum on the battlefield during the talks; Colombia's armed forces grew skillful at repelling its larger attacks, and the brutal paramilitary groups, their membership tripling to over 12,000 members, expanded into many guerrilla-controlled regions. The Pastrana administration lost as well, as the president saw his main ambition defeated and his political capital exhausted. As he left office, the government and FARC were as far apart as they had ever been over twenty years of off-and-on dialogues. The ELN lost political ground as well, though a renewal of talks with the Uribe government remains a possibility.

The term “peace process” hardly describes the Pastrana government’s fitful talks with the insurgents. The FARC dialogues (which began on January 7, 1999 and ended on February 20, 2002) and the ELN talks (off and on between February 10, 1999 and May 31, 2002) consisted of little more than haggling over procedural questions between small, unrepresentative, mutually distrustful groups of negotiators. Neither set of talks ever came to consider the serious challenges facing Colombia, reforms to address them, or mechanisms for reintegrating the groups’ members into post-conflict society.

The FARC talks were “frozen,” meaning no meetings at all between negotiating teams, more than one-third of the time or for more than 400 out of 1,140 days (see Appendix A). ELN negotiations never formally began for lack of agreement on a venue. A promising series of meetings in Cuba in 2002 brought the government and ELN quite close to a cease-fire, however, and most observers did not view those talks’ May 2002 rupture as final.

## Reasons for Failure

Looking back, the peace processes’ failure seems to have had an air of inevitability to it. Given all sides’ lack of battlefield dominance, the guerrillas’ questionable desire to negotiate, and the paramilitaries’ ability to undermine government guarantees, among other obstacles, could the outcome have been any different?

This paper contends that a successful outcome — at a minimum, negotiations that enjoyed both sides’ confidence and that Pastrana’s successor could have advanced further — was possible, even in the absence of battlefield dominance or a “hurting stalemate.”<sup>4</sup> Although few ever expected a final accord during Pastrana’s four years, all actors involved — government and guerrillas, the paramilitaries, “civil society,” the United States, and the “international community” — could have made important progress toward overcoming the many obvious obstacles the talks faced.

Such progress would have been difficult even under the best of circumstances. Over the course of the talks, however, it was made virtually impossible by a long series of political and strategic errors. While the illegal armed groups behaved most erratically — the paramilitaries were a constant hindrance and the guerrillas often seemed to be acting against their own self-interest — the finger of blame points in all directions.

In the hope that “next time” comes soon, it is worth an effort to identify some of these errors and to draw lessons from them. The list of “sins” is long, but most fit into the following four categories: an exaggerated mistrust between the parties, a reliance on improvisation at the expense of strategy, a lack of internal consensus on each side, and a systematic exclusion of potential allies. Mistrust, improvisation, ambivalence, and exclusion combined to keep the talks from moving forward.

## *Mistrust*

Throughout the FARC peace process, the Colombian government’s negotiators found themselves frustrated by the guerrillas’ intransigence, specifically, their foot-dragging on the negotiating agenda, their habit of making demands while conceding nothing, and their continuing aggression against civilians.

To many, this stubbornness owed to the reigning military balance. After several victories over Colombia’s armed forces from 1996-1998, including the wholesale destruction of military bases in the departments of Putumayo (Patascoy and Las Delicias) and Guaviare (Miraflores), the FARC believed itself to be “winning” the war. According to this view, the guerrillas, rich with drug money and controlling much of the countryside, would not negotiate seriously until they were dealt serious blows on the battlefield.

Today, this “military balance” view of the FARC’s motivations is predominant, certainly within the Bush and Uribe administrations. At the beginning of its peace effort, however, the Pastrana administration saw things quite differently.

Colombia’s weak state and small, underfinanced military were in no condition in 1998 to force the guerrillas to sue for peace. Getting there, the new government understood, would require years of reform, years during which thousands would die and billions in scarce resources would be wasted. Pastrana’s team decided to start dialogues sooner rather than later, although it meant facing stronger and, thus, more stubborn guerrillas.

Pastrana's initial peace team, led by High Commissioner for Peace Víctor G. Ricardo (the aide in the campaign photo) and advised by Álvaro Leyva, a Conservative ex-minister who maintained contact with guerrilla leaders, believed that making the FARC more cooperative was not simply a military question. Much of the problem could be addressed by taking aim at the insurgents' deep-rooted mistrust of Colombia's leaders.

### *Guerrilla Motivations*

This view was not — and still is not — hopelessly soft-headed. In fact, it is largely borne out by a consideration of the FARC's motivations, the reasons its members continue to fight.

Money for its own sake is not one of these reasons. The view that the group has devolved into "bandits" or a "cartel" makes little sense. The FARC's profits from kidnapping, extortion, and skimming from the drug trade are large, anywhere between \$200 and \$500 million per year, but do not explain why its members continue to risk their lives in Colombia's inhospitable jungles. Unlike true narco-bandits, money remains a means, not an end, for the FARC's leaders, none of whom are pouring their ill-gotten earnings into swimming pools and villas. Although some out-of-control front commanders may be exceptions,<sup>5</sup> the group appears to be plowing nearly all of its resources into weapons, equipment, and other elements of its war effort.

Ideology also fails to explain the FARC's stubborn behavior. Though their statements are often couched in the class-struggle rhetoric of Marxism's heyday, the insurgents' 10-point "Platform for a Government of National Reconstruction and Reconciliation" (see Appendix B) is not wildly radical.<sup>6</sup> With such demands as trade protectionism, land reform, and direct election of supreme-court judges, the 1993 guiding document offers much space for negotiation. "The FARC accepts a market economy, foreign investment, and private property," Camilo González, a former health minister turned leading peace activist, has pointed out. "The agenda of Francois Mitterand in his first government [in 1980s France] is more radical than the FARC's program."<sup>7</sup>

Instead, the FARC appear to have two main motivations. First, their leaders want a piece of political power; by arming themselves, they hope to gain a share of the wealth and impunity that Colombia's leaders have long enjoyed. Marxist rhetoric aside, it has never been clear whether the FARC truly desires to overturn Colombia's system of political power, or merely seeks to be included in it. Second, guerrilla leaders harbor a deep hatred of the elite that sits atop this system, the small group that benefits from one of the world's most lopsided income distributions.

These sentiments — and they are more sentiments than political programs — are common among the small farmers and coca-growers of Colombia's "agricultural frontier." The term describes the rural zones where, during the past fifty years, migrants fleeing violence or seeking land have settled, cleared jungle and tried to survive amid anarchy and extreme poverty. Neglected by the government (other than the occasional military patrol or fumigation plane) and cut off from the modern world, these areas have been guerrilla and paramilitary strongholds for decades.

Much of the FARC's rank-and-file membership, which is estimated to be nearly 40 percent female and perhaps one-third under eighteen, comes from the "agricultural frontier." In villages where most get only one real meal per day and violence is the norm, the guerrillas promise social mobility, or — as with urban gangs in the United States — a surrogate family or a source of self-esteem. For many guerrillas, taking up arms offers at least a slim hope of gaining power and privilege as well as vengeance against an "oligarchy" that its leaders blame for their poverty.

Former government peace advisor Álvaro Jiménez writes, "To talk to the FARC one must understand that although they have much hatred and much rage, that doesn't make them evil. The FARC are the expression of a peasantry that has always been beaten down in this country. . . . The FARC are uprooted peasants, expelled by society."<sup>8</sup>

Class anger underlies much of the FARC's legendary mistrust of nearly all outsiders, and its accompanying desire to act before its enemies do. This mistrust has multiplied over years of perceived and real offenses suffered at the hands of the Bogotá government, which the group's public statements routinely catalog. Manuel Marulanda's speech at the January 7, 1999, launch of peace talks (an event that the ever-mistrustful guerrilla leader skipped, leaving Southern Bloc leader Joaquín Gómez to read the document) listed

several of those offenses: the 1964 raid on the “Republic of Marquetalia” commune in southern Tolima department, whose surviving leaders went on to form the FARC; the assassination of over 2,000 members of the Patriotic Union, a political party the guerrillas formed during a mid-1980s peace process as a potential entry into civilian life; and the 1990 attack on the FARC’s “Casa Verde” headquarters, which officially ended that peace process. (Observers would long note the contrasts at the peace talks’ opening ceremony; the president’s speech hailing the launch as “a date with history,” and the FARC — its leader’s chair empty on the stage next to Pastrana — listing the “300 mules, seventy horses, 1,500 head of cattle, forty pigs and 250 poultry birds” lost in the Casa Verde raid.<sup>9</sup>)

In a country where the rural poor share little in common with the urban wealthy and middle class, a clash of cultures has further multiplied mistrust. The peasant-based FARC’s slow, deliberate approach to peace talks was a constant frustration, recalled Víctor G. Ricardo, who served as Pastrana’s chief negotiator between August 1998 and April 2000.

Some of the greatest problems were differences in language and senses of time. Sometimes one uses a language that they interpret wrong, and vice versa. Meanwhile, we had to respond to that day’s editorials, while they weren’t concerned with such things because they don’t share that vision. That made it difficult to negotiate with the guerrillas.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the group views negotiations in the same way it views war — as a possible avenue for gaining power and weakening (or replacing) the political and economic “oligarchy.” Alfonso Cano, often regarded as the chief political thinker among the group’s seven-member secretariat, told *The Economist* in 2001, “Our struggle is to do away with the state as it now exists in Colombia, preferably by political means, but if they don’t let us then we have to keep on shooting.”<sup>11</sup> Dialogue is simply an option, up-and-coming FARC leader Simón Trinidad explained to *Tiempos del Mundo* in October 2001:

Whether we come to power through peaceful or armed means is up to the oligarchy. If it is willing to change things in this country, such as to give up its privileges, we will do it through peaceful means, through dialogue, and if not we will continue the armed struggle in combination with other forms of struggle.<sup>12</sup>

In its leaders’ view, the FARC has been willing to negotiate since its first talks began in 1984, but it has systematically been denied political space. “You have to understand that we took up arms because of a lack of guarantees [for our security] and because they closed the doors to any legal participation in political campaigns and elections,” the group’s leader, Manuel Marulanda, wrote to Colombian government officials in November 2001.<sup>13</sup>

The FARC is deeply disdainful of the peace-process model followed in El Salvador, Guatemala, and early-1990s Colombia, in which guerrillas disarmed in exchange for promises of reform. In October 1998, Marulanda even turned down a visit from Antonio Navarro Wolff, the former second-in-command of the M-19 guerrillas (disbanded in a 1990 peace process), now a congressman who helped rewrite the country’s constitution. “We don’t need him here at the table to give us some clever proposals about how to get on one’s knees and grovel,” the FARC leader reportedly said.<sup>14</sup>

The group’s mistrust is so deep that it flatly refuses to give up its weapons after an agreement, as others did in past peace processes. This position owes largely to security concerns, but also to a belief that power in Colombia requires weapons and a willingness to use them. Jorge Briceño, one of the secretariat’s hardest-line members, explained the group’s insistence on an “armed peace” to reporters in 1999: “Don’t you see that guns are the accords’ guarantee? . . . If we don’t have guns we aren’t respected. Not even you would come here to listen to us. Why would you? You’re here because we have guns, right?”<sup>15</sup>

### *Building Relationships*

While Ricardo, Pastrana’s first negotiator, made his share of mistakes (several discussed below), he was justified in working to wear down the FARC leadership’s exaggerated mistrust, even though it meant taking some politically unpopular steps.

The government made several unreciprocated concessions at the outset of the process, the largest of them an unconditional troop pullout from five municipalities (counties) to create a venue for talks. Noted journalist Mauricio Vargas, “The new president appeared committed. . . to making gestures of enormous generosity to the FARC, with the purpose of undoing what he considered the greatest obstacle to starting negotiations: mistrust.”<sup>16</sup>



With the same goal in mind, the high commissioner for peace helped arrange “meet-and-greet” visits to the demilitarized zone from many of the FARC’s natural enemies, such as the head of the New York Stock Exchange, a U.S. congressman, a founder of America Online, Colombia’s finance minister, and leading business figures. Government and guerrilla negotiators visited several European capitals in February and March 2000.

To the alarm of many in Colombia’s political mainstream, the cameras often showed Ricardo sharing vigorous handshakes, embraces, and drinks with FARC leaders. Though Ricardo insisted he was tough on the guerrillas in private, “away from the microphones,” he and Pastrana sought to avoid and deflect public criticisms of the FARC, including charges launched by U.S. “Drug Czar” Barry McCaffrey, among others, that they were deeply involved in the drug trade.<sup>17</sup> The president asked military leaders to avoid using the term “narco-guerrilla” and told reporters, “I would never hold a dialogue with drug traffickers.”<sup>18</sup>

Ricardo based his approach on a belief that building trust through personal relationships could make the process move faster and perhaps, ultimately, with fewer government concessions on issues like the economy or the political system. Indeed, whatever personal relationship Pastrana and Marulanda enjoyed was enough to move the process forward whenever the two met face to face: in July 1998, when president-elect Pastrana met Marulanda and agreed to start the talks; in May of 1999, when both agreed on a negotiating agenda; and in February 2001, when the “Los Pozos Accord” (which was completely complied with) unfroze peace talks.

This approach reflected the influence and advice of Álvaro Leyva, a former senator and minister who had stayed in contact with the FARC leadership since the 1980s peace process. Leyva believed that making peace required showing the group’s leaders respect. He told Mauricio Vargas, “Doubting the FARC’s seriousness is a bad starting point for negotiations. . . . [T]he fundamental thing with the guerrilla group’s leaders is to demonstrate good faith and to trust in their word.”<sup>19</sup> Leyva, perhaps the only member of Colombia’s political establishment to have won the FARC leaders’ trust,<sup>20</sup> arranged Ricardo’s June 1998 meeting with Marulanda, but his role was reduced by a corruption charge that forced him into exile in Costa Rica.

Ricardo did make progress toward breaking some of the forty years of ice that had formed between the two sides. An agreement on a negotiating agenda — a list of issues for which reforms would be discussed — came in May 1999, though discussions on the first point hardly ever began. In April 2000, shortly after the European trip, the FARC, which had previously ruled out a cease-fire until much of the negotiating agenda was completed, changed its position and declared itself willing to consider a temporary truce.

### *Trust Deteriorates*

Indeed, the FARC talks can be said to have hit their high point, albeit not an inspiring height, in early 2000, just before Ricardo resigned his position. The high commissioner, whose “soft” approach and on-camera joviality with guerrilla leaders angered many, including paramilitary chieftain Carlos Castaño, exited in late April 2000, in the face of intensifying death threats.<sup>21</sup> He left the country shortly afterward to serve as Colombia’s ambassador in London.

His successor was Pastrana’s former private secretary and negotiating-team member Camilo Gómez, whose more distant and businesslike style discomfited the guerrillas, who complained that they had to “start over” when Ricardo left.<sup>22</sup> According to León Valencia, a demobilized ELN leader turned political analyst, “Gómez had such a different attitude, from the beginning, that the FARC’s leadership viewed him simply as the military’s man.”<sup>23</sup>

Trust deteriorated further in mid-2000 as the U.S. Congress approved Washington’s \$1.3 billion contribution to “Plan Colombia,” the Pastrana government’s attempt to marshal resources for “peace, prosperity, and the strengthening of the state.” FARC statements repeatedly denounced the U.S. outlay, \$860 million of which went to Colombia, three-quarters for the armed forces, police, and drug-crop fumigation, as foreign intervention and a gesture of bad faith. Whether the FARC truly believed this or merely saw it as a handy excuse for further foot-dragging, the effect was the same. Plan Colombia poisoned trust by strengthening both sides’ hard-liners, such as the guerrilla leaders most suspicious of government motives and the ruling-class stalwarts who saw the “gringos” coming to the rescue, making further flexibility unnecessary. Plan Colombia, ostensibly designed to strengthen the peace process, ended up crippling it further.

The FARC's behavior took a turn seriously for the worse after mid-2000. While Ricardo had to endure several FARC assaults on the process — offensives, abuses of the demilitarized zone, and especially the March 1999 murder of three U.S. indigenous-rights activists — the pace of such outrages quickened alarmingly after his exit (see Appendix C).

It is hard to imagine what strategy could possibly have been behind the rise in FARC provocation, such as the kidnappings and assassinations of public officials, attacks on population centers and infrastructure, hijackings and bombings, that accompanied the peace talks' latter phase. Perhaps they were shows of strength meant to improve the insurgents' negotiating position. Perhaps they indicated that the FARC had tired of the talks, but wanted to force the government to get up from the table first.

Whatever the reason, by August 2000, only 15 percent of Colombians polled by Gallup believed that the FARC had “a true desire to achieve peace through dialogue,” with 79 percent saying “No.”<sup>24</sup> Critics of a process in which the FARC made perhaps two concessions<sup>25</sup> could easily make the case that the insurgents were using the talks merely for tactical advantages. “It is impossible to establish whether the guerrillas are using negotiations as just a tactical means of gaining political space and, without having to show any democratic legitimacy, to impose themselves as a ‘factor of power,’ or whether they have a true will to arrive at some type of accord,” French analyst Daniel Pécaut observed.<sup>26</sup> Unnamed military sources cited in the Colombian news magazine *Cambio* were more blunt in August 2000, claiming to have intelligence showing that “the only thing the FARC seeks with the maintenance of the peace process and the demilitarized zone is to prepare itself for a sharp expansion of its blocs and fronts throughout the national territory.”<sup>27</sup>

Though Ricardo had made a top priority of gaining FARC leaders' trust — a process that would have required more than the twenty or so months he was able to give it — the insurgent leadership failed to recognize that trust is a two-way street. The FARC's relentless assaults on civilians damaged trust to a degree rivaling the history of government offenses listed in Manuel Marulanda's January 1999 speech.

In his televised address breaking off the peace talks, Pastrana returned to the theme of overcoming mistrust that had guided so many of his peace negotiators' early actions. Addressing Manuel Marulanda by name, he pointed at the camera and said, “I gave you my word and I kept it, I always kept it, but you assaulted my good faith, not just mine but that of all Colombians. . . . Today it is you who will have to respond before Colombia and the world for your arrogance and your lies.”<sup>28</sup>

## ***Improvisation***

It is possible that Víctor G. Ricardo's emphasis on building trust and respectful relationships, if allowed to continue beyond April 2000, could have kept the peace process afloat longer, perhaps to the point of agreement on one or two agenda items. But it would have been far from enough to save the process in the absence of a coherent strategy to guide the Colombian government's actions. No such strategy ever existed. Instead, Pastrana and his advisors too often found themselves simply improvising. While “making it up as they went along” occasionally led to audacious, dramatic gestures and breakthroughs, it more often led to disaster.

## ***The FARC Demilitarized Zone***

The classic example, of course, was the “original sin” of the peace process: Pastrana's decision to grant the FARC a sizable demilitarized zone without conditions.

In July 1998, in the midst of his “for peace, I risk everything” moment, President-elect Pastrana himself paid a visit to Marulanda and Jorge Briceño in the jungles of Caquetá department. The FARC leaders said they would agree to enter into dialogues if the Colombian government met the following five conditions:

1. To recognize the guerrillas' political character;
2. To “decriminalize social protest;”
3. To stop paying citizens for intelligence (a system, known as *recompensas*, that President Uribe reinstated at the beginning of his term);
4. To dismantle paramilitary groups; and



5. To pull the security forces out of five municipalities (counties): four in Meta department (Vistahermosa, La Macarena, La Uribe, and Mesetas) and one in Caquetá department (San Vicente del Caguán). This area, roughly the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined, has a population of slightly less than 100,000. The power to create such zones was granted to the president in a 1997 law (“Law 418”).<sup>29</sup>

Pastrana (and Víctor G. Ricardo, who accompanied him on this visit) agreed to all five preconditions on the spot, including the troop pullout, with no additional rules, conditions, or stipulations. The decision came without consultation with the zone’s mayors, the military, the Congress, or other advisors, reports Mauricio Vargas.

I have asked different officials of the Pastrana administration, several times, whether at some point before decreeing the military clearance of the five municipalities, there was a summit of high government officials to examine the rules that would govern the zone’s functioning. I am certain that the answer is no.<sup>30</sup>

The decision to grant the zone angered some, but was not considered particularly outlandish at the time. The region, particularly anything beyond its town centers, was already under quite solid FARC control; army personnel stationed there rarely strayed far from their bases unless in great numbers (as is the case again today). Pastrana justified it as a necessary first step to build trust and mutual confidence, and few saw any other options for getting the talks started. Vargas also contends that the president-elect “was truly gratified” by the guerrilla group’s agreement to meet Ricardo in June, “which he and his campaign managers regarded as crucial to the election’s result.”<sup>31</sup> In any case, Pastrana’s political opposition had been thinking along similar lines; outgoing President Ernesto Samper had offered the FARC one municipality during the campaign in an effort to boost the prospects of the Liberal Party candidate, Horacio Serpa. (Samper, in fact, had come close to granting a FARC request to demilitarize La Uribe municipality in 1995, but yielded to military pressure.)

Pastrana’s concessions would come back to haunt the process repeatedly, however, as the FARC strictly held the president to his original word. The FARC froze the talks four times; during each episode the insurgents invoked one of Pastrana’s original July 1998 commitments, either his promise of an unconditional demilitarized zone or his pledge to dismantle paramilitary groups.

The zone was declared into existence for ninety days starting on November 7, 1998, and its term had to be extended eleven more times (see Appendix D). Several times, the approach of another deadline threw the process into severe crisis, particularly during periods when the talks were already officially frozen.

Difficulties emerged almost immediately. The FARC delayed the talks’ launch for two months after November 7, insisting that 100 unarmed soldiers<sup>32</sup> vacate the Cazadores Battalion headquarters in San Vicente del Caguán. After weeks of difficult discussions that placed Ricardo uncomfortably between the immovable FARC and an angry Colombian military, the last army personnel left San Vicente on December 14. In May 1999, an offhand comment from Ricardo about extending the zone “indefinitely” set off a storm that culminated in the resignation of Defense Minister Rodrigo Lloreda.

Disagreement about the zone froze the talks again in June and July 1999, as the FARC refused to approve an international commission to verify complaints about abuses in the five municipalities. The verification commission was agreed to orally in November 1998 and in writing, in a May 2, 1999 agreement between Marulanda and Pastrana.<sup>33</sup> The FARC nonetheless insisted that it was not a part of Pastrana’s original July 1998 commitment, and that in May, Marulanda had only agreed to take up the topic later in the peace process.<sup>34</sup> “For the government it was an explicit commitment, and for the FARC just a possibility to discuss,” *Cambio* magazine explained.<sup>35</sup> The zone continued without outside observation for its entire existence.

The zone was also at the center of the second-to-last crisis the peace process suffered, a January 2002 face-off that came within hours of ending the dialogues. A new deadline approached on January 9, with the talks frozen over a guerrilla demand that the government lift military controls around the zone, such as overflights and perimeter roadblocks. Frustrated, Pastrana ordered the military to retake the zone within 48 hours. The process was saved only through the intensive efforts of UN and other foreign diplomats.

While the FARC took a fundamentalist approach to Pastrana’s original, improvised promises, it took many liberties with its zone. Though the initial agreement allowed most civilian government officials to remain in the five municipalities, the insurgents drove out all judges, prosecutors and investigators.<sup>36</sup> Well-founded charges of FARC abuses in the zone — coca cultivation, forced disappearances, harboring kidnapped civilians, and recruiting child soldiers — soured public opinion about the entire process, both domestically

and internationally.<sup>37</sup> The military complained that the guerrillas often launched attacks from the zone, then retreated to the safety of the off-limits area. The guerrillas' abuse of the zone left Pastrana with the following two poor choices: either to revoke the zone — thus ending the peace process — or to swallow hard and tolerate the FARC's behavior.

### *The ELN Demilitarized Zone*

Pastrana's July 1998 promises to the FARC carried consequences for his dialogues with the ELN. The prospect of a second demilitarized zone for the smaller group became the central issue, and the main obstacle to progress, in his government's discussions with ELN leaders. The group had never mentioned a desire for its own zone until February 1999, when its representatives sprang this new requirement on government negotiators during a round of meetings in Caracas.

Before then, the ELN had a reasonably well-considered plan for eventual dialogues, developed at meetings (particularly a July 1998 encounter in Mainz, Germany) with church, human rights, union, and business leaders. At least since 1996, the insurgents had called for a nine-month "convention," a public event at which participants would develop proposals in six areas (national sovereignty, natural resources, economic development, human rights, narcotics, and minority rights).<sup>38</sup> These proposals would form the core of the group's negotiating positions in official talks. An October 1998 meeting determined that the convention would take place in February 1999, but this scheme fell apart in the grisly aftermath of an October 18 oil-pipeline bombing in La Machuca, Antioquia, that triggered an accidental fireball, killing over 45 people.

The ELN's demand to hold the convention in a demilitarized zone of four municipalities in southern Bolívar department surprised everyone at the February 1999 Caracas meeting. "This issue was not considered during our conversations in Germany, nor in Itagüí, nor in Río Verde," read a statement from several of the guerrillas' civil-society interlocutors. "On the contrary, ELN representatives always emphasized that the only condition was a government guarantee that the event could take place."<sup>39</sup> (An unnamed member of the FARC's "international commission" told *Cambio*, "It's evident that they have a 'little brother' complex."<sup>40</sup>)

The government, wary of demilitarized zones after its difficult experience with the FARC, refused to consider the request. The ELN chose to pressure for its own zone with a wave of high-profile kidnappings. Guerrillas hijacked a domestic airliner in April 1999, retaining the passengers and crew. They kidnapped the wealthy congregants of Cali's La María church in May 1999. Several smaller incidents followed.

A year later, the Pastrana government yielded in principle, agreeing in April 2000, to pull troops out of three municipalities in the departments of Bolívar (San Pablo and Cantagallo) and Antioquia (Yondó). This time, government negotiators secured the guerrillas' assent to conditions on the zone, such as the presence of judicial authorities and an independent monitoring presence.

In the spirit of improvisation, though, Pastrana's team left other details for later, agreeing to the zone without drawing up any plan or mechanism for putting it into practice. When Pastrana ordered the military out of the three municipalities in March 2001, thousands of local residents spurred by the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia — AUC) paramilitaries who maintained a strong presence in the area, staged weeks of protests and road blockages. The promised demilitarization was ultimately called off, defeated by peasant protests, paramilitary pressure, and behind-the-scenes resistance from the Colombian military.<sup>41</sup>

In August, Pastrana, unable either to deliver on his pledge or to coax some flexibility out of the insurgents, put the talks with the ELN on hold. The president had been bitten by another improvisation, this time a promise to do something that his government could not (or would not) deliver.

### *Dismantling Paramilitary Groups*

Another such promise, of course, was Pastrana's pledge to aggressively confront the paramilitaries. No such effort ever materialized. During Pastrana's four years in office, the AUC enjoyed an alarmingly robust period of growth and few, if any, local-level paramilitary figures, much less national leaders, were captured (of those that were, Human Rights Watch has observed, fifteen "later walked past prison guards, soldiers, and police to freedom"<sup>42</sup>).

Public commitments to fight the self-defense groups received little follow-up. To much fanfare, the Pastrana government announced three ambitious-sounding antiparamilitary campaigns: a “Search Block” for the violent Magdalena Medio region unveiled in November 1998; a “Coordination Center for the Fight against Self-Defense Groups,” announced in February 2000; and an “Anti-Assassin Committee,” declared in January 2001.<sup>43</sup> None of these were heard from for more than a week or two after inauguration.

### *Negotiating Strategies*

The spirit of runaway improvisation also guided the government’s handling of the negotiating agenda. The FARC talks showed symptoms of “attention-deficit disorder,” skipping from issue to issue and routinely getting thrown off course by outside distractions.

By late 2000, León Valencia writes, the talks had more or less devolved into three separate tracks.<sup>44</sup> The first were the formal negotiations following the agreed-upon agenda, which never got past the first point (economic issues); lead negotiators like High Commissioner for Peace Camilo Gómez were normally absent from these meetings, leaving two negotiating teams unauthorized to make important decisions. The second was a series of “Public Audiences,” events to which members of the public were invited to present proposals for the negotiating agenda; though thousands of participants came to the demilitarized zone, the audiences rarely amounted to more than chaotic speechmaking exercises, with no effort to integrate or otherwise follow through on the participants’ proposals. The third track was a sporadic series of high-level meetings between Camilo Gómez and members of the FARC secretariat, to talk about off-agenda issues like prisoner exchanges or a possible cease-fire. According to Valencia, the FARC grew weary of Gómez’s insistence on a truce: “In the Caguán it was said that the government’s ‘record was scratched’ and that its only obsession was to ask for a cease-fire over and over.”<sup>45</sup>

In the ELN’s case, the government, again lacking a strategy, ended up giving the smaller guerrilla group a second-tier treatment. Though an accord with the ELN would probably have been easier to achieve, given the battlefield imbalance and the group’s slowly diminishing size, government negotiators met less frequently with its leaders, and when they did they were less flexible and more willing to freeze talks. ELN leaders complained of the government negotiators’ “minimizing” of their peace process and their “arrogant” attitude in the talks, and speculated that it owed to a perception that their group was on its way out militarily.<sup>46</sup> “What do they want? Do they want us to demonstrate that we are not as defeated as they say?” asked Antonio García of the ELN’s five-member Central Command (Comando Central — COCE) in March 1999, ominously adding that such a demonstration could be made “with a few actions.”<sup>47</sup>

As its sudden demand for its own demilitarized zone would indicate, the ELN was also guilty of improvising. Government negotiators repeatedly accused COCE members of contradicting each other and seeking to revise already-existing agreements.<sup>48</sup> Cease-fire talks ultimately broke off in May 2002, for instance, after guerrilla negotiators’ last-minute demand for \$40 million to support themselves while they silenced their guns.<sup>49</sup> The ELN’s dramatic string of mass kidnappings also seemed improvised, seeming to make little strategic sense. (Many also questioned why a group whose leadership has historically included leftist priests would choose to kidnap parishioners in the middle of a Mass.)

It is not clear whether the FARC had a clear negotiating strategy or whether it, too, was making things up as it went along. Clearly, not all of the group’s actions were guided by a strategy; behind the scenes, FARC leaders were heard expressing regret for some of the group’s most serious blows to the process. After 10th Front Commander Germán Briceño (“Grannobles”) ordered three U.S. indigenous-rights activists killed in 1999, a radio intercept picked up his brother, secretariat member Jorge Briceño, scolding him (with untranslatable profanity) for committing a political error “*de aquí a la puta mierda*.”<sup>50</sup> After the FARC’s 59th Front killed a beloved former culture minister it had kidnapped in 2001, León Valencia notes, “Marulanda was truly affected by her death. ‘There are things that slip through our hands,’ he commented days later,” while in a state of “physical sadness.”<sup>51</sup>

Though not cases of wanton improvisation, these episodes indicate either a loss of command and control over lower-level personnel, or the existence of dissent within the FARC’s ranks over the importance of the peace negotiations. Perhaps both.

## *Ambivalence*

Indeed, some key FARC members were probably quite unhappy with the dialogues. Like just about every other player in the peace process, the guerrillas' attitude was decidedly ambivalent.

This is not unusual, as all groups have hawks and doves among their memberships. Internal divisions that grow too extreme, however, can render a group unable to participate usefully in negotiations. A deeply divided group will be unlikely to follow a coherent negotiating strategy, leaving it forced to improvise. A divided group will also reinforce its adversaries' mistrust by sending constant mixed signals.

## *The FARC's Two Faces and "Political Autism"*

The FARC is skilled at appearing monolithic and hierarchical; its public statements rarely vary from a strict party line, and evidence of internal dissent almost never sees the light of day. For years, however, analysts have speculated about strong divisions lying just below the surface.

The speculation, although impossible to confirm, has tended to run along similar lines. The group's leadership is allegedly divided into two camps: a "political" wing that holds to ideological principles and is open to peace negotiations and a hard-line "military" wing that sees political support and public relations as secondary to the goal of taking power by force. Former minister Augusto Ramírez Ocampo observed, "those members of the FARC secretariat with political inclinations would like a political solution, and those whose vocation is only to be soldiers would like a military solution."<sup>52</sup> Some also see an overlapping generational split, with the group's most veteran members focused on political goals and an eventual settlement, and younger mid-level commanders, their entire adult lives spent in the FARC, content to keep fighting.

According to this vision, the group's seven-member secretariat incorporates both tendencies. The political wing is considered the dominion of Alfonso Cano, a former university professor from an urban upper-middle-class background. The bearded, bespectacled Cano, a secretariat member since at least the early 1980s, heads the insurgents' Western Bloc and has long served as a chief ideologist. "With Cano are the majority of the intellectual leaders, including three of the seven secretariat members: Raúl Reyes, Iván Márquez, and Pablo Catatumbo," the Colombian newsweekly *Cambio* — which has covered this supposed split several times — noted in late 1999. "The Cano line is supported by delegates at the negotiations and members of the high military command like Joaquín Gómez, Iván Ríos, Bernardo Peñalosa, and Simón Trinidad."<sup>53</sup>

Cano led the FARC's team at failed negotiations in Caracas and Tlaxcala in the early 1990s, but appeared to play less of a role in the last peace process. He gave relatively few interviews to journalists and, in fact, did not appear to be spending much of his time in the demilitarized zone (In January 2002, *Cambio* claimed that Cano disdained the "bourgeois-ization" of FARC leaders who stayed comfortably within the zone's confines).<sup>54</sup> His most visible moment during the process was the mid-2000 launch of the Bolivarian Movement, a "clandestine political party" with Cano at its head; the success of this effort, however, is far from certain, as it has received few mentions even in recent FARC documents.

More visible, and probably more influential during the dialogues, was Jorge Briceño ("El Mono Jojoy"<sup>55</sup>), regarded as the head of the FARC's military wing. A stocky son of peasants from La Uribe, a town in the former demilitarized zone, and a guerrilla since his teenage years, Briceño heads the group's Eastern Bloc, whose fronts control the savannahs and jungles of departments like Meta, Guaviare, and Caquetá with their lucrative coca fields. According to *Cambio*, "The 'Jojoy' hard-line is represented by him and several of the *comandantes* that dominate the eastern plains and jungles, such as Fabián Ramírez, 'Romaña,' 'Acacio,' and 'Grannobles.'<sup>56</sup>

The latter three are some of the group's most feared members, whose actions have done the most to inspire charges that the group is sliding into banditry. Henry Castellanos or "Romaña," head of the FARC's 53rd Front, pioneered the practice of "miracle-fishing," the staging of roadblocks in search of wealthy drivers to kidnap. Tomás Medina, "Negro Acacio," heads the 16th Front in Colombia's far east. "Grannobles," or Germán Briceño, the brother of "Mono Jojoy," heads the 10th Front and ordered the murder of three U.S. citizens in Arauca in 1999. The U.S. Justice Department has requested the extradition of all three, as well as Jorge Briceño, on charges stemming from drug trafficking and the 1999 killings.

This faction's influence appeared to grow during the 1990s along with the FARC's overall military



strength. Its members seem less interested in peace talks, and have even been accused of torpedoing advances in the negotiations. An unidentified person “close to the FARC’s political relations commission” told *Cambio*, “‘Jojoy’ understood that if the process depended on building trust, he would have to dedicate himself to sowing mistrust if he wanted to see it fail.”<sup>57</sup>

Some evidence indicates that Briceño may have sought to keep the talks from advancing. He — not Marulanda or the FARC’s most visible spokesman, Raúl Reyes — was the leader who announced a “tax” on wealthy Colombians, with kidnapping the price of nonpayment, in April 2000. (The announcement came less than two weeks after encouraging news of the group’s interest in a cease-fire.) He also spoiled the atmosphere of the FARC’s main goodwill gesture in the talks, a June 2001 release of 242 imprisoned soldiers and police in exchange for fifteen ill guerrillas in Colombian jails. Briceño told the assembled crowd (prophetically, it turned out) that the FARC would henceforth kidnap public officials instead: “We have to grab people from the Senate, from Congress, judges and ministers, from all the three powers [of the Colombian state], and we’ll see how they yell.”<sup>58</sup>

Manuel Marulanda, the group’s maximum leader, is somewhere between the two camps. *Cambio* noted in 2000, “as has been seen in the past, ‘Tirofijo’<sup>59</sup> — more friendly to negotiations than people might think — leans toward one tendency or the other, according to whether things are going well or badly for his fronts in the battlefield.”<sup>60</sup>

Though *Cambio* insists that Cano and “Jojoy” are “like oil and water,” the FARC has taken pains to deny charges of this internal split. “‘Cano’ is not the political chief, nor is ‘Jojoy’ the military one. Each is responsible for both political and military aspects of his bloc,” insisted FARC negotiator Marco León Calarcá. “What do exist are differences in personality.”<sup>61</sup>

While the FARC endeavored to hide any internal divisions, the peace process appeared to bring the political-military split into sharper relief. The military wing’s presumed ascendance could explain the FARC’s political ineptitude of the past few years, which has cost the insurgents much of the domestic and international support they may once have enjoyed. The FARC’s escalating violence against civilians, stubbornness at the table, and failure to explain its actions did more than destroy trust at the negotiating table. They also united disparate sectors of Colombia’s otherwise divided society against the insurgents.

Analysts frequently use the term “political autism” to describe the guerrillas’ apparent lack of concern about others’ opinion of them. While it has enjoyed significant military success, the FARC has made little effort to explain its struggle; no manifestoes or broad-based appeals, only complaints about past mistreatments, essays filled with generic radical jargon, and a two-page list of demands. It has only the weak party structure of the clandestine “Bolivarian Movement,” which has had zero impact on Colombian politics. Its leaders have generally ignored opportunities to reach a larger audience, such as the 2000 offer from Carlos Lleras, the director of the then-daily *El Espectador*, to contribute a regular column to the newspaper.<sup>62</sup>

The common explanation for the FARC’s neglect of politics is the experience of the Patriotic Union, a political party the insurgents formed in 1985 after agreeing to a cease-fire during an earlier peace process. Although the party won several congressional seats and local elections, more than 2,000 of its members were wiped out by a systematic campaign of assassination during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This not only alienated the FARC from political activity, but eliminated most of the group’s more sophisticated political thinkers, leaving behind a rump of fighters more adept at winning battles than hearts and minds.

The retreat from politics also owes to a strategy adopted at the FARC’s 1993 National Conference at which, dismayed by the fall of the Soviet bloc and the early-90s peace processes in Central America and Colombia, the group resolved to place a higher priority on military expansion. Since then the FARC has sharply reduced its contacts with Colombia’s communist party, labor unions, and other leftist civil-society groups. The group is convinced that the 1993 turn from politics was the right move, as shown in a revealing account of a conversation between Marulanda and European diplomats reproduced in León Valencia’s recent book.

In a conversation, we told Manuel that most of the FARC’s demands were shared by large sectors of civil society, and that in the political sphere he would find many allies willing to fight for them. Marulanda answered that, while that might be the case in Europe, it was much harder here. He added that he had once had at his side one of the best politicians, Jacobo Arenas, [one of the FARC’s founding members and an ardent communist since the early 1950s, who died in 1990] and while Jacobo worked to hold the organization to political types of actions, the FARC grew very slowly. The guerrillas’ great expansion happened after Jacobo died.<sup>63</sup>



Dominant both in Marulanda's estimations and in the battlefield, it is possible that the FARC's military wing spent too much time in the driver's seat during the Pastrana peace process. The group's deep political-military split, if it does indeed exist, would explain much of the FARC's ambivalent approach to the negotiations.

### *Chaos in the ELN*

The ELN was still more ambivalent and divided, as the dialogues were taking place amid a period of chaos among its leadership. The group's longtime leader, former Spanish priest Manuel Pérez, died in February 1998, setting off a power struggle exacerbated by a bloody paramilitary offensive in areas under the group's control. This disorder no doubt contributed to the last-minute demands, alterations of agreements, and other erratic behavior that so frustrated government negotiators. Pastrana's interior minister, Néstor Humberto Martínez, complained in 2000, "The problem is ... the lack of coherence within the ELN. In a negotiation you need a legitimate interlocutor with the ability to make a commitment. On the government side this interlocutor has existed; however, on the ELN side there are multiple actors who do not individually have decision-making power."<sup>64</sup>

### *Paralysis in the "Establishment"*

While members of the small government negotiating teams may have been on the same page, they represented an "establishment" that was deeply divided, to the point of paralysis, on the subject of peace. A key reason for Pastrana's over-reliance on improvisation was his inability to cobble support for a basic strategy from among the many competing interests backing his government.

Pastrana recognized this problem and attempted at least twice to create a broad, multi-sector political front to back the peace process incorporating opposition-party leaders as well as other prominent members of the country's political and economic elite. The 2000 "Group of Support for the Negotiating Table" and the 2001 "Common Front for Peace and Against Violence" faded out of existence within months of their creation, undone by personality clashes and disagreements on crucial issues.

The peace process raised many issues over which Colombia's political class was sharply, often emotionally, divided. Demilitarized zones for guerrillas, especially the FARC zone after it had been renewed several times, were always certain to spark political firestorms in Bogotá. Little agreement existed over the need to fight paramilitaries or charges that the military tolerates or assists them. Consensus was also impossible regarding any measure that might be seen as conferring belligerency status on the guerrillas, such as a law governing prisoner exchanges (a frequent FARC request). Whenever cease-fire discussions with guerrillas entered into specifics, political leaders fought over sticky questions like whether to separate the guerrillas from the security forces in "mini-demilitarized zones," and whether to provide their members with financial support during the truce.

Over time, the establishment's ambivalence gradually hardened into opposition to the negotiations. From the very beginning, a standard-bearer of this opposition was the outspoken former governor of Antioquia department and presidential precandidate Álvaro Uribe. Uribe's insistence that negotiations not take place without a prior cessation of guerrilla hostilities was a lonely position at the outset of the talks. (In a March 2000 *Semana* magazine article, Uribe's interviewer prefaced a question with, "Some people maintain that you are one of the few remaining skeptics with respect to the peace process."<sup>65</sup>) Uribe's view increasingly entered the mainstream, however, as the peace process bore few results, FARC assaults on civilians mounted, and a significant minority of observers, noting improvements in the military and territorial gains by the paramilitaries, began to view the war as winnable.

The arrival of Plan Colombia caused still more members of Colombia's establishment to turn their back on the negotiations, as Alfredo Molano wrote in *El Espectador* in early 2000.

On the part of the establishment, it is clear that the United States' growing participation in the conflict and the development of paramilitarism have caused negotiations — defined as transaction and the building of a new political system — to lose importance. A sector of the establishment and public opinion is turning the solution of our military and social problems over to the United States. It believes that the gringos will impose order and that the negotiations will become spurious.<sup>66</sup>

Unable to agree on the strategy — or later, the necessity — of negotiations, the Colombian political class sent mixed signals to the guerrillas. Government negotiators, “their hands tied and with a precise orientation not to cede on anything,” in Marulanda’s description, were unable to make clear what was and was not negotiable, offering the insurgents little hope that peace could offer a credible path toward political power.<sup>67</sup>

The Pastrana government could have softened the establishment’s ambivalence with a better effort to “sell” or justify its peace effort. On the whole, though, its use of the media was confused and episodic, falsely building up expectations, touting tiny achievements, or responding defensively to the day’s criticism instead of counseling patience and inviting constructive input. (The Colombian media deserves some blame, too; its coverage of the talks was frequently sensational, with headlines like “Crucial Day for the Peace Process” appearing far too often<sup>68</sup> but, on the whole, the reporters were just doing their jobs.) Camilo Gómez only occasionally spoke to reporters while his predecessor, Víctor G. Ricardo, sometimes said too much, at least during the first few months of the talks. Meanwhile, Ricardo did the peace talks few favors with a series of uninformative, platitude-filled op-eds in Colombia’s daily *El Tiempo*, which surely did nothing to convince skeptics (“My vehement proposal is that Colombian society make its power felt and take the positive option of a ‘yes,’ of a full, radical, perseverant, audacious, valiant and committed ‘yes’ to peace.”<sup>69</sup>)

Some of this botched sales job owed to the general disarray of the understaffed high commissioner’s office, which reached such levels that it apparently failed even to respond to offers of assistance from the U.S. Embassy.<sup>70</sup> The message problem went beyond just one office, however. The Colombian government similarly failed to sell Plan Colombia as a development program, as critics who saw it as a U.S.-led military endeavor gained the upper hand.

### *“Civil Society” in Its Labyrinth*

Division and ambivalence reigned well beyond the political and economic elite. The assortment of human rights, peace, women’s, business, labor, peasant, church, student, Afro-Colombian, and indigenous organizations commonly called “civil society” enjoyed a moment of strong influence, but soon declined under the weight of its internal divisions (as well as constant threats and exclusion from a more meaningful role).

Non-governmental organizations, never before a significant political actor in Colombia, played a large role at the end of Ernesto Samper’s presidential term, helping fill the vacuum left by an administration discredited by a drug-money scandal. A “Citizen Mandate for Peace” garnered 10 million nonbinding “votes” for negotiations on a ballot distributed at gubernatorial and municipal elections in October 1997. Massive peace marches followed in May 1998 and in July, the church-organized National Conciliation Commission hosted thousands of grassroots and non-governmental organization members at a “Permanent Assembly of Civil Society for Peace” in Bogotá. Groups of civil-society representatives even carried out preliminary negotiations with armed groups in July with ELN leaders in Mainz, Germany, and with paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño and his associates in rural Córdoba department.

Working together along similar strategic lines, national-level groups like REDEPAZ, the Citizen Mandate, and the Permanent Assembly for Peace were instrumental in making peace a make-or-break issue in the 1998 election campaign. After Pastrana arrived in office and launched official talks, however, “civil society” found itself unable to move forward. Though still able to convene large gatherings, its messages were repetitious, lacking in depth, and offered little of practical use to guerrilla and government peace negotiators. Civil society’s influence never managed to return to 1997-1998 levels.

Much of this decline owes to the Pastrana government’s and the FARC’s unwillingness to incorporate civil society in its peace effort (see the discussion of “exclusion” below). Other than a small “accompaniment group” that played a useful go-between role in ELN talks, most non-governmental groups found themselves “crowded out” by the Pastrana administration’s peace efforts, without a clear way to contribute. Another form of exclusion also weakened the movement: the death threats and targeted violence launched from far-right sectors that have forced dozens of its most effective activists into silence or exile.

However, intimidation and exclusion only bear some of the blame for civil society’s weakness. The groups in this category were riven with divisions ranging from ideology to social class, making agreement on a common strategy very difficult. Repeated coalition-building attempts too often gave way to fragmentation and infighting. While “*protagonismo*,” the clash of egos, played a role here, as in other sectors, other factors combined to keep people apart.

Civil society reflects the same divisions found elsewhere in Colombia, including social inequality. “Elite” peace and human-rights groups, run by urban, educated full-time activists with six-figure budgets, often mix awkwardly with grassroots labor, peasant or ethnic organizations from “the provinces.”

It proved even more difficult to keep the business community inside the peace movement’s “big tent.” While some of Colombia’s large business federations were present at the July 1998 Permanent Assembly, they were soon scared off by many other groups’ brand of non-guerrilla leftism; by late 1999 most business groups channeled their pro-peace activity through a movement called “No Más,”<sup>71</sup> which emphasized stopping guerrilla kidnappings.<sup>72</sup>

The business community itself lacked a single position regarding Pastrana’s negotiations. Some large business federations, such as the National Association of Industrialists (ANDI) and the National Business Federation (FENALCO), worried about the cost of the war and started out as key supporters of the talks. Others, like the powerful Cattlemen’s Federation (FEDEGAN, uniting many of the country’s largest landowners) were skeptical or openly opposed from the beginning. Along with majority public opinion, the business community’s discomfort with Pastrana’s peace process would solidify over time.

Beyond social divisions, civil-society groups were also split on political questions. One central question of debate was their relationship to the government-guerrilla dialogues. Some saw a need to help shore up the fragile peace process, while others — viewing the dialogues as an exchange between groups that did not represent them — chose instead to continue non-violent action for a “larger peace” of structural reforms and social justice. Other divisions ranged from basic philosophical questions, such as the rejection of violence as a means of political action, the importance of criticizing guerrilla human-rights violations, the economic model that a post-conflict Colombia should follow, to practicalities such as whether to negotiate with paramilitaries and whether human-rights violators should receive a postconflict amnesty.

The non-governmental, nonbusiness sector did gain a degree of unity on the issue of its opposition to Plan Colombia. By late 2000, a coalition called “Paz Colombia” had achieved some political impact. A large event in Costa Rica, attended by government and ELN representatives and many foreign diplomats, sought to do more than channel opposition to Plan Colombia; it was structured to seek consensus solutions on issues like human rights, narcotics policy, and land reform. Little consensus was reached, however, and even some of the group’s more compelling proposals, such as a 100-day, multilateral cease-fire and an immediate International Humanitarian Law accord, soon faded from national discourse.

Civil society’s ambivalence and division was a blow to the peace process. It left the talks without a non-governmental coalition able to build political support during shaky moments, or to contribute ideas and detailed proposals to guide the negotiations.

### *The United States*

Foreign governments played an important role despite being generally relegated to the sidelines of the peace process. As an “international community,” they had the ability to create or remove political space for the dialogues merely through their presence (or absence) at events, their response to Bogotá’s requests to contribute, and their public statements of approval (or disapproval).

The most important of these governments, Colombia’s main trading partner and by far the region’s dominant military power, the United States, was almost painfully ambivalent about the process, its statements and actions sending wildly mixed messages. Official statements of support combined with harsh criticism from other quarters, while funding for Colombian military antiguerrilla operations increased rapidly.

By the end of the process, though, ambivalence had given way to discomfort and skepticism. Although U.S. diplomats’ statements were consistently supportive over the years, even here, a sharp-eyed observer could note the gradual change in tone from “we support President Pastrana’s peace process” to “we support President Pastrana.”

At the very beginning, evidence of U.S. support was strong. Although they raised private questions about the planned demilitarized zone, Clinton administration officials were enthusiastic and hopeful about the peace process that Pastrana described to them during an October 1998 state visit. President Clinton apparently even expressed interest in playing a facilitating role.<sup>73</sup> In response to a Colombian government request, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Andean Affairs, Philip Chicola, held two days of meetings with the FARC’s

Raúl Reyes at Álvaro Leyva's Costa Rica residence in December 1998. A month later U.S. envoy Curtis Kamman, guarded only by rifle-toting FARC fighters, was among the foreign ambassadors to attend the inaugural of peace talks in San Vicente del Caguán.

Dissent was quick to set in. News of the Costa Rica meeting triggered an uprising among a bloc of Republicans in both houses of Congress. "Those in the State Department who blurred the longstanding U. S. policy of not dealing with terrorists have, unfortunately, legitimized the FARC and undermined the Colombian peace process. They should be held accountable," Rep. Benjamín Gilman (R-New York) editorialized in the *Miami Herald* in March 1999.<sup>74</sup> Roger Noriega, an aide to Sen. Jesse Helms (R-North Carolina) and now the Bush administration's nominee for assistant secretary of state for western hemisphere affairs, told Colombia's *El Tiempo* in 1999 that the meeting would affect the confirmation of Chicola's boss, Acting Assistant Secretary Peter Romero.

The question is whether the State Department acted within a legal framework when it decided to meet with this terrorist group in Costa Rica, and if it had the authority to do so. We have to be convinced as well that there was no negotiation with the FARC. Until that happens there will be no confirmation.<sup>75</sup>

The Senate never did confirm Romero for the title for which Noriega now awaits approval, though Romero earned the assistant secretary position shortly before retiring, through a January 2001 recess appointment.

This congressional bloc would be a vocal critic of the process from the outset, and its members sometimes aimed their statements directly at Colombians. "The FARC are not committed to peace and the Colombian president should break off all negotiations with this group right now," Rep. Gilman told *El Tiempo* in April 1999.<sup>76</sup> (By some accounts, contacts in Colombia's National Police encouraged some of these representatives' activism.<sup>77</sup>)

For its part, the Clinton administration's approach involved more than just meetings with guerrillas. A second track was built in December 1998, the same month as the Costa Rica meeting, when Defense Secretary William Cohen and Colombian Defense Minister Rodrigo Lloreda agreed to form a new Colombian Army counter-narcotics battalion, to be based in the FARC-dominated department of Putumayo. This agreement, the first major U.S. assistance to Colombia's troubled army in several years, launched a strategy that would expand dramatically.

U.S. support for the dialogues would become far less active after March 1999, when the FARC killed three U.S. citizens, Terence Freitas, Ingrid Washinawatok, and Lahe'ena'e Gay, who were working with an indigenous group locked in a dispute with a U.S. oil company in Arauca department. Despite the published plea of Freitas's mother not "to abandon support for the peace initiatives in Colombia," U.S. officials ruled out any further contact with the FARC until the activists' killers were turned over to Colombian justice.<sup>78</sup> The FARC of course refused, and contact was never renewed.

The United States turned down the Colombian government's invitations to attend international meetings at which FARC members would be present. Only European and Latin American ambassadors would attend a June 2000 "International Audience" on drug policy or a February 2001 discussion of the talks, or serve on the "group of friends" of the peace process. (The head of the U.S. embassy's political section attended the October 2000 "Paz Colombia" meeting in Costa Rica, at which three ELN leaders were among the 300-plus guests, but to this author's knowledge no contact took place between the U.S. official and the guerrilla leaders.)

Instead, momentum for greater military assistance increased along with the talks' first major stumbles. In the aftermath of a large-scale July 1999 FARC offensive, Office of National Drug Control Policy Director Barry McCaffrey circulated a memo to his cabinet colleagues calling for a billion dollars' worth of new spending focused on Colombia.<sup>79</sup> A month later, McCaffrey and Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering were in Bogotá with two messages, as the *Washington Post* explained at the time.

Senior U.S. officials warned President Andres Pastrana last week that he risks losing U.S. support if he makes further concessions to the insurgents in an effort to restart stalled peace negotiations. . . . But the officials. . . also told Pastrana the United States will sharply increase aid if he develops a comprehensive plan to strengthen the military, halt the nation's economic free fall and fight drug trafficking.<sup>80</sup>

This "comprehensive plan" — Plan Colombia — was not long in coming; a thirty-page document available in English by October 1999. The mostly-military U.S. contribution became law in July 2000,



sending a message that drowned out any official declarations of support for the ongoing dialogues. Washington's approach to the process had shifted away from diplomacy and facilitation, and toward helping Colombia's military pound the FARC into a more compliant negotiating position.

After the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, U.S. enthusiasm for the talks dropped to near zero. Secretary of State Powell, Ambassador Anne Patterson, and State Department Counterterrorism Coordinator Francis Taylor issued public statements lumping the FARC together with Al Qaeda, complicating Pastrana's efforts to salvage the sputtering talks.<sup>81</sup> "The signal was clear" after September 11, León Valencia reports Colombian Ambassador to Washington Luis Alberto Moreno as having said. "The United States would maintain its support for the process with the FARC if — and only if — a change was made to the demilitarized zone."<sup>82</sup> In the end, U.S. officials were openly pleased to see the peace process collapse, both during the crisis of January 2002, and after the final break in February.

### *Europe*

Europe's governments were certainly less ambivalent than the United States; across the board, their political support for the peace process was consistent. Their ambassadors were present at government-guerrilla gatherings, they funded civil-society peace groups and some government peace efforts, and they allowed guerrillas to enter their national territory for visits and peace meetings. It is impossible to imagine U.S. soil having been used for events like the six-country tour that the FARC and Colombian government took in early 2000, or the civil-society gatherings with ELN leaders that have taken place in Germany and Switzerland.

Although consistently supportive, Europe's involvement was also relatively low-level, especially where financial contributions are concerned. While several European governments were uncomfortable with the military emphasis of Washington's contribution to Plan Colombia, their own combined aid to Colombia has equaled only a small fraction of the U.S. outlay. The region's governments explain that Colombia, a middle-income country, and a minor trade partner in a region beyond their traditional sphere of influence, is simply low on their list of priorities, and that their approach to drug abuse is mainly domestic and therapeutic.

### *Colombia's Neighbors*

Colombia's neighbors maintained a quite ambivalent, sometimes unhelpful, but largely marginal relationship to the peace process. Although an Andean government's statements or antics could make headlines in Bogotá for a few days, the late 1990s and early 2000s were a difficult period for the entire region, and Colombia's neighbors for the most part were distracted by more immediate domestic concerns.

By far the most complicated and troubled relationship was that with Hugo Chávez's Venezuela. "Chávez was dying to serve as a mediator in the Colombian armed conflict," Mauricio Vargas wrote in 2001. "He had old and good relations with the FARC and the ELN, and he believed he could play a decisive role in negotiations." Colombian officials, however, were very reluctant to invite a neighbor and historical rival — much less a figure many viewed as a leftist troublemaker — to play a central role in their internal affairs.<sup>83</sup> While Colombian government and ELN negotiators used Venezuelan territory on a few occasions, Bogotá for the most part tried to keep Caracas out of the picture. In fact, Chávez's meddling with Colombian insurgents soon became a point of strong contention between the two governments. Vargas lists some of the worst episodes:

In first place were the frequent secret visits of high officers of the Venezuelan Armed Forces to the Caguán zone. . . . Also, the invitation made to a FARC delegation to attend a forum on Plan Colombia in Caracas. . . . And finally, the protection Venezuela offered to the ELN guerrilla, José María Ballestas, head of the column that hijacked an Avianca flight in [April] 1999.<sup>84</sup>

On the whole, however, Chávez found himself forced to abandon foreign-policy freelancing in favor of addressing Venezuela's moribund economy and his rapidly growing political opposition.

Although they were concerned about spillover of violence in their mostly unpopulated border zones, Peru, Ecuador, and Panama had little impact on the peace talks, mainly preferring to look inward. The first two had their own political earthquakes to attend to, namely the exit of Alberto Fujimori in Lima and a series of



government changes, including a coup attempt, in Quito. However, during his tenure (which abruptly ended in November 2000) Fujimori was occasionally critical of Pastrana's handling of the peace process, comparing it unfavorably with his own aggressive early-1990s campaign against Peru's guerrilla groups.

Brazil's role remains something of a question mark. The largest country in South America, with one of the largest and most experienced corps of diplomats in the world, chose to shy away from both the peace process and Plan Colombia. Brazil's ambassador did not serve, for example, among the "group of friends" of either peace process.<sup>85</sup> Brazil was certainly concerned by the problem along its long but very sparsely populated border with Colombia. It did deploy increased police and troops to the region under the U.S.-aided "Operation CoBra," strengthen its signals-intelligence capability in the Amazon region, and allow the Colombian Army to use Brazilian territory to re-take Mitú, a remote provincial capital, from the FARC in December 1998. But its involvement didn't go much farther, and its diplomatic effort was invisible.

### ***Exclusion***

With guerrillas, political leaders, civil society and the international community lacking common strategies and issuing muddled messages — contributing to risky improvisation and worsening mistrust — the peace process was already in trouble. Divisions and frustrations were exacerbated, however, by the simple fact that very few people had a seat at the table. The peace process was very exclusive; negotiating teams were small and unrepresentative, and neither set of talks offered outsiders useful avenues for input.

The result was tragic. Experienced, respected potential negotiators sat on the sidelines. Impartial potential mediators were denied a role. Broad sectors of Colombian society, sectors that would have fought harder, in a more unified way, for the process if led to feel they had a stake in it, were left on the outside looking in.

The FARC negotiations left out almost everyone but the negotiators themselves; even key members of the Pastrana government were kept "out of the loop." Over the life of the talks, the government's negotiating teams consisted mainly of Conservative Party figures close to the president. Of the roughly fifteen individuals who were named to negotiating teams, only two came from the opposition Liberal Party (one was the only woman), one was a retired military officer, and one was a church representative (three, however, came from the business community). Colombia's indigenous and Afro-Colombian community (together nearly a third of the population), its labor and peasant unions, and its very active non-governmental peace movement, to name a few, never had representatives at the table. The FARC was guilty of similar homogeneity in its choice of negotiators.

Any peace process needs some level of secrecy to survive; negotiations require sensitive compromises that cannot be debated in the press, and many discussions must stay off the record if participants are to be truly forthcoming. Pastrana's peace team took secrecy to an extreme, however, rarely consulting outside experts or other key political actors. To some degree, this hermetism owed to both sides' mistrust of outsiders; a measure of "*protagonismo*," an unwillingness to share credit for any successes, was also to blame. The government also believed "the fewer, the better" to be a good guideline for negotiations, as former foreign minister Rodrigo Pardo observed in 1999. "The government cited recent international experiences in which peace negotiations have been almost secret, and has been reluctant to debate the issue — much less consult about it — with the country's other political forces."<sup>86</sup>

As discussed above, in 2000 and 2001 the Pastrana government tried, without success, to include top political and economic leaders in a broad front to back the peace process. These fell apart due to internal divisions that were worsened by participants' dissatisfaction with the government's defensive handling of even constructive criticism. The result was that much of the country felt unrepresented by the peace talks, and even many powerful members of the political class had no way to contribute. "This near absolute incapacity for self-criticism and internal debate is at the root of much of the weaknesses of the Pastrana government's peace process," Mauricio Vargas observed. "Although there were many people with knowledge of the guerrillas whom the president could have consulted within and outside the administration, he clearly preferred to work exclusively with the high commissioner [Víctor G. Ricardo], who lacked experience in this field."<sup>87</sup> Added Gustavo Petro, a congressman and former M-19 guerrilla, "The strategy with the FARC has two characteristics: it is an agreement between elites and it leaves aside the country's huge problems."<sup>88</sup>

### *Civil Society*

Attempts to integrate civil society into the FARC peace process were halfhearted at best. To begin with, both sides distrusted the wave of non-governmental organizations that made up Colombia's peace movement. The Pastrana team kept them at arm's length out of its desire for secrecy and its disagreement with their predominantly left-of-center orientation. The guerrillas, suspicious of urban, bourgeois movements and convinced that the FARC should be the true expression of civil society, had strained relationships with most peace and human rights groups.

Pastrana made little use of the National Peace Council, an advisory body created by law during the Samper administration with eighteen government representatives and nineteen representatives of various non-governmental sectors.<sup>89</sup> Although the law called for the Council to convene monthly, such meetings were rare during the course of the peace process, and it played almost no role. "The Pastrana administration had shown skepticism about this instrument," Rodrigo Pardo observed in 1999. "Some say because it came from the Samper government. Others say it is simply an effort to keep the policy in a few hands to avoid delays and loss of focus."<sup>90</sup>

The government and FARC chose to incorporate outsiders through a "Thematic Committee" whose job was to organize periodic "Public Audiences," in which citizens were invited to the demilitarized zone for discussions of topics like unemployment, drug policy, or agrarian reform. Guerrilla moderators (and sometimes government officials, if any were present) listened to speech after speech (each limited to five minutes) from those who had come to participate. The audiences, Daniel Pécaut wrote, "completely reduce civil society's capacity for expression, to the point where its representatives resemble subjects presenting letters of petition to viceroys."<sup>91</sup> The audiences' ultimate purpose was never clear, as the negotiators did not develop any means of following through on any of the proposals they heard. "According to the FARC's own statistics, 16,000 people have passed through the audiences in the Caguán, but to date the country has not seen any synthesis of these citizens' proposals," analyst Jorge Bernal noted in 2001.<sup>92</sup>

While civil society's divisions made its inclusion difficult, an effort to include non-governmental leaders could in fact have helped heal these splits, at least temporarily. Past peace processes elsewhere have benefited greatly from opportunities for input from united civil society coalitions; in Guatemala, for instance, the short-lived Assembly of Civil Society drafted proposed peace agreements that the negotiators substantially adopted. Such coalitions usually incorporate widely disparate sectors and then break back down into their component factions once they have served their short-term purpose. Including them during times of crisis, however, can foster moments of unity, overcoming the challenge of ambivalence. Colombia's peace process never put this lesson to the test.

### *The Military*

Although Colombia's armed forces are constitutionally barred from playing a political role, the talks would have benefited from greater military participation. The officer corps must buy into the process, since an accord reached over their objections is unlikely to prosper. In addition, military leaders, who have been present in far more neglected rural areas than have most state representatives, can bring to the process a better perspective on the guerrillas' grievances and demands. Giving the military a seat at the table, or at least allowing opportunities to contribute and to have occasional contact with guerrilla negotiators, could have built mutual trust and reduced the officer corps' discomfort.

Despite occasional FARC requests, the Colombian military was neither present at the table (other than retired General José Gonzalo Forero) nor in any contact with guerrilla leaders. This exclusion was partly voluntary; the armed forces did not express any interest in participating, although their commander, General Fernando Tapias left the possibility open in June 2000: "If the guerrillas show gestures of good faith, acts of peace, the military is willing to sit down with them. The peace process cannot happen behind the military's back, much less behind the backs of the generals who are fighting the guerrillas."<sup>93</sup>

General Tapias and most of his subordinates were careful not to criticize the peace process in public, although they occasionally balked at the possibility of negotiating structural or doctrinal reforms with the enemy. Behind the scenes, however, there were rumblings of unhappiness with the process and the way the government, in particular, Víctor G. Ricardo, who had few fans in the barracks, was handling it.

Their main complaint, especially at the talks' outset, was poor communication with the Pastrana administration's secretive peace negotiation team. Things started on the wrong foot in late 1998, when the military understood that it had an agreement with Ricardo to leave 100 unarmed soldiers in the Cazadores Battalion's base in the demilitarized zone. When Ricardo was unable to get the FARC to agree to this stipulation, he was forced to demand the troops' removal, a humiliating step for an institution charged with maintaining the country's territorial integrity. Military leaders were left with the feeling, justified or not, that the high commissioner for peace had not been straight with them. "When a point of discord arose," Vargas contends, "[Ricardo] chose to control the beginnings of the fire by saying one thing to the guerrillas and another to the soldiers. This was the case with the Cazadores Battalion."<sup>94</sup>

The military was further inflamed by the April 1999 firing of two generals, Fernando Millán and Rito Alejo del Río, who were widely alleged (even by subordinates) to have tolerated or supported paramilitary activity. The military's hard line saw their dismissal as a capitulation to the FARC, who at the time had frozen the peace talks to demand government action to dismantle the paramilitaries. (On April 29, a grouping of right-of-center figures grabbed headlines with a dinner in honor of the recently fired generals. The keynote speaker was former Antioquia governor Álvaro Uribe.)

Military anger over poor communication on the peace process came to a head in late May 1999. On May 21, Víctor G. Ricardo offhandedly told reporters that the government was likely to renew the FARC's demilitarized zone "indefinitely," a possibility that the armed forces unanimously and angrily opposed. When an alarmed Defense Minister Rodrigo Lloreda had trouble getting Pastrana to confirm or deny this possibility, he suddenly resigned on May 26. Seventeen generals and about 100 colonels followed suit, submitting their resignations. Although Pastrana convinced the uniformed officers to remain, Vargas notes that "almost all those who resigned, especially those of the rank of general, passed into retirement by the end of 1999."<sup>95</sup>

Although never again as dramatic, military unhappiness with the process continued to be the norm. Armed-forces pressure prevented any declaration of an "indefinite" demilitarized zone, and (as discussed in the "improvisation" section above) helped prevent the formation of a zone for talks with the ELN. On at least one occasion, the Pastrana government was also forced to reproach military leaders for passing intelligence about FARC misuse of its zone to the talks' congressional opponents.<sup>96</sup>

### *The International Community*

By the time the international community was given a meaningful role in the talks, it was nearly too late. In January 2002, intervention by the UN Secretary General's representative, the Papal Nuncio, and the 10 ambassadors of the "group of friends" barely saved the FARC talks, which had come within hours of collapse. From that point forward, these international representatives were to be present as the negotiators followed an agenda of cease-fire talks; the process, however, only survived for six more weeks.

It is unfortunate that international actors were not included much earlier. An impartial international mediator or facilitator could have sped the talks along greatly by ironing out procedural disagreements, verifying compliance with earlier commitments, holding negotiators to an agreed-upon agenda and calendar, and discouraging both sides from "freezing" the talks or getting up from the table.

Before January 2002, however, attempts to integrate international diplomats and experts were rather marginal. Neither the government nor the FARC wanted international involvement. The Bogotá government has historically been reluctant to "internationalize" its internal conflict, which would mean yielding some sovereignty to outside powers. The FARC, which has unkind words even for Fidel Castro, is even less trusting of the capitalist world's governments and international organizations, like the UN and OAS. As a result, the main attempts to integrate internationals into the talks were the "group of friends," whose role was rather unclear and two events in the demilitarized zone to which foreign diplomats were invited. The United Nations' two special representatives, Jan Egeland and James LeMoyné, worked creatively and tirelessly, but their participation was heavily circumscribed at least until January 2002.

They and other UN and international representatives tried to promote a concrete first step for the peace talks, an accord pledging all sides to respect the dictates of international humanitarian law. Such preliminary accords to "humanize the conflict" have proven useful in peace processes elsewhere, both to reduce civilian casualties and to build trust between parties. The FARC never assented: "IHL and its additional protocols

were signed by nations and governments. . . . We were not in that discussion nor did we ever discuss this issue with anyone officially,” guerrilla leader Alfonso Cano explained to an interviewer in 2000.<sup>97</sup> A bilateral IHL accord would be meaningless, the FARC also observed, as long as the paramilitaries continue to commit most killings and disappearances.

### *The Paramilitaries*

Bringing the paramilitaries into an IHL agreement, however, would have required negotiating with them, something the FARC adamantly opposed and made clear would instantly end its talks with the government. (The group froze peace talks in November 2001, after Colombia’s interior minister met with paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño, even though the meeting only sought to get Castaño to release five kidnapped members of Colombia’s Congress.)

This left the Colombian government with no good options for dealing with the rightist groups. With the military either unwilling or unable to fight them (or both), Castaño’s AUC grew strong enough to do serious damage to the peace process, threatening government negotiators (even briefly kidnapping the brother of negotiator Fabio Valencia in June 2000), organizing opposition to the proposed ELN demilitarized zone and increasing the pace and severity of their massacres to register displeasure with developments at the negotiating table. “The paramilitaries and the extremist sector of the armed forces have the ability to endanger the negotiations process whenever they want,” Daniel Pécaut wrote in 2001.<sup>98</sup>

Faced with the choice of fighting the paramilitaries, negotiating with them (thus ending the FARC peace process), and doing nothing, the Pastrana government chose to do nothing, probably the worst of the three options. Excluded but facing little military opposition, the paramilitaries grew more powerful and became one of the principal obstacles to peace.

In November 2002, President Álvaro Uribe announced that church-mediated contacts with paramilitary leaders had brought a commitment to begin talks with several of the AUC’s component groups. By early 2003 the FARC and ELN had begun to play the same “spoiler” role that the paramilitaries had filled during the Pastrana years, stepping up horrific urban terrorism and attacks on paramilitary strongholds. Following the February 7, 2003, bombing of an exclusive social club in Bogotá, the AUC issued a statement that recalled the guerrillas’ threats to freeze the Pastrana government’s dialogues. If guerrilla attacks continued, the communiqué threatened, the AUC would “revise the wording, if not the spirit” of its agreement with the Uribe government, which called for a cease-fire while talks take place.

### *The ELN Talks*

The Pastrana government’s talks with the ELN were less exclusionary. The ELN is more accessible to civil society, both for ideological reasons (with a more intellectual base than the FARC, they have more fondness for the “popular sectors”), and because their leaders can often be found, not in the jungles of the Caguán, but in Cuba, Venezuela or (in the case of *comandantes* Francisco Galán and Felipe Torres) at the Itagüí prison outside Medellín. The group kept in frequent contact with a “facilitation commission” made up of civil-society, political, and business leaders and over the past few years has participated in meetings with civil-society representatives in Germany, Switzerland, Costa Rica, and even Colombia. While the ELN’s less exclusionary approach could ease a restarting of talks, it should be noted that the group’s more controversial negotiating moves, such as demanding its own demilitarized zone, were not consulted with civil society, and its leaders have not expressed enthusiasm for international mediation or verification.

Uribe government representatives have held three rounds of “exploratory talks” with ELN leaders in Cuba, in conditions of absolute secrecy. The guerrillas withdrew in December 2002, claiming that despite government negotiators’ claims of progress, in their view the talks were “a trick and a pretext to justify more war.”<sup>99</sup>



## Lessons for Next Time

**P**astrana and his team may not have used the same four terms, but they must have been aware of the mistrust, improvisation, ambivalence, and exclusion hampering their peace effort. Perhaps they clung to a hope that mistrust would evaporate over time through the building of relationships, that improvisation would allow the flexibility necessary to develop a more solid strategy, and that progress toward peace would erase all parties' ambivalence and eventually allow the inclusion of more participants. Sadly, the opposite happened.

Mistrust, improvisation, ambivalence and exclusion fed off each other, causing each to worsen over time. This cycle of errors was more than enough to suffocate a process of fragile negotiations amid an increasingly barbaric conflict.

## Overcoming Ambivalence

The errors of the last peace process offer guidelines for the next one. First, if an opportunity for a new set of dialogues should arise, it is crucial that all parties, to the extent possible, begin by negotiating an internal peace. Talks will go further if leaders refrain from contradicting one another and are able to deliver on their commitments.

Before embarking on another peace process, the Colombian state and its allies in the establishment need to agree, either informally or through some "broad front" structure like an inclusive "government of national unity," that negotiations are indeed desirable. This means developing at least a rough consensus on the limits of what is negotiable and what issues should be taken up first. This means addressing some tough questions early on. As *El Tiempo* editor Enrique Santos has written:

Perhaps most important is the need to define at least a pre-agenda, before beginning the formal dialogue and concrete negotiations. A broad framework of principles within which everything can be discussed (prisoner exchanges, paramilitarism, kidnappings, etc.), but outside of which there can be neither negotiations nor accords. These are principles that the government must define and could include, for example, respect for the democratic and pluralistic character of the Colombian political system. . . ; the preservation of the nation's unity and territorial integrity. . . ; the existence of only one legitimate armed force. . . or subscription to international norms regarding crimes against humanity or other international agreements.<sup>100</sup>

Negotiators need at least a general idea about what decisions will be politically possible. Do they hear strong objections regarding the rules the process should follow, in particular the venue in which the talks are to take place? How comfortable is the establishment with conferring political recognition on the group being negotiated with? Would it tolerate decisions that result in conferring belligerency status? Is the military willing to discuss reforms to its structures and doctrine? Are landowners willing to allow land reform? Is the business community content to commit to greater tax collection? Would the political class as a whole support a rewriting of the constitution?

If no flexibility exists on these questions, then peace talks will not prosper; negotiation requires compromise, which means some sacrifice. There is a difference, however, between a refusal to budge and a tough opening bargaining position. Discerning the two will require serious discussion and consensus-building.

Colombia's government has already created structures for such debate. A broadened National Peace Council could be a suitable venue. It must meet very regularly, as the government will need to negotiate with political leaders and civil society at least as often as it meets with guerrilla leaders. "The peace and negotiation policy cannot be exclusive to one president, and must be accompanied by a broad national consensus in order to be truly legitimate," notes Alejo Vargas of Colombia's National University. "The National Peace Council, eventually increased to include other participants as necessary, could be the mechanism to allow broad accords for a future negotiation with the guerrillas."<sup>101</sup>

Colombia's diverse "civil-society" groups need to avoid being paralyzed by their divisions, at least during crucial moments of a peace process in which they have a meaningful way to participate. It may prove impossible for these groups to form a broad coalition behind a detailed program for rebuilding the country. Nonetheless, non-governmental groups can effectively unite behind sets of principles for peace agreements or other simple, short-term demands. The Paz Colombia proposal for a 100-day cease-fire was a perfect example, as would be a demand that all sides immediately sign an international humanitarian law accord.



Both guerrilla groups would do well to get their political houses in order; while drug and extortion money can sustain them for some time, it will ultimately be a poor substitute for popular support. If they are to avoid collapsing under the weight of their own divisions and unpopularity, insurgent groups must give a greater voice to any remaining leaders with strong political instincts. This means curtailing their attacks on civilians and other violations of international humanitarian law, which have done severe damage to their domestic and international standing. The success of a future peace process will require that politically oriented insurgent commanders take the lead on their negotiating teams. (Even without a peace process, however, a politically incoherent guerrilla group is unlikely even to prosper long on the battlefield. A group without political guidance is more likely to be undone by squabbling over resources, poor command and control, and the enmity of the civilian population.)

For its part, the United States will unavoidably play a large role in the new peace process. It is crucial that Washington, too, makes peace with itself and sends clear signals about how potential decisions in the talks, such as demilitarized zones and negotiations on drug policy, might affect relations. It is important as well that U.S. policymakers be flexible, even on subjects like contact with insurgents and the negotiability of the fumigation program. (An agreement to stop fumigation in exchange for noninterference with eradication-for-alternative-development programs, for instance, could bring real reductions in drug cultivation while building trust for the peace talks.)

### ***Do Not Improvise***

While flexibility and the occasional display of audacity can help a peace process through difficult moments, improvisation must be kept to a bare minimum. Instead of making weighty decisions on the spot, negotiators must discuss their potential consequences with more than just a small coterie of advisors.

Avoiding improvisation also means not putting off difficult questions. Sticky issues that can derail a peace process should be publicly debated, perhaps in a permanent forum, at the earliest possible opportunity. When a difficult issue arises — whether to negotiate with paramilitaries, how to separate and sustain guerrillas during a cease-fire, what happens to insurgents' weapons after a peace accord — key questions will already have been asked, and the list of options will already be known.

Avoiding improvisation also means devising a strategy for dealing with the media, which demands to be fed a story every day. This strategy lies somewhere between a total news blackout and the Pastrana-era talks' regular offerings to the camera crews assigned to the demilitarized zone. While a peace process must be transparent, since it concerns all citizens, it is not a show. The emphasis should be on issue-oriented declarations rather than soundbite-filled interviews with key actors, which should occur sporadically at best. President Pastrana occasionally expressed a preference for holding talks in Cuba, a closed society where press restrictions allowed talks to take place in a more relaxed and productive environment.<sup>102</sup> Although the Castro model is a poor one, future peace talks must address the frustrations that led Pastrana, a former journalist, to find it preferable.

### ***Include Key Allies***

A successful peace process requires more than just a handful of elite politicians and businesspeople sitting across a table from a group of *comandantes*. Colombia's current social predicament owes in part to exactly this sort of exclusion and disenfranchisement. Negotiating teams must be broadened to reflect the remarkable diversity of Colombia's population.

Potential third-party facilitators can play a role from the very beginning. The international community, particularly the United Nations, can provide experienced individuals able to keep the agenda moving and build confidence between parties. The Colombian military should feel it has a stake in the dialogues' outcome, even if it means including an active officer at the negotiating table. Civil society organizations must have a real chance to contribute, both by including their representatives on negotiating teams and through energetic use of the National Peace Council.

Inclusion also means eliminating communication problems. It is crucial to avoid alienating an actor (such as the military or the United States) with the capacity to undermine the peace process. All who might be affected by a decision at the negotiating table must be kept informed and told the truth; the Pastrana government's troubles with the Colombian military must not be repeated with any sector.

### ***Trust Matters***

After decades of mistrust, negotiators will need to emphasize efforts to build a comfortable working relationship with those on the other side of the table. Developing trust and empathy can keep small disagreements and procedural questions from stalling the talks. Building at least basic personal relationships may require the occasional toast, embrace, or trip to Europe with one's adversaries, but it could bring a more flexible and cooperative attitude at the negotiating table.

"Trust, but verify" is a key principle, however, especially in the early stages of talks. Any commitments made or "rules of the game" must be ratified in writing and include a means for impartial parties to verify both sides' compliance (an appropriate role for non-Colombians). Verification can have a salutary effect; the presence of verifiers offers an incentive to comply with commitments, while compliance with commitments in turn builds trust.

### ***Will There Be a "Next Time" Anytime Soon?***

Even if Colombia's next peace process follows all these recommendations and avoids the mistakes of 1998-2002, many observers insist that failure is still likely. Colombia's armed groups will not negotiate in earnest, the refrain goes, until the situation on the battlefield changes significantly. The Colombian military must either alter the balance, pushing the illegal groups' backs to the wall, or the country must slip into a "hurting stalemate" in which no group is clearly dominant but all are finding the costs of war to outweigh the benefits.

This view, held by many advocates of increasing U.S. military assistance, makes sense as far as it goes. In Colombia, however, a battlefield imbalance or a hurting stalemate is not likely for several years at least. One measure alone, the size of the armed forces, indicates that profound reforms are needed first, as Gabriel Marcella explained in 2002.

Counterinsurgency wisdom suggests that Colombia needs a 10-to-1 advantage for the armed forces to prevail over the 20,000 to 25,000 guerrillas, plus the estimated 8,000 paramilitaries. This would require tripling the size of the current armed forces. . . . To expand its armed forces to the proper size, the Colombian Congress and leadership elites must do something totally novel in their nation's history: give enough resources to the military to do its job as part of a coherent national political-economic-military strategy. This will require a veritable revolution in civil-military relations and implementation of obligatory universal military service.<sup>103</sup>

How many years and how many billions of dollars would it take to strengthen Colombia's military to the point where proper battlefield conditions for talks are in place? In the meantime, are all sides condemned to several years of killing each other and using up scarce resources? If it took El Salvador ten years and 70,000 lives to reach a hurting stalemate, how high would that toll be in a country with eight times the population and fifty-three times the land area? If even the ELN — supposedly near defeat — still frustrates attempts to negotiate with it, what can be done with the much stronger FARC and paramilitaries? Are would-be peacemakers condemned to stand by and wait for a change on the battlefield?

There are no good answers to these questions, which is why it makes sense for all sides to keep talking, even under less-than-optimal conditions. If not a full-fledged negotiation, it is past time at least to press Colombia's armed groups to sign an accord on international humanitarian law, before the conflict deteriorates still further.

### ***Renewing FARC Talks***

For the moment, a broader peace negotiation with the FARC seems extremely unlikely. Both the Uribe government and the guerrillas have made clear their preconditions for renewed dialogue, and neither is based on a realistic reckoning of the current military balance. Uribe continues his long-held insistence that any armed group first agree to a cessation of hostilities before talks can begin.<sup>104</sup> The FARC, which since February 2002 has issued death threats to hundreds of mayors, kidnapped officials, launched a mortar attack at the presidential palace during Uribe's inauguration, and planted bombs in cities, is now demanding that the government demilitarize the entire departments of Caquetá and Putumayo (which together account for half of all coca grown in Colombia).

Obviously, new talks will be impossible until both sides back off significantly from these initial offers. The government may have to make do with holding dialogues without a cease-fire, something that, strategic analyst Alfredo Rangel has argued, might in fact be preferable:

Paradoxically, in a peace process in which one side has not ruled out war, an eventual bilateral truce can become an obstacle to the negotiations. Experience indicates that in these circumstances the negotiations devolve into verification of compliance with the cease-fire. The war's episodes relegate the substantive issues of peace to a secondary status.<sup>105</sup>

The FARC must yield in their demands as well. Not only is the demilitarization of the two departments unfathomable, it is also hard to imagine the government granting another demilitarized zone of any size without strong international monitoring and a host of other conditions. Unfortunately, if a comment from "Mono Jojoy" early this year is indicative, the FARC seem more disposed to fight, win or lose. "Now, a few years will pass and we'll come back asking for a few departments — or we'll simply be trying to save whatever is left of us, sitting at a table in some small town in Germany."<sup>106</sup>

### *Renewing ELN Talks*

More hope exists for restarting dialogues with the ELN. President Uribe's high commissioner for peace, Luis Carlos Restrepo, held three secretive meetings in Cuba with ELN leaders during the second half of 2002. As of early 2003, however, the ELN has backed out of these "exploratory talks," a move that Uribe blamed on pressure from the FARC. Eventual talks with the ELN, should they occur, will probably center on conditions for a cease-fire; the government will insist that the guerrillas stop fundraising through kidnapping and extortion, while the insurgents will seek a secure means of cantonment — perhaps small encampments off-limits to the military — and a contribution to keep its members fed and sheltered (and possibly equipped) during the talks. Both sides must be flexible in their discussion of cease-fire terms, and the ELN must decide from the outset exactly what to ask for, without last-minute revisions.

### *Talks with the Paramilitaries*

President Uribe has so far made the most progress toward opening negotiations with the AUC paramilitary confederation, whose leaders have effusively praised the new government's security policies. The success of these talks is nonetheless in question. The AUC is decidedly ambivalent, with two large component groups (the Antioquia-based Metro Bloc and the Urabá-based Elmer Cárdenas Bloc) determined to keep fighting. Exclusion is a growing issue, with the talks' extreme secrecy feeding suspicions that the "real agenda" is an amnesty for the paramilitary rank-and-file and their incorporation into the Uribe government's security structures. Meanwhile the guerrillas without a seat at the table, are using targeted violence to derail the talks. With no clarity yet on key questions like amnesties, extradition to the United States, or even whether the talks will discuss political reforms, the main strategy as of early 2003 seems to be improvisation.

### *IHL Accord: A Potential First Step*

A verifiable, three-way cease-fire and negotiation is such a distant possibility that none even hope to propose it at the moment. Instead, Colombia's violence is escalating to new levels of brutality, while Washington slowly increases Colombia's rank among priority countries for the "global war on terror." If the worst case is realized, and battlefield conditions condemn the country to several more years of total war, the lessons of the last peace process will mean little. As fighting drags on, only one near-term option for dialogue will remain: Colombia's government, civil society, and the international community must redouble efforts to exclude civilians from the conflict.

Civilians are by far the main victims of this war. Three-quarters of all people killed in the conflict are noncombatants. The violence displaces over 300,000 people a year, mostly women and children. Each year, about 3,000 people are kidnapped to finance armed groups' war efforts.

Even in the absence of real peace talks, an accord pledging all sides to respect international humanitarian law, curtailing extrajudicial killings, indiscriminate bombings, kidnappings, child recruitment, and similar internationally recognized crimes, is urgently needed. Such an agreement, incorporating international verification, could reduce the conflict's human toll while building confidence, creating the mutual trust necessary to move the negotiations forward to other issues.

Certainly, even this effort seems quixotic amid Colombia's rapidly worsening violence. Nonetheless, even in a period when all sides favor war, all sides must also have a strategy for peace. This strategy and the resulting political pressure and proposals should center on a humanitarian accord. An effort to humanize the conflict still promises to be Colombia's best possible first step on the path out of its current madness.

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## APPENDIX A: "FREEZES" IN THE FARC PEACE TALKS

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The following are the six main periods during which either the government or the FARC "froze" the dialogues. "Freezing" tended not to mean a total break in contacts; while negotiating teams did not meet, meetings beyond the talks' agenda, such as between guerrilla leaders and the Colombian government's high commissioner for peace, did occasionally take place. By this reckoning, the 1,140-day talks were "frozen" for 404 days, or 35 percent of the time.

1. **January 19 - April 20, 1999:** Twelve days after talks begin, and in the wake of a string of paramilitary massacres, the FARC freezes talks to demand greater government action against paramilitary groups and military officers who assist them.
2. **July 18 - October 24, 1999:** The FARC freezes the talks in a dispute over establishment of a commission to verify conditions in the demilitarized zone.
3. **May 16-20, 2000:** The government freezes the talks, believing the FARC to be responsible for a woman's horrific death by a "necklace bomb" in Chiquinquirá, Boyacá, department. The incident is later determined to be an extortion attempt by a local criminal gang.
4. **September 9 - October 23, 2000:** The government freezes talks to demand that the FARC turn over Arnubio Ramos, a guerrilla who hijacked a commercial aircraft, forcing it to land in the demilitarized zone. A FARC-government commission is named to handle the case, but Ramos is never turned over (by some accounts, the FARC executed him in early 2002 on charges of being an enemy agent<sup>107</sup>).
5. **November 14, 2000 - February 9, 2001:** The FARC freezes talks to demand government action against paramilitaries after Interior Minister Humberto de la Calle met with paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño to seek the release of five congress members kidnapped by Castaño's group.
6. **October 17, 2001 - January 14, 2002:** The FARC freezes talks to demand that the government lift military control measures around, and flights over, the demilitarized zone.

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## APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF THE FARC "PLATFORM FOR A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION AND RECONCILIATION"

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From the group's eighth national conference, April 3, 1993.

1. Political solution to the conflict.
2. Reorient the military toward external defense, away from internal security; move the police out of the defense ministry.
3. Make the "Internal Affairs" office (*Procuraduría*) a separate branch of government; choose the "Procurador" through elections; make the Congress unicameral; guarantee minority rights and freedom of the press; make the elections commission a separate branch of government; allow for direct election of high court judges; pursue the "moralization of public administration."

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## APPENDIX B: — CONTINUED

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4. Establish state control of strategic sectors of the economy, such as energy and natural resources; emphasize the internal market and protect domestic industry.
5. Allocate 50 percent of national budget for social needs; 10 percent for scientific research.
6. Establish a progressive national income tax, and charge sales tax only on luxury items.
7. Provide credit, technical assistance, and marketing for rural producers; increase state investment in, and protection of, the agricultural sector; institute a land reform.
8. Renegotiate contracts with foreign companies exploiting natural resources; institute state-run development of petrochemical industry; use natural-resource profits for social needs.
9. Base foreign policy on self-determination, regional integration, respect for international commitments, and revision of military alliances and foreign powers' influence; renegotiate Colombia's external debt.
10. Solve the narcotics problem by treating drugs as a social, not a military, problem, emphasizing the responsibility of powerful countries' drug consumption.

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## APPENDIX C: THE FARC'S POLITICALLY INEXPLICABLE ACTIONS

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While negotiations proceeded, the FARC carried out a number of actions that upset Colombians' confidence in the peace process.

Some recurred throughout the life of the talks, such as military offensives launched after minor breakthroughs in the dialogues; increased kidnappings for profit (including the 1998 introduction of "miracle-fishing," the staging of roadblocks in search of wealthy drivers to kidnap); the use of homemade gas-canister mortars in attacks on towns; use of the demilitarized zone to grow coca, harbor kidnapped persons, or launch attacks; and evidence of increased involvement in drug trafficking.

Several other high-profile episodes shook the talks; the following incidents started to happen with greater frequency after about the middle of 2000:

**March 1999:** FARC members kill three U.S. indigenous-rights activists in Arauca department; although they claim the murders were an accident, they refuse to turn over those responsible.

**April 2000:** The FARC issues its "Law 002," stating that all Colombians with over \$1 million in assets must pay a "tax for peace" or be "retained." (The announcement comes less than two weeks after the insurgents indicate their willingness to discuss a cease-fire.)

**June 2000:** FARC members kidnap Senator Luis Eladio Pérez in Nariño department. Pérez is the first of five members of Colombia's congress (among other political figures) to be kidnapped to pressure for the release of FARC members in Colombian prisons.

**September 2000:** FARC member Arnubio Ramos hijacks a commercial aircraft, forcing it to land in the demilitarized zone.

**December 2000:** FARC members assassinate congressman Diego Turbay and members of his family on a highway in Caquetá department, near the demilitarized zone.

**June 2001:** FARC members kidnap Colombian Soccer Federation official Hernán Mejía Campuzano on the eve of the Copa América soccer tournament, which Colombia is scheduled to host. Though Mejía is quickly released, the incident nearly causes the tournament to relocate.

**June 2001:** FARC militias attack the La Picota prison in southern Bogotá, freeing 98 prisoners, including several FARC and ELN members.



**July 2001:** FARC members in Meta department kidnap the department's former governor, Alan Jara, while he travels in a clearly marked United Nations vehicle.

**July 2001:** FARC members kidnap three German government development workers in Cauca department.

**August 2001:** James Monaghan, Martin McCauley, and David Bracken, three suspected members of the Irish Republican Army, are arrested in the Bogotá airport and accused of spending five weeks in the demilitarized zone, offering training in urban terror tactics.

**September 2001:** FARC members kidnap Consuelo Araújo Noguera ("La Cacica"), a popular former minister of Culture and the wife of Attorney-General Edgardo Maya, at a roadblock near Valledupar, Cesar. According to witnesses, Noguera is killed when her guerrilla captors, fleeing the army, shoot her at pointblank range.

**September 2001:** Liberal Party presidential candidate Horacio Serpa is forced to give up an attempt to lead a protest march into the demilitarized zone after FARC fighters at the zone's entrance fire warning shots with rifles and mortars.

**December 2001:** Colombians are captivated by the case of Andrés Felipe Pérez, a twelve-year-old boy with terminal cancer, who wants to say goodbye to his father, a police agent in FARC custody. The FARC refuses to release Andrés Felipe's father without a reciprocal release of one of its fighters; Andrés Felipe dies on December 18.

**January 2002:** Shortly after a last-minute agreement saves the peace process, the FARC launches a large-scale offensive, much of it for the sabotage of infrastructure and bombings of urban areas.

**February 2002:** FARC members hijack a domestic airliner, forcing it to land on a stretch of highway in Huila department. All passengers are freed but one, Senator Jorge Gechem Turbay, the fifth member of Colombia's Congress to be kidnapped since June 2001.

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## **APPENDIX D: RENEWALS OF THE FARC DEMILITARIZED ZONE**

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Initial period: November 7, 1998 to February 7, 1999 (Talks did not begin until January 7, as the FARC insisted that the government pull out 100 unarmed soldiers, who left December 14).

1. February 7, 1999: Zone extended until May 7.
2. May 7, 1999: Zone extended until June 7.
3. June 4, 1999: Zone extended until December 7.
4. December 1, 1999: Zone extended until June 7, 2000.
5. June 6, 2000: Zone extended until December 7.
6. December 6, 2000: Zone extended until January 31, 2001.
7. January 31, 2001: Zone extended until February 4.
8. February 4, 2001: Zone extended until February 9.
9. February 9, 2001: Zone extended until October 7.
10. October 7, 2001: Zone extended until January 20, 2002.
11. January 14, 2002: Zone extended until April 7; process ends February 20.

## NOTES

1. Government of Colombia, “Alocución radiotelevisada del Presidente de la República, Andrés Pastrana Arango,” (Bogotá: February 20, 2002).

2. Gabriel Marcella, Donald Schultz, *Colombia's Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads*, (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 5, 1999): 4. See <<http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usassi/ssipubs/pubs99/3wars/3wars.pdf>>.

3. Edgar Téllez, Óscar Montes, and Jorge Lesmes, *Diario Íntimo de un Fracaso*, (Bogotá: Planeta: 2002): 34.

4. This term describes a situation in which no side has a clear edge on the battlefield, but the costs to all parties — measured in lost lives, resources, territory, political support, or other assets — appear to outweigh the benefits of continuing to fight.

5. Regarding out-of-control fronts, Daniel Pécaut has observed, “There are many indications that, even in the case of the FARC-EP [EP = “People’s Army”], some fronts are tending to act on their own: they are carrying out more random kidnappings, they are tending to keep a share of the economic resources they gather, there is no lack of cases of ‘personal enrichment,’ etc. This ‘overlap’ with common crime endangers discipline.” (Daniel Pécaut, *Guerra Contra la Sociedad*, (Bogotá: Espasa, 2001): 302.)

6. Some analysts are more dismissive of the FARC’s ideology. Colombian strategy expert Alfredo Rangel, who views the FARC as “a large armed project in search of a political position,” calls the group’s ten-point program “almost laughable, a caricature for how simplistic and inapplicable it is.” (Corporación Observatorio para la Paz, *Las Verdaderas Intenciones de las FARC*, (Bogotá: Intermedio: 1999): 97-8.) However, Otty Patiño, a former leader of Colombia’s disbanded M-19 guerrilla group, defends the FARC position as “an ideology with much peasant content in which there are also elements of Marxist methodology. . . . In fact, one of the state’s most serious errors has been its continued dismissal of . . . this ideological element, for the mere reason that it is not a grand discourse elaborated in an academic style.” (*Corporación Observatorio para la Paz, Las Verdaderas Intenciones de las FARC*, (Bogotá: Intermedio: 1999): 182.)

7. John Otis, “The Future: Peace or War,” *Houston Chronicle*, August 3, 2001.

8. Álvaro Jiménez, “Comentario,” in *Corporación Observatorio para la Paz, Las Verdaderas Intenciones de las FARC*, (Bogotá: Intermedio: 1999): 86.

9. Government of Colombia, “Speech by President Andrés Pastrana at opening of talks with FARC, January 7, 1999.” See also <<http://ciponline.org/colombia/past1eng.htm>>. FARC, “Oración del Manuel ‘Tirofijo’ Marulanda al inicio de los diálogos de paz, January 7, 1999,” <<http://ciponline.org/colombia/tirofijo1esp.htm>>.

10. Diana Losada, “‘Me faltó protagonismo,’” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), May 4, 2000.

11. “Talk of Peace, Acts of War,” *The Economist* (London, UK), April 21-27, 2001.

12. Interview with Simón Trinidad, *Tiempos del Mundo*, October 4, 2001.

13. Manuel Marulanda Vélez, letter to Colombian government officials, November 20, 2001, <<http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/112005.htm>>.

14. Edgar Téllez, Óscar Montes, and Jorge Lesmes, *Diario Íntimo de un Fracaso*, (Bogotá: Planeta: 2002): 60.

15. “Entrevista con ‘Mono Jojoy,’” *Semana* (Bogotá, Colombia), January 11, 1999.

16. Mauricio Vargas, *Tristes Tigres, Revelador Perfil de Tres Mandatarios Que no Pudieron Cambiar a Colombia*, (Bogotá: Planeta, 2001): 145.

17. Losada, op. cit.

18. Tod Robberson, “Many in Colombia Questioning President’s Peace Strategy,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 7, 1999.

19. Vargas, 143-4.
20. Jairo Rojas, a congressman from Cundinamarca department who assisted Leyva's mediation efforts, had also won guerrilla leaders' confidence. (Rojas in fact took the famous June 1998 picture of Víctor G. Ricardo with Marulanda.) In a crime for which Carlos Castaño's paramilitaries have claimed responsibility, Rojas was shot to death in front of his Bogotá home in September 2001.
21. Steven Dudley, "Colombia's Negotiator With Rebels Steps Down," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2000.
22. Author interview with FARC international representatives, Mexico City, July 2001.
23. León Valencia, *Adiós a la Política, Bienvenida la Guerra*, (Bogotá: Intermedio, 2002): 59.
24. "El proceso de paz está a punto de romperse. ¿Es posible salvarlo? *Cambio* (Bogotá, Colombia), August 6, 2000.
25. A "humanitarian exchange" of prisoners in June 2001, in which the FARC released 242 police agents and enlisted men, and in January 2002, a last-minute backing down from a demand that the Colombian military lift controls on the perimeter of the demilitarized zone.
26. Daniel Pécaut, *Guerra Contra la Sociedad*, (Bogotá: Espasa, 2001): 299.
27. "El proceso de paz está a punto de romperse. ¿Es posible salvarlo? *Cambio* (Bogotá, Colombia), August 6, 2000.
28. Government of Colombia, "Alocución radiotelevisada del Presidente de la República, Andrés Pastrana Arango," Bogotá, February 20, 2002.
29. Author interview with FARC international representatives, Mexico City, July 2001. Téllez, Montes, and Lesmes, 41.
30. Vargas, 148.
31. Vargas, 145.
32. The soldiers were "bachilleres," high school-educated recruits legally exempted from combat duties.
33. Juan Manuel Ospina, *Paz, Silencios y Esperanzas*, (Bogotá: Juan Manuel Ospina, 2001): 82. Andrés Pastrana and Manuel Marulanda, Joint communiqué, May 2, 1999, <<http://ciponline.org/colombia/990502.htm>>.
34. Some, however, questioned whether Marulanda, who signed the May 2 statement calling for "an international accompaniment commission that may serve as a verifier," was later overruled by his subordinates.
35. "Las dos caras de las Farc. . . y 'Tirofijo' en la mitad," *Cambio* (Bogotá, Colombia), October 11, 1999.
36. John Otis, "The Rebel Sanctuary," *Houston Chronicle*, August 3, 2001, <<http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/story.hts/special/rebelheld/986536>>.
37. See Human Rights Watch, "Letter to Commander Manuel Marulanda," July 10, 2001, <<http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/07/farc-0709-ltr.htm>>.
38. "'Sí estamos cobrando,'" *Semana* (Bogotá, Colombia), October 24, 1999.
39. Letter to ELN, February 11, 1999, cited in "Punto de Vista de la Sociedad Civil," *El Espectador* (Bogotá, Colombia), February 12, 1999.
40. Alejandra de Bengoechea, "Lo que piensan las FARC," *Cambio* (Bogotá, Colombia), February 15, 1999.
41. According to journalist Mauricio Vargas, "There were other reasons for not decreeing the demilitarization of southern Bolívar, among them the mobilization of the zone's residents, some of them instigated by narcotraffickers and paramilitaries. But the reiterated opposition of the military leadership was always the most important. . . . Due, among other things, to the enormous sensitivity that the issue inspired in the armed forces, the government was never able to decree a demilitarized zone with the ELN in southern Bolívar." (Vargas, 187n, 187).

42. Human Rights Watch, *The "Sixth Division": Military-Paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, September 2001), <<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/colombia/>>.
43. Ibid. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Washington Office on Latin America, "Colombia Certification," (Washington: AI, HRW, WOLA, August 2000), <<http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/colombia/certification.htm>>. Human Rights Watch, *War Without Quarter: Colombia and International Humanitarian Law*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, October 1998). <<http://www.hrw.org/reports98/colombia/>>.
44. Valencia, 55-6.
45. Valencia, 59.
46. "Sí estamos cobrando," *Semana* (Bogotá, Colombia), October 24, 1999.
47. Rodrigo Pardo, "Y el Eln, ¿para dónde va?," *El Espectador* (Bogotá, Colombia), March 15, 1999.
48. See, for example, Government of Colombia, "Algunas consideraciones relacionadas con la suspensión de los diálogos con el ELN," August 2001, <[http://www.colombiaemb.org/Doc\\_PeaceProcess/elementos.pdf](http://www.colombiaemb.org/Doc_PeaceProcess/elementos.pdf)>.
49. "Pastrana anuncia ruptura de proceso de Paz con Eln," *El Espectador* (Bogotá, Colombia), June 1, 2002, <<http://www.elespectador.com/2002/20020601/paz/nota1.htm>>.
50. "Es un error político de aquí a la puta mierda," *Cambio* (Bogotá, Colombia), March 15, 1999.
51. Valencia, 82.
52. Cited in Jesús Ortiz Nieves, *La Paz: Análisis del proceso y propuestas para un nuevo sistema político en Colombia*, (Bogotá: Ediciones Aurora, 2000).
53. "Las dos caras de las Farc. . . y 'Tirofijo' en la mitad," *Cambio* (Bogotá, Colombia), October 11, 1999.
54. "La interna de las FARC," *Cambio* (Bogotá, Colombia), January 2002, <<http://www.upaz.edu.uy/informes/sobrecolom/200201b.htm>>.
55. According to a profile in a Chilean newsmagazine, Briceño's odd nom de guerre is a bastardization of his original nickname, "El Mojojoy." A mojojoy, or "chiza," is a burrowing insect ("El duro de las FARC," *Qué Pasa*, (Santiago, Chile), July 26-August 3, 1999).
56. "Las dos caras de las Farc. . . y 'Tirofijo' en la mitad," *Cambio* (Bogotá, Colombia), October 11, 1999.
57. Ibid.
58. Human Rights Watch, letter to Manuel Marulanda, April 15, 2002, <[http://www.hrw.org/spanish/cartas/2002/farc\\_colombia.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/spanish/cartas/2002/farc_colombia.pdf)>. Shortly after this threat was issued, the FARC began a wave of kidnappings of public officials that continues today. This was not Briceño's first such threat; he made a similar statement on January 11, 1999, only four days after peace talks began.
59. "Sureshot," Marulanda's frequently used nickname.
60. "El 'Tirofijo' apacible," *Cambio* (Bogotá, Colombia), January 24, 2000.
61. Juan José Ramírez, "'Cano' y 'Joyoy': una sola estrategia," *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), May 9, 2000.
62. Carlos Lleras de la Fuente, "La invitación a Marulanda," *El Espectador* (Bogotá, Colombia), March 23, 2000.
63. "Conversation with a Diplomat from one of the Countries Forming the "Group of Friends" of the Peace Process, October 2001," cited in Valencia, 115.
64. "Falta Voluntad del Gobierno," *El Espectador* (Bogotá, Colombia), February 14, 2000.
65. "El viaje de los 'cacaos' es un mal ejemplo," *Semana* (Bogotá, Colombia), March 23, 2000.
66. Alfredo Molano, "Balance y perspectivas," *El Espectador* (Bogotá, Colombia), January 17, 2000.
67. Luis Enrique González, "'Pastrana Desconoce Cómo Marchar Hacia Adelante,' Entrevista a Manuel Marulanda

Vélez, Máximo Líder de las FARC,” *Prensa Latina* (Cuba), cited in *Corporación Observatorio para la Paz, Las Verdaderas Intenciones de las FARC*, (Bogotá: Intermedio: 1999), 211.

68. A few examples: Arturo Peñaloza, “Día clave para consulta de despeje,” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), May 31, 2000; “Semana clave para los diálogos con las FARC,” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), November 26, 2000; “Semana clave para proceso con las FARC,” *El País* (Cali, Colombia), December 4, 2000; “Hoy, día clave para el proceso de paz,” *El País* (Cali, Colombia), October 4, 2001; “Día clave para la paz,” *El Colombiano* (Medellín, Colombia), December 22, 2001.

69. Víctor G. Ricardo, “La paz, una obligación de todos,” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), January 18, 2000.

70. Author interview with embassy personnel, 2001.

71. A key leader of the “No Más” effort was Francisco Santos, a scion of the family that publishes Colombia’s largest newspaper, *El Tiempo*. Santos was elected to Colombia’s vice-presidency as Álvaro Uribe’s running mate in 2002.

72. Jorge Bernal Medina, “Estado y Perspectivas del Movimiento Ciudadano por la Paz,” *Revista Foro No. 40* (Bogotá: Fundación Foro Nacional por Colombia: January 2001): 20.

73. Yamid Amat, “Debemos Buscar Unir las Mesas,” *El Espectador* (Bogotá, Colombia), January 22, 1999.

74. Rep. Benjamín Gilman, “Don’t legitimize [sic.] terrorist groups,” *Miami Herald*, March 23, 1999.

75. Sergio Gómez Maseri, “Romero, en Vilo por Cumbre E.U.-Farc,” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), January 23, 1999.

76. Sergio Gómez Maseri, “Piden romper diálogo con FARC,” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), April 15, 1999.

77. Téllez, Montes, and Lesmes, 56.

78. Julie Freitas, “The Meaning of My Son’s Murder,” Letter to the *Washington Post*, May 22, 1999.

79. United States, Executive Office of the President, Office of National Drug Control Policy, “Discussion Paper: Western Hemisphere Counterdrug Program Enhancements,” memorandum, July 13, 1999, <<http://ciponline.org/colombia/00071301.htm>>.

80. Douglas Farah, “U.S. Ready to Boost Aid to Troubled Colombia,” *Washington Post*, August 23, 1999, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/daily/aug99/colombia23.htm>>.

81. Speech by U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Anne Patterson, Bogotá, Colombia, October 25, 2001, <<http://ciponline.org/colombia/102501.htm>>. Rui Ferreira, “Las FARC se asemejan a Bin Laden”, *El Nuevo Herald*, (Miami, Fla.), September 29, 2001, <<http://www.miami.com/elnuevoherald/content/noticias/granmiami/digdocs/082554.htm>>. Jonathan Wright, “Powell Sees ‘Gray Areas’ in Defining Terrorism”, Reuters, October 25, 2001, <[http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20011025/pl/attack\\_powell\\_dc\\_2.html](http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20011025/pl/attack_powell_dc_2.html)>. U.S. State Department Coordinator for Counter Terrorism Ambassador Francis X. Taylor, Press conference, OAS, Washington, D.C., October 15, 2001, <[http://www.oas.org/OASpage/eng/videos/pressconference10\\_15\\_01.asf](http://www.oas.org/OASpage/eng/videos/pressconference10_15_01.asf)>.

82. Valencia, 64.

83. Vargas, 173.

84. Vargas, 174.

85. The FARC group of friends included Canada, Cuba, France, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Venezuela. The ELN group of friends included Cuba, France, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland.

86. Rodrigo Pardo, “Cambio de rumbo?” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), February 19, 1999.

87. Vargas, 147.

88. “Falta Voluntad del Gobierno,” *El Espectador* (Bogotá, Colombia), February 14, 2000.

89. These sectors include the Catholic Church, other religious denominations, labor unions, business syndicates,



campesino groups, indigenous groups, Afro-Colombian groups, retired military personnel, women's groups, peace groups, human rights groups, universities, and demobilized guerrillas.

90. Rodrigo Pardo, "Cambio de rumbo?" *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), February 19, 1999.
91. Pécaut, 299.
92. Bernal, 22.
93. Juan José Ramírez, "Los militares y la negociación," *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), July 12, 2000.
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99. Hernando Calvo Ospina, "Entrevista a Ramiro Vargas, miembro del Comando Central del Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Colombia (ELN)," *Rebelión* (Madrid: January 13, 2003), <[http://www.eln-voces.com/propaz/pp\\_entrevista\\_vargas\\_calvo\\_w.html](http://www.eln-voces.com/propaz/pp_entrevista_vargas_calvo_w.html)>.
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101. Alejo Vargas Velásquez, "'Estorbo o utilidad del Consejo de Paz,'" *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), February 19, 1999.
102. Yamid Amat, op. cit.
103. Gabriel Marcella, "The U.S. Engagement with Colombia: Legitimate State Authority and Human Rights," *The North-South Agenda 55* (Coral Gables, Fla.: The Dante B. Fascell North-South Center, March 2002): 4-5, <<http://www.miami.edu/nsc/pages/pub-ap-pdf/55AP.pdf>>.
104. While Uribe has encouragingly invited the United Nations to play a mediating role in an eventual process, his "cease-fire first" demand makes any dialogue — and thus any UN role — unlikely anytime soon.
105. Alfredo Rangel Suárez, "Guerra sin tregua," *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), January 21, 2000.
106. Valencia, 79.
107. "¿Guerrilla asesinó a aeropirata?" *El Tiempo* (Bogotá, Colombia), August 27, 2002.