



Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace

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Preventing War. Shaping Peace.

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Executive Summary

The peace process with Colombia's largest and longest standing guerrilla group has defied its detractors and brought 11,200 ex-combatants to the cusp of civilian life, but the aftermath of war has not been safe for all. Since the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) withdrew from their rural heartlands to gather in cantonments in early 2017, rival armed actors have taken their place, waging a battle for spoils: control of isolated communities and territories, many rich in illicit business. In the Pacific cocaine hub of Tumaco, in hamlets of Chocó, or in contraband zones on the Venezuelan border, established armed groups and new insurgent breakaway factions have attacked state forces, intimidated communities and vied to become undisputed local overlords. Grassroots security is crucial to assure the success of the peace process with the FARC as it shifts from a UN-monitored weapons handover to deeper structural reforms of politics and society. Efforts to combat remaining armed outfits are essential, but in so doing the government must not alienate the population and exacerbate poverty in ways that would aggravate the conditions that propel these groups' growth.

Most of these armed factions now cluster in coastal and border areas. Around 1,000 FARC dissidents, who disown the peace deal for various reasons, are de facto rulers of disparate territories, several of them dependent on the drug trade. Colombia's second main guerrilla force, the National Liberation Army (ELN), has brokered a temporary ceasefire with the government despite looking to conquer new territories, especially along the Pacific coast. The Gaitanista Self-defence Force, currently the largest neo-paramilitary group in the country, combines a vertical military hierarchy centred in the country's north west with a web of subcontracted local gangs. It is now the country's leading drug trafficking organisation.

Thriving illicit businesses – booming coca plantations, illegal gold mines, extortion rackets and contraband – account for the survival and expansion of many of these groups. But economic interests alone do not explain their support within some communities. By resolving disputes and defending illicit livelihoods from law enforcement, these groups have crafted a rudimentary, authoritarian form of local political leadership. The Colombian state has responded through a nationwide "Victory Plan", deploying 80,000 soldiers and police officers to occupy vacated FARC territory. Yet even if security forces could seize all disputed territory, coercion alone cannot establish bonds of trust between the state and local citizens; instead, they need to be persuaded that there is a better alternative to the summary justice and social discipline meted out by illegal groups.

The next phase of reforms under the peace accord aims precisely at building such trust between state and citizenry. It includes a more plural democratic system, reintegration of ex-FARC fighters, justice for conflict victims and a coca substitution program. But its implementation faces myriad difficulties. Comprehensive reintegration plans are on hold. Voluntary coca substitution, one of the accord's flagship programs, will require a long-term commitment from the state and far more international political and financial backing. Corruption debilitates the government's campaign against armed groups, and must be countered by stronger and more independent

agencies operating within and outside the military and police. Urgent consideration also should be given to the design of new judicial approaches that might encourage other armed groups to lay down their weapons and follow the FARC's path to peace.

The initial accord's defeat in a 2016 plebiscite demonstrated the public's mistrust of the peace process, raising the risk that the 2018 elections could bring a government to power that is intent on rewriting or gutting the agreement. Implementation of the accord is threatened both by an opposition that believes it pandered to FARC guerrillas, and by armed factions that regard the deal either as a fraud or an opportunity to expand. The combination of local armed activity and divisive national politics could decisively weaken public support for the accord unless the results of the peace process defy expectations once again. For that to happen, the government must aim its sights at both local insecurity and the broader weaknesses of local governance that underpin it.

Recommendations

To improve the security situation in Colombia and wrest territorial control from other armed groups:

To the government of Colombia:

1. Increase permanent presence of police and army in prioritised isolated hamlets, using the army as a stop-gap force in clearly identified areas that police cannot reach until later, but with specific timelines for handover to police.
2. Increase navy control along key rivers and oceanic deltas, especially along the Pacific coast, creating a new “river force” in the region with members from the Infantry Marine shifted away from land forces.
3. Strengthen local justice by both providing economic incentives to and improving training for conciliators, evaluating police mediation for possible future use in conflict-affected areas, and expanding systems of local justice.
4. Continue crop substitution efforts, prioritising prompt payments and coordination with larger development efforts, especially the Territorial Development Plans (PDETs) for post-conflict rural areas.
5. Allow members of organised armed groups and FARC dissidents to demobilise and take part in individual reintegration programs.
6. Pass a law on judicial negotiations with organised armed groups that includes lowering sentences in exchange for the fulfilment of truth and reparations commitments, provision of information on illegal economies and handover of illegally obtained assets.

To the FARC:

7. Continue efforts to bring dissident fronts back into the peace process, offering access to protection measures and inclusion in the reincorporation process while also providing information to the authorities regarding dissidents who reject these offers.

To the government and the FARC:

8. Accelerate design and implementation of reincorporation projects for FARC fighters in cantonments, with differentiated gender, rank and ethnic approaches.

To the government and the ELN:

9. Extend ceasefire agreement to last until after Congressional elections in March 2018.

To the international community:

10. Continue funding key monitoring organisations such as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Organization of American States’ Mission to Support the Peace Process and humanitarian bodies; and explore avenues to fund coca substitution efforts.

To the UN mission:

11. Improve coordination and information sharing among various state agencies charged with implementing security measures.

Bogotá/Brussels, 19 October 2017

Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace

I. Introduction

The Colombian government is suffering the backlash of successfully ending decades of war with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). With the signing of the peace agreement in November 2016, FARC fighters moved to 26 cantonments and in June 2017 handed over their weapons. While this has improved security in some conflict-affected regions, it has allowed armed groups in others to fill the void created by the FARC's withdrawal, seizing the opportunity to reap illicit revenues and assert local political authority. This makes implementing the peace accords even more challenging since their success depends on tangible improvements in security.¹

Colombia as a whole is experiencing its lowest homicide rates since the 1970s; in the areas most deeply affected by conflict, security conditions also improved during 2016. However, murder rates and forced displacement in these areas have risen again in 2017 (see Appendix D). Also, about 51 local social leaders were killed in the first half of the year, up from 26 during the same period in 2016.² Dissident FARC groups have established territorial control in some areas and are seeking to do so in others. Despite ongoing peace talks, the country's remaining guerrilla force, the National Liberation Army (ELN), has increased violent attacks in its historic theatres of operation, while expanding elsewhere. Different organised crime groups are active across Colombia, and have established control over illicit economic activities while looking to infiltrate local politics.

The government has not been idle. It has begun to implement its "Victory" and "Safe Communities" plans, under the aegis of the army and police respectively. It plans to strengthen the rural police to protect post-conflict communities. It has also started to carry out strategies to "stabilise" priority territories, improve local justice and replace illegal with legal crops and other licit industries. These efforts, though, have had limited effect in most conflict-affected areas.

Political polarisation, meanwhile, continues to impinge on the peace process. Opposition leaders focus on the accord's perceived failings and allegedly leftist ideology, while government officials downplay evidence of new security threats. This

¹ For previous analysis focusing specifically on security threats and policy, see Crisis Group Latin America Reports N°s 41, *Dismantling Colombia's New Illegal Armed Groups: Lessons from a Surrender*, 8 June 2012; 40, *Moving Beyond Easy Wins: Colombia's Borders*, 31 October 2011; 20, *Colombia's New Armed Groups*, 10 May 2007. Crisis Group Latin America Briefings N°s 23, *Improving Security Policy in Colombia*, 29 June 2010; 21, *The Virtuous Twins: Protecting Human Rights and Improving Security in Colombia*, 25 May 2009.

² Conflict-affected areas are understood as the 170 municipalities of the Special Constituencies for Peace, with the first six months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. Katherine Aguirre, "Violencia y criminalidad tras la implementación de los acuerdos de paz", *Razón Pública*, 16 July 2017. "Agúzate", *Somos Defensores*, August 2017, p. 61. Crisis Group telephone interview, Norwegian Refugee Council representative, Bogotá, 7 October 2017.

is reminiscent of what happened following the paramilitary demobilisation a decade ago, when the government failed to adequately recognise the emergence of new “criminal groups”, or *bacrim*. What is now Colombia’s largest neo-paramilitary organisation, the Gaitanistas, was born during that period.

This report examines security challenges in the Colombian periphery, strategies designed to confront them and how the international community could help cement the peace. It focuses primarily on FARC dissidents, the ELN and key drug trafficking organisations, which have gained local territorial control by offering dispute resolution mechanisms, providing a semblance of protection for local people and preserving local illegal economies. In some cases, civilians – trapped between clashing armed groups – are being exposed to alarming levels of violence.

In-depth fieldwork was carried out in Tumaco, Guaviare, Chocó, Norte de Santander and Putumayo, including more than 100 interviews with community leaders, local authorities, members of the international community, government and the Catholic Church officials, members of FARC dissident groups, and members of the FARC currently taking part in the peace process. Additional research in Bogotá included interviews with experts on security, justice and the drug trade. Ten meetings were held in communities to discuss coca crop substitution, local justice mechanisms, perceptions of the state and what would be necessary to improve those perceptions.

II. Armed Groups at the Grassroots

Armed groups with varying levels of internal organisation, military capacity, economic resources and political capital currently lay claim to parts of rural Colombia. Three stand out for their size and the threats they pose to peace: dissidents from the FARC, the ELN, and organised criminal groups. The Colombian government divides criminal groups into three sub-categories: those that meet the standards set by International Humanitarian Law (IHL) as parties to an internal armed conflict; organised crime groups, which have important roles in illegal economies but do not control territory; and common criminals. Those considered parties to the armed conflict are Colombia's leading neo-paramilitary group, the Gaitanista Self-defence Forces of Colombia³, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) and the Puntilleros.

Each of these groups has different goals, but they share common methods for imposing territorial control, offering protection, resolving disputes among residents and preserving local illegal economies. They compete with a state perceived as distant and indifferent for the control of physically isolated regions, border areas and key rivers, which are seen as the highways of Colombia's periphery.

A. FARC Dissident Groups

At least nine FARC dissident groups continue to carry out violent attacks, refusing to assemble in the 26 cantonments and hand over their weapons.⁴ Their numbers are estimated to range from 800 to 1,000 and they operate across the country, principally in the departments of Nariño, Cauca, Caquetá, Guaviare, Vaupés, Guainía and Meta. While differing considerably in size, origin and military muscle, they share four traits: they represent only a sub-set of their original FARC units (to date no complete front has left the FARC); they all are involved in illegal economic activities; they seek to consolidate territorial control; and they operate in areas where they were active during the armed conflict, often expanding outward.⁵

The motivations of these dissidents are difficult to establish, though evidence points to a variety of shifting interests. Remnants of the First Front in Guaviare are deeply involved in the cocaine trade, but also defend their activities by pointing to alleged flaws in the peace process: "the dialogues in Havana only look to demobilise

³ The Gaitanistas are called the Gulf Clan by the government and were popularly known as the Ura-beños. "Directiva Permanente No. 0015 /2016", Defence Ministry, 22 April 2016.

⁴ Where the identity of a group leader is unclear, Crisis Group used information about violent actions to establish the existence of a dissident faction. This is the case of the Frente Che Guevara in Nariño. Crisis Group interview, humanitarian aid worker, Tumaco, 10 May 2017. See Appendix E for a list of the different groups, their leaders, areas of operation and their original FARC fronts.

⁵ The FARC are organised into hierarchical units, including seven blocs covering regions of Colombia and 69 fronts controlling local areas, as well as mobile columns and companies. Dissident numbers are estimated at between 7 and 9 per cent of the total number of FARC fighters, based on the National University's census of 11,200 registered FARC fighters. "No nos temblará la mano para sacar gente de las listas": Rivera", *El Tiempo*, 9 September 2017. Most urban militia members did not register in cantonments, making their numbers difficult to estimate. Crisis Group interviews, FARC commander, San José del Guaviare, 31 August 2017; FARC secretariat member, Havana, Cuba, 13 June 2016. "La incógnita de los milicianos", *La Silla Vacía*, 17 March 2017.

the guerrillas These agreements do not represent real changes”.⁶ Gentil Duarte,⁷ commander of the Seventh Front in Meta, argued that the government could not be trusted to honour its commitments. The United Guerrillas of the Pacific (GUP, in Spanish) in Nariño, have an interest in controlling the drug trade, though they also seek to ensure a level of public order in the communities they dominate.⁸

Both the dissidents and the communities where they operate depend on criminal revenues. In Guaviare and Meta, First and Seventh Front dissidents attack soldiers and police to protect the coca trade, actions that locals regard as protection for their livelihood from what they consider an insensitive state.⁹ In this way, the dissidents are simply continuing to operate as they did before the peace agreement: fighting coca eradication efforts, resolving disputes, controlling trafficking corridors, carrying out targeted attacks on security forces and generally ensuring local public order. For example, fighters with the dissident Seventh Front act both as political bosses and as a local economic power. Their leader, Gentil Duarte, still receives residents who want him to resolve problems in their communities. Elsewhere his group demands exorbitant extortion payments.¹⁰

Dissidents are also taking advantage of the support base they built during the conflict.¹¹ The First Front has expanded from its traditional strongholds in Guaviare toward the regional capital, San José del Guaviare, into south-east Meta and parts of Vichada and Caquetá. Seventh Front dissidents remain in their pre-accord areas of operations, however, as do the GUP in Nariño, the 40th front in Meta, and dissidents in Cauca and Putumayo.¹²

⁶ “Resistencia”, Frente Primero Armando Ríos FARC-EP, December 2016, pp. 6-7.

⁷ Unless stated otherwise, all names of those involved in armed groups are aliases or noms de guerre.

⁸ Crisis Group interviews, FARC secretariat member, Cauca, 7 February 2017; conflict analyst, Bogotá, 7 September 2017; human rights defenders, Bogotá, 7 September 2017. While dissidents from the First and Seventh Front have held meetings on their reasons for continuing to fight, smaller groups have not. Former dissident leaders in Tumaco claimed that poor treatment by FARC leaders led to their schism. Crisis Group interviews, then-dissident leader Pollo, Tumaco, 9 March 2017; church official, Tumaco, 12 May 2017. “Comunicado desde la ZVTN “Ariel Aldana” La Variante – Tumaco”, FARC-EP, 29 March 2017.

⁹ The First Front imposes a fixed price for coca paste, which, according to locals, protects them from drug traffickers who would otherwise pay less. This control and regulation of the drug trade strengthens the dissidents’ argument that it defends the peasants. Crisis Group fieldwork, El Retorno, Guaviare, 11 April and 3 September 2017. Crisis Group interviews, community leaders, El Retorno and San José del Guaviare, 3 and 11 April 2017, and 3 September 2017.

¹⁰ Crisis Group field work, El Retorno, Guaviare, 14 May 2016; Miraflores, Guaviare, 6 April 2017; El Retorno, Guaviare, 3 September 2017. Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives, San José del Guaviare, 3 April and 30 August 2017; human rights activists, San José del Guaviare 1 September 2017; Campesino, El Retorno, Guaviare, 3 September 2017; church official, Tumaco, 12 May 2017; community leaders, Tumaco, 11, 12 and 16 May 2017; conflict analyst, Bogotá, 6 September 2017.

¹¹ This resembles the continuation of paramilitary blocs following their demobilisation between 2003 and 2006. See Sarah Zuckerman Daly, *Organized Violence after Civil War: The Geography of Recruitment in Latin America* (New York, 2016).

¹² Crisis Group interviews, local residents, El Retorno, Guaviare, 11 April and 3 September 2017; international organisation representatives, San José del Guaviare, 3 April and 30 August 2017; Human rights defenders, San José del Guaviare, 3 April and 1 September 2017; international organisation representative, Bogotá, 7 June 2017; conflict analysts, Bogotá, 6 June and 7 September

Despite their origins, many dissident groups are more abusive than their FARC predecessors as they compete among themselves, sometimes brutalising local communities to maintain control. In the city of Tumaco, a cocaine trafficking hub on the Pacific coast, two groups of dissident FARC militia fighters vied for control, leading to an increase in murders in the first six months of 2017. FARC breakaway commanders sowed so much terror in the rural hamlet of Pital de la Costa, on the Pacific coast of Nariño, that they lost control of the town, which is now under control of the navy, itself accused by the local population of tolerating the presence of a local neo-paramilitary outfit.¹³ Tensions have grown in Guaviare over the First Front's recent selective killings of civilians.¹⁴

The dissidents undermine the peace process both nationally and locally. Opposition leaders maintain that their existence proves the guerrillas never truly handed in their weapons or gave up their illicit assets, but instead use the breakaway fronts to pursue an armed campaign and criminal activity. These arguments are likely to intensify as elections approach in 2018.¹⁵ Their presence also undermines implementation of the peace agreement, which can only prosper under stable security conditions. Ongoing insecurity would deprive peripheral populations of any peace dividend while perversely confirming dissident claims that the state never intended to fulfil its promises to rural Colombians.

Insecurity also strengthens the appeal of these groups. The murders of 23 FARC members or relatives since the signing of the peace agreement may push some to join dissident forces out of fear or anger. Frustration at the slow progress of the peace agreement, especially the lack of a reincorporation program or opportunities for mid-level commanders to move up within the FARC, is alleged to have prompted Cadete, an important FARC commander, into joining the dissidents in September 2017.¹⁶

Since the start of the year, originally independent dissident factions have begun to unite, and will probably continue to do so in the near future in response to the central government's captures or killings of dissident leaders, especially in Guaviare, Nariño and Caquetá. The 62nd and Fourteenth Fronts are now part of the Seventh. In Nariño, the GUP includes four different dissident groups created in July 2016. The First Front includes fighters from the First, Sixteenth and Acacio Medina fronts, as well as individual deserters from numerous other units. There is, however, no

2017; church official, Tumaco, 12 May 2017; community leaders, Tumaco, 12, 15 and 16 May, 2017; human rights activist, Bogotá, 7 September 2017.

¹³ Crisis Group interviews, community leaders, Tumaco, 12 and 16 May, and 14 June 2017.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, human rights activist, San José del Guaviare, 1 September 2017; international organisation representative, San José del Guaviare, 30 August 2017; church official, Tumaco, 12 May 2017.

¹⁵ "Disidentes de las Farc siguen manejando 40 mil hectáreas de coca: CD", *El Herald*, 2 January 2017. Four of the five richest fronts, according to the FARC's statement of its assets – the 40th, First, 62nd, and 7th Fronts – have dissidents. "Documento No. 1 - Consolidado de bienes y Activos", FARC-EP, n.d.

¹⁶ "Vacío de poder de las FARC genera miedo y desertiones en sus combatientes", *El Universal*, 27 August 2017. "Se recrudece la violencia contra excombatientes de las Farc y sus familias", *El Espectador*, 24 August 2017. Eduardo Álvarez Vanegas, "Y después de 'Cadete'...¿qué?", *El Espectador*, 13 September 2017. As of mid-August 2017, the UN mission had registered 472 FARC deserters. Crisis Group interview, UN mission member, 18 August 2017.

evidence to suggest that the largest dissidents have united yet. First, Seventh and 40th Front dissident groups, all of which operate in eastern Colombia, do not represent a single structure led by Gentil Duarte, although members from these groups did meet in June 2017 to discuss coordination around certain matters.¹⁷ The FARC leadership has tried to maintain some contact with dissidents to convince them to return to the peace process. Alexander Mojoso, who led a dissident group in Caquetá, demobilised in March 2017 and was accepted back into the FARC in April.¹⁸

B. *The ELN: Between Peace and War*

Even while negotiating with the Colombian government in Quito, the National Liberation Army or ELN has solidified its control of traditional strongholds and expanded into new areas.¹⁹ Since the FARC's demobilisation in early 2017, the 1,800-strong ELN has surfaced in areas where its previous presence had been negligible, such as northern Chocó, northern Cauca,²⁰ the Pacific coast of Nariño, Buenaventura and southern Córdoba. It also has strengthened its control in territories formerly shared with the FARC, such as Arauca, Bajo Cauca Antioqueño and southern Chocó. Since 2016, it has carried out attacks in 23 more municipalities than it did between 2012 and 2014; the armed forces have also carried out operations against the ELN in more municipalities than before.²¹ The ELN killed sixteen members of the armed forces or police in the first eight months of 2017.²²

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representative, Bogotá, 7 June 2017; conflict analyst, Bogotá, 6 September 2017; human rights defender, San José del Guaviare, 1 September 2017; FARC commander, San José del Guaviare, 31 August 2017; international organisation representative, San José del Guaviare, 30 August 2017; community leader, Miraflores, Guaviare, 7 April 2017. Euclides Mora, second-in-command of the 7th Front dissident faction, was killed by the armed forces in September 2017 in a town under First Front control.

¹⁸ "Reporte del MM&V sobre un proceso en verificación, tres incumplimientos y dos violaciones al CFHBD y DA", UN mission Colombia, 6 February 2017. "Alexander Mojoso ex-comandante del 14 Frente, retorna a las FARC-EP", FARC-EP, 5 April 2017. "La 'estrategia Mojoso' de las Farc", *La Silla Vacía*, 23 May 2017.

¹⁹ The Colombian government and the ELN signed a three-month ceasefire agreement in September 2017 following six months of negotiations in Quito, Ecuador. Joshua Goodman, "Colombia signs cease-fire deal with last guerrilla group", Associated Press, 4 September 2017.

²⁰ Some observers believe that FARC dissidents in the region, led by Pija, have ties to the ELN and allowed it to enter areas previously under FARC control. "Un policía herido deja hostigamiento a patrulla en vía Toribío-Caloto", *El País de Cali*, 18 March 2017. Crisis Group interviews, ELN expert and conflict analyst, Bogotá, 22 May and 7 June 2017. "Crimen organizado y saboteadores armados en tiempos de transición: radiografía necesaria", Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 15 July 2017, p. 44.

²¹ This data is based on a review of ELN and armed forces operations in the UN Colombia mission's Information and Analysis Unit's violent action databases. Results were validated by checking them against the Early Alert System from the Defensoría del Pueblo, plus reports, documents and maps by NGOs and the media. Negotiations between the FARC and ELN to transfer territory from the former to the latter reportedly occurred in Tumaco, Chocó, Cauca and Catatumbo. Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Bogotá, 9 December 2016; conflict analyst, 1 March 2016 and 5 May 2017. See also "Van 27 alertas de la Defensoría y aún nadie detiene el avance de los paras en Chocó", *La Silla Vacía*, 17 April 2017. Laura Ardila Arrieta, "Los brazaletes del ELN llegaron al sur de Córdoba", *La Silla Vacía*, 12 September 2016. Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives and human rights activist, Quibdó, 28 and 29 August 2017.

²² "Ministro de Defensa celebra el cese bilateral con el Eln", *Caracol*, 5 September 2017.

The ELN remains ideologically committed to fighting against what it calls a repressive oligarchy that responds to foreign masters and multinational companies at the expense of poor rural communities. The group, whose membership has included Catholic priests, most notably Camilo Torres and former leader Manuel Pérez, retains an affinity for liberation theology and opposes the commercial exploitation of natural resources, especially oil production and large-scale mining. ELN sabotage of oil pipelines has caused major environmental damage over the past three decades.²³ Incapable of amassing large contingents, it sends small bands to carry out most operations, but occasionally groups of ten to 25 fighters attack government forces or other armed groups.²⁴

The National Liberation Army (ELN) looks to create “parallel political power” structures to compete with the state in areas where it has long operated, such as Arauca department on the Venezuelan border, where it applies its own justice, controls economic activity, and seeks to steer communities toward its political ideology. The group also believes in a strategy of local armed resistance, where winning the war is no longer the goal. Resisting suffices to justify its existence, the ELN argues.²⁵

Increasingly, the ELN acts as a federation of regional fighting units responding to general guidelines from the group’s leadership. Each regional war front commander enjoys substantial decision-making autonomy and the national leadership seeks majority support when making key decisions. Decisions imposed from above are not the norm in the ELN, which partly explains its reluctance to unilaterally halt kidnappings and the variable yet deepening involvement of certain units in drug trafficking, something the group used to prohibit.²⁶ Regional autonomy also means some units may reject the terms of a negotiated peace.

Different ELN units also exercise different levels of violence against the civilian population, despite claims to offer protection. Each regional commander acts according to strategic decisions based on his or her perception of the local military, political and economic context, as well as relationships with members of the central command. The ELN’s Western War Front in Chocó department, which is engaged in a bitter conflict for territory and resources with the neo-paramilitary Gaitanistas, has abused

²³ Camilo Torres was a Catholic priest and social leader in Colombia who joined the ELN in 1965. He was killed in February 1966. His story still inspires many social movements and the ELN today. Miltón Hernández, *Rojo y Negro: Aproximación a la historia del ELN* (Bogotá, 2004); Mario Aguilera Peña, “ELN: Entre armas y la política”, in Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, and María Emma Wills and Gonzalo Sánchez Gómez (Eds.), *Nuestra guerra sin nombre: Transformaciones del conflicto en Colombia* (Bogotá, 2006), pp. 211-266; Carlos Medina Gallego, *ELN: Notas para una historia de sus ideas políticas* (Bogotá, n.d.), p. 424.

²⁴ “Van 27 alertas de la Defensoría y aún nadie detiene el avance de los paras en Chocó”, op. cit. Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives, Cúcuta, 14 and 16 August 2017; Quibdó, 29 August 2017.

²⁵ For more on the ELN’s political and military strategy, see Mario Aguilera Peña, “ELN: Entre armas y la política”, op. cit., p. 221. Mario Aguilera Peña, *Contrapoder y justicia guerrillera: Fragmentación política y orden insurgente en Colombia (1952 – 2003)* (Bogotá, 2014). Crisis Group interviews, ELN experts, Bogotá, 3 October 2016. Crisis Group interviews, ELN expert, Bogotá, 22 May 2017.

²⁶ The ELN also did not want to halt kidnapping because it regarded this as a unilateral demand by the Colombian government. Crisis Group interview, ELN expert, Bogotá, 22 May 2017; senior diplomat, Bogotá, 25 August 2017. It eventually did so as part of the ceasefire agreement which came into effect on 1 October. “Gobierno y Eln logran acuerdo de cese bilateral del fuego”, *El Tiempo*, 4 September 2017.

the civilian population by planting landmines and forcibly recruiting children. This front is also close to a member of the ELN central command known as Pablito, who reportedly opposes the peace process, and is seen as more economically motivated and lacking in ELN “identity”. Pablito also retains influence over the Eastern War Front, which he previously commanded. This front currently is carrying out an assassination campaign in Arauca against those accused of petty crimes or collaborating with the armed forces.²⁷

But the ELN acts differently elsewhere. Despite the presence of Gaitanistas in southern Bolívar department, ELN units there engage in very little violence. The Darío Ramírez Castro War Front, close to both Gabino, the ELN leader, and Pablo Beltrán, its chief negotiator in Quito, is noticeably less violent toward the civilian population than other ELN units, despite facing a fierce military offensive. This front has not recently increased the use of landmines nor does it carry out economically motivated kidnappings, though it is still accused of forced recruitment.²⁸

The ELN is more active in drug trafficking than in previous years, especially in Nariño, Chocó, Cauca and Catatumbo. While it previously taxed and purchased coca paste, the discovery and destruction of cocaine laboratories in ELN territory suggests the group is increasingly connected to trafficking networks for the more valuable, fully refined drug.²⁹ This enhanced role has led to clashes with other armed groups, especially in Chocó and Nariño.³⁰

C. Organised Armed Groups

The Colombian government has identified three “organised armed groups”, which it argues qualify as parties to an internal armed conflict under international standards: the Gaitanistas, EPL and Puntilleros.³¹ On this basis, the government assumes the

²⁷ “Van 27 alertas de la Defensoría y aún nadie detiene el avance de los paras en Chocó”, op. cit. Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives; Quibdó, 29 August 2017; human rights activist, Quibdó, 28 August 2017; ELN expert, Bogotá, 22 May 2017; senior diplomat, Bogotá, 25 August 2017; conflict analyst, Bogotá, 7 June 2017. The Eastern War Front has a representative in Quito, albeit apparently in a “monitoring” role, while the Western War Front voted against peace talks but accepted the majority decision to negotiate. León Valencia, “Era un adolescente ahora es el comandante del ELN”, *Semana*, 29 January 2017. “Asesinan a campesino que había sido secuestrado en Arauquita, Arauca”, *Caracol*, 13 April 2017.

²⁸ Crisis Group interview, ELN expert, Bogotá, 15 September 2017. “Ante ofensiva militar Eln recluta menores en el sur de Bolívar”, *El Tiempo*, 27 April 2016. “Informe de riesgo 029-16, para los municipios de Remedios y Segovia, departamento de Antioquia”, Defensoría del Pueblo, 2016. “Se dispara el secuestro en Norte de Santander”, *El Tiempo*, 30 July 2017.

²⁹ “El millonario complejo cocalero del ELN”, *Semana*, 6 February 2016; “Tonelada y media de cocaína del ELN enterrada en una playa del Pacífico”, *Caracol Radio*, 22 March 2017. “Desmantelan cristalizadero en el sur del Cauca”, *Proclama del Cauca*, 11 February 2016.

³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives, Bogotá, 7 June 2017 and Quibdó, 29 August 2017; human rights activist, Quibdó, 28 August 2017.

³¹ The Puntilleros will not be discussed here as Crisis Group believes that it is wrongly classified as an organised armed group based on those standards. The Puntilleros do not appear to carry out sustained operations against state forces, and do not have the territorial control necessary to do so. “Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II)”, 7 June 1977.

legal right to target these groups with lethal force under the laws governing the conduct of war.

1. The Gaitanistas

Founded in the Urabá region of Antioquia department in 2006, the Gaitanistas have expanded along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and to a lesser extent into the eastern plains. It is by far the largest of the three armed groups, claiming some 8,000 members, though the government estimates there are about 2,000. More independent assessments put the figure at between 3,000 and 3,500, including subcontracted gang members.³²

Gaitanistas fall into two categories: full-time fighters and subcontracted criminals. The armed, uniformed combatants operate in rural areas, such as Urabá, southern Córdoba, Bajo Cauca Antioqueño, Chocó and southern Bolívar, where they seek territorial control, and are organised in blocs and fronts led by regional and front commanders.³³ The subcontractors are members of local gangs who are hired by regional commanders and coordinators, allowing the organisation to gain indirect influence over territory. They operate in Nariño, Antioquia, and along the Atlantic coast and the Venezuelan border.³⁴ The organisation has a central high command, made up of regional commanders, and a political wing. Beneath the leadership stands a vertical hierarchy with various levels of control, including squadrons, sections, groups, companies, fronts and blocs. This hierarchy has allowed the Gaitanistas to survive and expand despite the loss of key leaders, such as its founder Don Mario who was captured in 2009, and his replacement Giovanni, killed in 2012, as well as withstand some internal divisions in Antioquia.³⁵

The group claims it was “obliged” to take up arms given the “poorly done peace process”, in reference to the paramilitary demobilisation slightly more than ten years ago, and argues that it defends its territory from the ELN.³⁶ The Gaitanistas also state they enjoy “legitimacy and political representation”, a claim that seems true in parts of north-west Colombia.³⁷ But in areas where the Gaitanistas compete with

³² Crisis Group interview, government official, Bogotá, 11 August 2017. “Colombia’s largest neo-paramilitary group AGC claims to have 8,000 members”, *Colombia Reports*, 19 January 2017. “Crimen organizado y saboteadores armados en tiempos de transición: radiografía necesaria”, op. cit., p. 27.

³³ “Estatutos AGC”, Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, 27 February 2016. “Crimen organizado y saboteadores armados en tiempos de transición: radiografía necesaria”, op. cit., p. 27. “Autodefensas gaitanistas del sur de bolívar hacen duro señalamientos contra alcalde de Achí”, video, Youtube, 9 April 2015.

³⁴ Internal Gaitanista statutes allow for this practice, which it calls “decentralisation”. “Estatutos AGC”, op. cit. “Crimen organizado y saboteadores armados en tiempos de transición: radiografía necesaria”, op. cit., p. 27. Crisis Group interview, conflict analyst, Bogotá, 7 September 2017.

³⁵ “Estatutos AGC”, op. cit. “Así cogieron a ‘Don Mario’”, *Semana*, 15 April 2009; “Cayó alias ‘Giovanny’, jefe de la banda criminal de ‘Los Urabeño’”, *El Tiempo*, 1 January 2012. Sofía León Oñate, “Se acabó la primera generación de neoparamilitares, ¿qué sigue?”, Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, op. cit., pp. 7-8. “Crimen organizado y saboteadores armados en tiempos de transición: radiografía necesaria”, op. cit., p. 55.

³⁶ “Un gran ‘descubrimiento’”, Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC), 13 March 2017.

³⁷ In Chocó, the Gaitanistas appear to have offered to finance local economic projects to generate popular support. Ibid. “Editorial: La naturaleza de las Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia”,

other armed groups, such as the ELN in Chocó or the GUP in Nariño, violence against civilians is common. The group has killed sixteen police officers so far this year, while the government claims the group is behind many recent killings of social leaders, although the evidence for this is not categorical.³⁸

The Gaitanistas are mainly interested in criminal rackets, principally drug trafficking, illegal gold mining and extortion. The group transports cocaine along the Atlantic coast and charges other traffickers for permission to cross areas under its control. It has also started to buy coca paste in a possible bid to dominate the whole of the drug trade in parts of the north west.³⁹ Gaitanistas profit from criminal and informal mining in areas such as Bajo Cauca Antioqueño, Córdoba and Chocó, where they manage mines directly, demand fees from local minors or demand extortion payments from those who use backhoes to search for gold.⁴⁰ More broadly, they extort large sums from local businesses and farms.⁴¹

2. The EPL

The second organised armed group identified by the government, the Libardo Mora Toro Front of the EPL, with about 200 fighters, operates in Catatumbo, on the border with Venezuela.⁴² Since 2016 the EPL has expanded out of its historical communities into areas formerly controlled by the FARC, such as parts of Tibú, El Tarra, Sardinata, Teorama, and Abrego, in Norte de Santander province, where it has announced its presence through pamphlets, attacks against state forces, and violence against civilians. The EPL has ratcheted up control over the local population, including prohibiting road travel at night, increased surveillance in urban areas, threats and selective killings.⁴³

Its leader for years was Victor Ramón Navarro, also known as Megateo, an enigmatic figure who, besides organising the drug trade in Catatumbo, built a sizeable civilian following. Since Megateo was killed in October 2015, the group has suffered

AGC, 7 April 2017. Crisis Group interview, police intelligence official, Bogotá, 14 July 2017. "Informe de la visita humanitaria a las cuencas del Truandó, Domingodó, Cacarica y el municipio de Ríosucu", ACNUR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) and Defensoría del Pueblo, 13 October 2015, p. 12.

³⁸ "El 'Clan del Golfo' sigue con la mira en la Policía", *El Colombiano*, 19 September 2017. Crisis Group interview, government official, Bogotá, 8 September 2017.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, police intelligence official, Bogotá, 24 March 2017. James Bargent and Mat Charles, "Inside the BACRIM: Money", *Insight Crime*, 13 July 2017. "La macabra alianza de los carteles de Colombia y México", *Semana*, 16 January 2016.

⁴⁰ "Inside the BACRIM: Money", op. cit. "LA MINERÍA SIN CONTROL: Un enfoque desde la vulneración de los Derechos Humanos", Defensoría del Pueblo, October 2015, pp. 73-74. "Oficio dirigido al CIAT del Mininterior", Defensoría del Pueblo, 21 February 2017, p. 6.

⁴¹ In southern Córdoba, the group reportedly brought in \$140,000 per month from extortion; in Urabá, the situation is so severe that beer and soda trucks are escorted by police for protection. "Urabá, el nido de los nuevos paramilitares", *Semana*, 25 April 2017. "Alias 'Sergio', recaudaba en extorsiones \$400 millones para el Clan del Golfo", *La Razón*, 26 July 2017. "Inside the BACRIM: Money", op. cit.

⁴² Here, as in general in Colombia, the group will be referred to simply as the EPL. Historically, it has operated in the so-called "EPL triangle" (Hacarí, San Calixto and La Playa municipalities in Norte de Santander).

⁴³ Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives, Bogotá and Cúcuta, 6 June and 12, 14 and 18 August 2017. "The EPL shoots first and asks questions later". Crisis Group interview, local official, Tibú, 15 August 2017.

the loss of two other top leaders.⁴⁴ According to police intelligence, two leaders are now fighting for control, though local observers believe the group maintains its internal cohesion. The EPL is also likely incorporating FARC deserters, who are generally more disciplined than its own fighters.⁴⁵

Views differ as to whether the EPL is a guerrilla group, as locals in Catatumbo believe, or an organised crime syndicate, as the government contends. The group has some popular support, which it has tried to strengthen by arguing that, unlike the FARC and ELN, the EPL will not “betray” the people by handing themselves in to the government. Some communities in Catatumbo respect the EPL as the only force to have fought paramilitary groups in the early 2000s.⁴⁶ The Marxist-Leninist Colombian Communist Party claims the EPL as its armed wing, and the latter still distributes the party’s newsletter. The group also compels farmers to grow coca rather than take part in crop substitution programs, which has helped it gain support from coca producers while also demonstrating its stakes in the coca trade.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ “Murió un delincuente que no era sólo eso”, *La Silla Vacía*, 2 October 2015; “Capturan a alias ‘David León’, sucesor de ‘Megateo’”, *Caracol Radio*, 19 September 2016; “Murió ‘Caracho’, el sucesor de Megateo”, *La Opinión*, 24 October 2016. According to police intelligence, two figures are fighting for leadership: Pacora, a military leader, and Pepe, better known for political proselytising. Crisis Group interview, police intelligence official, 24 March 2017.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives, Cúcuta, 14 and 16 August 2017; Bogotá, 18 August 2017.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, international organisation representative, Cúcuta, 14 August 2017.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives, Cúcuta, 14 and 16 August 2017; local authorities, Tibú, 15 August 2017; drug trafficking expert, Cúcuta, 14 August 2017. “Revolución: No. 511”, Órgano Central del Partido Comunista de Colombia (Marxista-Leninista), February 2017. In an October 2016 communiqué, the EPL lays out its reasons for rejecting the FARC peace agreement. “¡Un pueblo y un ejército guerrillero que no se rinden! Carta al pueblo colombiano”, EPL – Mando Nacional, 16 October 2016.

III. The Lure of Illicit Economies

The ability of Colombia's armed groups to profit from criminal businesses has helped them survive a long asymmetrical conflict with state forces. As the FARC withdraws from its revenue-generating activities, various armed groups are vying to take its place, competing for control of drug production, illegal mining, contraband and extortion both in the interior and along the country's weak borders, especially with Venezuela. In several areas, this competition has resulted in rising violence. Local communities that depend on illegal activities for their precarious livelihoods often see these armed groups as defending them from government forces. This relationship of exploitation and protection gives local armed actors considerable social support and political power.⁴⁸

A. Drugs

Colombian coca cultivation and cocaine production have grown sharply since 2013. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) detected 146,000 hectares of coca crops in 2016, up from 48,000 hectares in 2013 (see Appendix F); the U.S. reports that these crops reached 188,000 hectares, up from 80,500 hectares.⁴⁹ Much of this growth is explained by a reduction in eradication, perverse incentives created by the peace agreement, and increases in farm productivity. The government is now under intense domestic and international pressure to bring coca production down fast.⁵⁰

Under point four of the peace agreement, the FARC withdrew from illegal drug trafficking. The guerrilla group had been directly or indirectly involved in the coca paste trade since at least the 1980s, participating in its purchase and trafficking, and regulating or taxing third parties. In some parts of Colombia, the FARC also was involved in cocaine trafficking.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Protection, economic wellbeing and dispute resolution are three social demands that if satisfied create dependency relationships that can give any armed actor political power. Gustavo Duncan, *Más que plata o plomo* (Bogotá, 2014). Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (New York, 1978). Richard M. Emerson, "Power-Dependence Relations", *American Sociological Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1962), pp. 31-41.

⁴⁹ Potential cocaine production reached 866 metric tons in 2016, according to the UNODC, or 710 metric tons, according to the U.S. "Colombia: Monitoreo de territorios afectados por cultivos ilícitos 2016", UNODC, July 2017, p. 11. "ONDCP Releases Data on Cocaine Cultivation and Production in Colombia", ONDCP, 14 March 2017. Adam Isacson, "Confronting Colombia's Coca Boom Requires Patience and a Commitment to the Peace Accords", Washington Office on Latin America, 13 March 2017.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, drug trafficking expert, Bogotá, 17 August 2017.

⁵¹ Coca crops are transformed or sold in three ways. First, coca leaves are harvested and sold in "arrobos" of 25 pounds. Second, coca paste or base is produced from the leaves by chemical processes (maceration). The third and final product is cocaine hydrochloride, derived from coca paste through additional chemical processes. The FARC claim to have taxed only coca paste transactions. Crisis Group interviews, FARC commanders, San Vicente del Caguán and San José del Guaviare, 15 to 25 September 2016 and 31 August 2017. For a general overview of the FARC role in the drug trade, see John Otis, "The FARC and Colombia's Illegal Drug Trade", Wilson Center, November 2014; John de Boer, Juan Carlos Garzón and Louise Bosetti, "Criminal Agendas and Peace Negotiations: The Case of Colombia", UN University, April 2017.

The effects of this withdrawal vary across regions. In Putumayo, where according to UN estimates 25,000 hectares of the crop were grown in 2016, the illicit market has undergone drastic changes. The FARC purchased coca paste and leaves directly while also charging taxes on transactions by other buyers. It also trafficked in coca, working with a local crime outfit known as the Constru. Now the Constru and a newer group, Los Comuneros, have moved into rural areas to take over the trade, though with limited success so far. FARC militia members were still buying coca paste in some towns in early 2017, while new buyers from outside the region have been killed by unknown perpetrators, according to local sources.⁵² In Guaviare and Meta, dissidents have increased their involvement in and control over the drug trade, whereas in Cauca the ELN has taken over most of the trade.⁵³

Contrary to much public and political opinion in Colombia and elsewhere, there is no direct, linear relationship between the volume of coca crops and the levels of violence suffered in any region. Where only one armed group currently has hegemonic control, violence against civilians tends to be low: this is the case under the rule of FARC dissidents in Meta. At the other extreme, Chocó, perhaps Colombia's most violent region, is devoid of coca crops though it is home to numerous trafficking routes.

However, where there is competition among various armed groups for control of territory used by the drug trade, along with the formation of new alliances between traffickers and armed groups, there are spikes in violence. A major reconfiguration of power has been underway in the municipality of Tumaco, a Pacific coast port and narcotics trafficking hub. FARC structures formerly taxed the drug trade while working with large-scale traffickers to move the product to international markets. The FARC's old role is being filled by the GUP, enabling the drug trade to continue without major impediment. The Gaitanistas, through a local group led until recently by a figure called Cusumbo, have also expanded along the coast, leading to a three-way fight between the Gaitanistas, the GUP and ELN.⁵⁴

In Catatumbo, the threat of violence is latent as the EPL and ELN currently continue to cooperate in the drug trade, though the former remains largely in control of cocaine trafficking in alliance with armed groups on the other side of the Venezuelan border. Yet this cooperation is straining due to EPL expansion into ELN territories. In some areas where FARC guerrillas were strongest, their withdrawal caused a temporary hiatus in business and a drop in prices. In others, the EPL moved in quickly to buy coca paste, paying farmers immediately in cash.⁵⁵

⁵² Crisis Group interviews, community leaders, Puerto Asís, 27 February 2017; Valle del Guamuéz, 28 February 2017; Valle del Guamuéz, 3 March 2017; local government official, Valle del Guamuéz, 28 February 2017; international organisation representative, Valle del Guamuéz, 2 March 2017. Crisis Group telephone interview, government official, 20 June 2017.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, human rights defenders, San José del Guaviare and Bogotá, 3 April and 7 September; international organisation representative, Bogotá, 6 June 2017.

⁵⁴ All groups have announced their intentions of moving into Llorente, a key drug trafficking town in the region, for example. Crisis Group interviews, community leaders, international organisation representatives and church leaders, Tumaco, 10-19 May 2017; conflict analyst, Bogotá, 7 September 2017. Cusumbo was killed by security forces in early October. "Abatido alias Cusumbo, cabecilla de banda criminal del Pacífico", *El País de Cali*, 6 October 2017.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives, Cúcuta, 14 and 16 August 2017; local authorities and church official, Tibú, 15 August 2017.

B. Criminal Mining

Illegal mining, mainly of gold, is another basic source of revenue for armed groups. Early evidence suggests homicides are higher in illegal gold mining areas, probably due to disputes among armed actors in regions once controlled by the FARC.⁵⁶ About 60 percent of the mines using heavy machinery to dredge river beds for gold had no license in 2014, according to the UNODC.⁵⁷

Armed groups profit from illegal mining in various ways. Perhaps the most common is by forcing mine operators and miners to pay for permission to pan for gold or dredge it up from the river bed using heavy machinery. They also take a percentage of the gold produced by large-scale miners. Some armed groups directly invest in mining operations, import gold or buy and sell it through third parties.⁵⁸ The territorial control exercised by illegal armed groups offers miners protection against government raids in return, although somewhat ineffectively since these operations have risen in number since 2014.⁵⁹ Furthermore, both armed groups and drug traffickers use illegally mined gold to launder money. Small-scale, artisanal miners can sell gold without proving it came from a licensed mine, making its real origins hard to detect. By producing or buying gold, an internationally traded commodity that is difficult to trace, drug traffickers and other criminals can turn illicit money into legal assets.⁶⁰

C. Contraband

The threadbare state presence on Colombia's borders has allowed contraband to flourish since at least the 1850s. Historic smuggling routes later would be used by marijuana and cocaine traffickers.⁶¹ The economic asymmetries between Colombia

⁵⁶ Nicolás Idrobo, Daniel Mejía, and Ana María Tribin, "Illegal Gold Mining and Violence in Colombia", *Peace Economics, Peace Science, and Public Policy*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2014), pp. 83-111.

⁵⁷ "Colombia: explotación de oro de aluvión", UNODC, June 2016, pp. 56-57. In Chocó, 61 per cent of the gold mining operations detected, covering 22,142 hectares, were illegal; in Antioquia, the figures were 59 per cent and 15,600 hectares. These figures include only mines using heavy machinery, not panning or other artisanal forms of mining. Other affected provinces include Córdoba, Bolívar, Cauca and Nariño.

⁵⁸ Angelika Rettberg and Juan Felipe Ortiz-Riomalo, "Conflicto dorado: Canales y mecanismos de la relación entre minería de oro, conflicto armado y criminalidad en Colombia", 1 April 2014.

⁵⁹ "Logros de la Política de Defensa y Seguridad Todos por un Nuevo País", Mindefensa, June 2017, p. 60.

⁶⁰ Frédéric Massé and Johanna Camargo, "Actores Armados Ilegales y Sector Extractivo en Colombia", CITPax, 2012. Angelika Rettberg and Juan Felipe Ortiz-Riomalo, "Conflicto dorado: Canales y mecanismos de la relación entre minería de oro, conflicto armado y criminalidad en Colombia", op. cit. "Sentencia T-622/16", Constitutional Court, 10 November 2016. Crisis Group interview, church official, Tibú, 15 August 2017.

⁶¹ While contraband existed in Colombia under the Spanish empire, it was mainly confined to port cities. The country's post-independence land borders have only existed since the 1830s. Muriel Laurent, *Contrabando en Colombia en el siglo XIX: Prácticas y discursos de resistencia y reproducción*, (Bogotá, 2008), pp. 349-387. Santiago González-Plazas, "Pasado y presente del contrabando en la Guajira aproximaciones al fenómeno de ilegalidad en la región", Universidad del Rosario, March 2008. Carlos Medina Gallego, "Mafia y narcotráfico en Colombia: elementos para un estudio comparado", in Alejo Vargas Velásquez (Coordinator), *El prisma de las seguridades en América Latina* (Buenos Aires, 2012), pp. 146-150.

and its neighbours, above all Venezuela, create incentives for illegal trafficking and contraband, making borders a magnet for expansionary armed groups.⁶²

The border with Venezuela is the most problematic. In August, Colombian authorities estimated that about 1,000 Venezuelans emigrated each day across the official border crossing near Cúcuta.⁶³ The porous 2,200km-long frontier, much of it over rugged terrain, also has some 200 informal crossing points, many located in territories controlled by illegal armed groups. Coca paste and cocaine flow easily across the border, reportedly aided by corrupt officials on both sides. Venezuela's expulsion of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in 2005 (by the late President Hugo Chávez) and the government's indifference to armed actors along the Colombian border are said to make it especially attractive to traffickers seeking to send drugs abroad.⁶⁴

Gasoline costs pennies per gallon in Venezuela, but is worth USD\$2-\$3 per gallon in Colombia. Smuggled gasoline is sold in plain sight along the highway in border regions. Those participating range from individuals seeking to make a living to transnational criminal organisations.⁶⁵ In 2013, the Colombian government estimated that one million gallons of gasoline crossed the border every day. Corruption in both countries allows the trade to continue, though authorities are also reluctant to fight a business that has become so important to the population living along the border.⁶⁶

Arms trafficking is also big business along the border. The FARC, ELN, EPL and organised crime groups have obtained weapons from Venezuela for years. Demand for weapons remains high as the EPL expands in north-eastern Colombia the ELN fortifies its military might to strengthen its leverage in peace negotiations. Between August and November 2016, Colombian authorities seized almost 500 weapons along the border.⁶⁷

The border between Colombia and Ecuador is another hive of illicit activity. With hundreds of informal border crossings, movement from one side to the other is fluid. Illegal armed groups in the region, such as La Constru and Los Comuneros, cross the border along the San Miguel river with relative ease. Coca paste from the regions of Nariño and Putumayo, which together accounted for almost half of all Colombia's

⁶² Fernando Carrión M., "Introducción: De la frontera binacional al sistema fronterizo global", in Fernando Carrión M. (Ed.), *Asimetrías en la frontera Ecuador-Colombia: entre la complementariedad y el sistema*, pp. 9-12.

⁶³ Crisis Group interviews, Colombian migration officials, Cúcuta, 16 August 2017.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, international organisation representative, Bogotá, 18 August 2017. "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume 1", U.S. Department of State, March 2017, pp. 286-290. It was reported that a Colombian businessman with connections to local authorities was arrested on the Colombian side of the border in August 2017 after a U.S. investigation into his alleged role in drug trafficking. "Narco capturado en Cúcuta tenía nexos con 'Megateo'", *La Opinión*, 16 August 2017.

⁶⁵ Santiago González-Plazas, "Pasado y presente del contrabando en la frontera colombo-venezolana", *Razón Pública*, 20 September 2015.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives, Cúcuta, 14 August 2017; local officials, Tibú, 15 August 2017; NGO representatives, Cúcuta, 14 August 2017. "Contrabando de gasolina por La Guajira es un cáncer: Dian", *El Heraldo*, 13 November 2013.

⁶⁷ Katherine Aguirre, "El tráfico de armas en Colombia: una revisión desde los orígenes a los destinos", *Urvio*, no. 10 (November 2011), pp. 36-59. Crisis Group interviews, local officials, Tibú, 15 August 2017. "Gestión del Gobierno colombiano en la frontera colombo-venezolana", Colombian government, 19 December 2016, p. 13.

coca crops in 2016, is often transformed into cocaine in Ecuador and then trafficked to Central America. Ecuador has long been an important drug transit country; Mexican cartels since 2012 have increased their participation, working both with Colombians and Ecuadorians to ship cocaine north.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, international organisation representative, Valle del Guamuéz, 2 March 2017; conflict analyst, Bogotá, 6 June 2017. "Colombia: Monitoreo de territorios afectados por cultivos ilícitos 2016", op. cit., p. 24. "Huge ecuador cocaine seizures signal growing role in drug trade", Insight Crime, 10 May 2017. "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: vol. 1", op. cit., p. 155.

IV. Security Policy and State Presence

Colombia must consolidate security gains and thwart the expansion of armed groups to show a doubting public that the accord has been a success, and to build the conditions for lasting peace in its countryside. The Colombian government has tried before to extend its reach into the long-neglected periphery, however. In the late 1980s, the government launched a National Rehabilitation Plan to integrate the “poorest communities and strata of society”.⁶⁹ And in 2006, then Defence Minister Juan Manuel Santos and his deputy Sergio Jaramillo embarked on what they called “Territorial Consolidation Plans”.⁷⁰

Current approaches are essentially the same as those in previous plans, with one main difference. The peace process with the FARC should (in theory) leave most territories open to an enhanced military and police presence, which in turn will allow the government to strengthen civilian institutions. Local economic development efforts, formally known as Territorial Development Plans (PDETs), should also help buttress state authority.⁷¹

Two sets of obstacles now stand in the way of these initiatives. First, the Colombian state needs to consolidate swiftly the rural presence of the various central institutions created to implement the peace process, above all in the field of security, reintegration of former fighters, rural development, coca substitution and local justice. The fragmentation of these bodies, and the slow progress of peace-related legislation through Congress, have frustrated implementation of the accord on the ground.⁷² Second, even though a military and police presence are required to expand state authority in the short term, they risk provoking resentment among local populations further down the road. How security agencies relate to these communities – and whether the state can provide the services that armed groups purport to provide, above all protection, maintaining local economies and offering local dispute resolution – will determine the effectiveness of these latest efforts to bring public authority to its periphery.

A. *Confronting Security Threats*

Extending coercive control over conflict-affected territories is a central tenet of government strategy. The Defence Ministry's budget has increased at a time of fiscal

⁶⁹ “Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación - política de inversión 1989”, Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 11 April 1989, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Implementation of these plans started in the Macarena region. The aim was to clear the FARC out militarily and hold the territory, enabling the state to enter. The U.S., which was implementing this “clear-hold-build” model in Afghanistan at the time, provided “heavy ... input”. See Adam Isacson, “Consolidating ‘Consolidation’: Colombia’s ‘security and development’ zones await a civilian handoff, while Washington backs away from the concept”, WOLA, December 2012, p. 5. Ucko, David H., “Beyond Clear-Hold-Build: Rethinking Local-Level Counterinsurgency after Afghanistan”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2013), pp. 526-551.

⁷¹ The Consolidation Plan focused on areas that are almost all part of municipalities prioritised by the Victory Plan and the PDETs. Adam Isacson, “Consolidating ‘Consolidation’”, *op. cit.*

⁷² Santos' recent cabinet changes have not convinced those in Congress to continue to support peace legislation, for example. Crisis Group interview, senior diplomat, Bogotá, 11 August 2017. “El cambio de gabinete no surte efecto en el Congreso”, *La Silla Vacía*, 24 August 2017.

austerity because of the need to consolidate peace and security and fight organised crime with “all of the state forces’ capacities”.⁷³

The main strategy, which the military calls its “Victory Plan”, involves sending 65,000 soldiers and 15,000 police officers to 160 priority municipalities. Planning began two years before the peace accord was signed to ensure the state would be the first armed force to move into territories vacated by the FARC. The government publicly calls the strategy a success, but admits that in some places implementation has not been as “quick” as expected.⁷⁴

Independent verification of the plan’s results is difficult. Some priority municipalities formerly under FARC control, including those in southern Tolima, Huila and parts of Caquetá, have not suffered incursions by new or different armed groups. In most, however, other armed groups have strengthened or expanded. In many conflict-affected rural areas, it is still rare to see military or security forces. Army officers in private concede progress is slow.⁷⁵

Colombian and international officials offer multiple explanations for these mixed results. One is corruption: military officers allegedly accept bribes to allow illicit businesses to function and turn a blind eye to certain armed groups. Some senior officers maintain the military has not captured armed actors for fear criminally complicit local judges will free them, or that they themselves could face legal proceedings for alleged abuses or use of excessive force should they take strong action.⁷⁶ In addition, the army has been trained to mobilise, hit a specific target and leave, rather than establish a permanent presence.⁷⁷ Finally, the army and police have dedicated most of their personnel to protecting areas around the 26 cantonment sites, remaining static to avoid incidents during the ceasefire with the FARC. Some regional commanders were reportedly concerned that other areas were still under clandestine FARC armed control, making them reluctant to go on the offensive due to the possible political and human costs.⁷⁸

The navy’s role in extending state authority is also critical. At present, it is focusing on strengthening its presence along rivers.⁷⁹ A priority for the navy should be control over the rivers and deltas feeding into the Pacific Ocean, which could be achieved using

⁷³ In Colombia, state forces include the army, police, navy and air force, all part of the Defence Ministry. Crisis Group interview, government official, Bogotá, 7 June 2017. “Plan Estratégico del Sector Defensa y Seguridad: Guía de Planeamiento Estratégico 2016-2018”, Defence Ministry, June 2016. “All of the state forces’ capacities” means that the army will be involved in the fight against Gaitanistas, EPL and Puntilleros, not just the police. The Defence Ministry states that international humanitarian law will be applied to FARC dissidents. Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Bogotá, 7 June and 17 August 2017. “Directiva Permanente No. 0015/2016”, Defence Ministry, op. cit.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Bogotá, 17 August 2017; Vice President Óscar Naranjo, Bogotá, 14 July 2017. Luis Carlos Villegas, interview on *Semana en Vivo*, 18 July 2017.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, senior diplomat, Bogotá, 25 August 2017.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives and church official, Tumaco, 10 and 12 May 2017; senior diplomat, Bogotá, 25 August 2017. Crisis Group telephone interview, humanitarian aid worker, Apartadó, 26 March 2017.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interviews, government official, Bogotá, 13 July 2017; Vice President Óscar Naranjo, Bogotá, 14 July 2017; military officer, Miraflores, Guaviare, 7 April 2017.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, military officer, Bogotá, 18 August 2017.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interviews, navy officials, Bogotá, 18 July 2017.

existing marine forces focused on land operations in western Colombia, and equipping them with a coast guard unit.

Both the army and the navy nevertheless have mixed records of convincing war-weary communities that they can protect their interests. Information from various parts of the country suggests military efforts to win over locals have faltered, and that the armed forces still see many communities as “guerrilla towns”. In Chocó, for example, indigenous leaders have been detained for “rebellion” but were later released for lack of evidence. Indigenous communities there accuse state forces of working with the Gaitanistas in certain regions and have demanded the army and navy not enter their territory.⁸⁰

Greater police presence in rural areas is also essential to consolidate grassroots security.⁸¹ The Defence Ministry plans to strengthen the rural police force known as the DICAR (Dirección de Carabineros y Seguridad Rural), which has roughly 10,000 members but lacks sufficient personnel and infrastructure to cover the entire countryside. The ministry is now focusing on basing more rural officers in urban centres and near former FARC cantonments.⁸² Police intend to recruit 50,000 new members over the next decade, but will not be able to cover all key territories immediately. In the meantime, the army will have to act as a temporary stopgap in rural areas, with clear timelines for handing over control to the police.

In addition, large-scale police-led operations, with military participation, have captured or killed criminal leaders, especially in Urabá. An elite police unit created by the peace agreement is now operating in Buenaventura and Tumaco.⁸³ But removing leaders does not necessarily affect a criminal group's power or wealth, as subordinates have quickly taken over organisations with strong vertical hierarchies, such as the Gaitanistas or the EPL. Given that the drug trade still has huge economic incentives for those involved, and makes use of wealthy clandestine investors to fund drug runs, dismantling an armed group tends to produce only an ephemeral reduction in drug trafficking.⁸⁴

Plans to strengthen the police, meanwhile, could be impeded by financial constraints and limited political commitment. The current national budget would only enable the rural police to build one station per year until 2018.⁸⁵ In the short term, the Defence Ministry budget might need to remain comparatively high to reinforce

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interviews, international organisation representatives, Quibdó, 28 and 29 August 2017; human rights activist, Quibdó, 29 August 2017; community members, El Retorno, Guaviare, 14 May 2016 and 4 September 2017; Puerto Leguizamo, Putumayo, 10 March 2016. Crisis Group telephone interview, humanitarian aid worker, Apartadó, 26 March 2017.

⁸¹ Due to the armed conflict, the police have tended to focus on urban areas whereas the army concentrates on rural ones.

⁸² Crisis Group interviews, government and officials from the *Dirección de Carabineros y Seguridad Rural* or DICAR, Bogotá, 14 July 2017.

⁸³ The unit includes 1,088 highly trained officers to fight armed groups in Tumaco and Buenaventura. “El piloto del general Naranjo”, *La Silla Vacía*, 22 June 2017. Crisis Group interview, government official, Bogotá, 17 August 2017.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, senior diplomat, Bogotá, 11 August 2017.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Bogotá, 14 July 2017 and 17 August 2017. “Resolución No. 01258”, Defence Ministry: National Police, 28 March 2016.

security in the periphery and increase buy-in from mid-level military officials who have misgivings about the peace process.

Extending the state's military and security presence, whether through the Victory Plan or other police or naval initiatives, will also require addressing alleged official collusion with criminal actors and building trust with communities. Sources in Tumaco, for example, claimed the navy was linked to drug trafficking; in March 2017, fifteen employees of the attorney general's office were arrested for suspected connections with drug traffickers in Tumaco.⁸⁶ Tackling corruption will require continued high-level political pressure and oversight to avoid creating perverse incentives to abuse power or obtain false results, for example by detaining people without hard evidence of connections to illicit activity. The current approach of strengthening anti-corruption bodies that are part of the same armed or police forces whose wrongdoing they are meant to fight raises the risk of collusion between investigators and the targets of investigation. Oversight by independent anti-corruption bodies and civil society organisations is essential in such cases.⁸⁷

B. *Reintegration and Justice*

Coercion by itself is not sufficient. Other initiatives are needed to integrate former combatants back into civilian life, curb further recruitment, and generate long-term alternatives to crime and violence. The peace agreement with the FARC emphasises the "reincorporation" program to help former combatants adapt to civilian life, which began in August 2017 after the group handed over its weapons. The newly minted Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN), formerly the Colombian Reintegration Agency, is overseeing the process.⁸⁸

Although the agency has built a solid reputation for reintegrating individual ex-combatants, including paramilitary members and FARC deserters, the current process poses a tougher test. Many former FARC combatants, now clustered in cantonments, want to remain in these isolated regions to engage in collective enterprises, especially farming, despite appalling infrastructure, limited access to markets, and the presence of illegal businesses. It will be difficult in this context to make the reincorporation program economically sustainable.⁸⁹

Differences between the FARC and the government over whether such projects are viable have severely hindered progress. The National Reincorporation Committee,

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interviews, church official, Tumaco, 12 May 2015; community leaders, Tumaco, 8 March and 15 June 2017; international organisation representative, Tumaco, 10 May 2017. "Capturan a 15 funcionarios de la Fiscalía por corrupción", *El Tiempo*, 28 March 2017. All fifteen suspects have been remanded in custody to await trial.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interviews, military and police officials, Bogotá, 13 July and 16 August 2017.

⁸⁸ "La ACR fortalece su institucionalidad y pasa a ser la Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización (ARN)", Agencia para la Reincorporación y Normalización, 2 June 2017.

⁸⁹ In the cantonment in Mesetas, Meta, FARC members showed Crisis Group a massive hole dug for a fish farm. The closest market town was hours away and far too small to support profitable production. Crisis Group field work, Mesetas, Meta, 27 June 2017. Crisis Group interviews, government official, Bogotá, 27 July 2017; senior diplomat, Bogotá, 25 August 2017. Pastor Alape, "FARC perspective on reincorporation", speech at "La Vida Después de las Armas", Crisis Group conference, Bogotá, 29 June 2017. "La reincorporación de las Farc va a paso de tortuga", *Semana*, 12 August 2017.

created by the peace agreement and which includes FARC and government representatives, has not been able to date to design a general FARC reincorporation plan.⁹⁰ The naming of María Lorena Gutiérrez, a close Santos ally, to coordinate the committee may give it more impetus. But it will be hard to overcome differences between the guerrillas, who are politically committed to cooperative projects, and government officials, who remain highly sceptical. Unless they reach to an agreement, reincorporation efforts could remain limited to ad hoc development and education projects, including literacy training, and the payment of monthly benefits.

Keeping ex-FARC fighters in their former cantonments to preserve the cohesion necessary for collective reintegration will be a challenge in these circumstances. Mid-level commanders, with experience in controlling territory and trafficking drugs, as well as certain rank-and-file FARC members, could abandon the organisation entirely. Some frustrated FARC members have reportedly already left cantonments in the wake of delays in framing the reincorporation plan. Many will be tempted to join the remaining FARC dissidents, the ELN or the EPL unless ex-fighters can look forward to an alternative livelihood.⁹¹ Differential approaches based on gender, rank and ethnicity could help make reincorporation more attractive, given the FARC's internal makeup.⁹² Furthermore, FARC leaders should continue trying to convince dissidents to rejoin the peace process, while providing the state with information on those who resist the offer.⁹³

Similar plans to demobilise Colombia's other armed groups are also essential. The Gaitanista leader, Otoniel, recently stated that his forces would be willing to surrender to the judicial system, while demanding some guarantees of leniency.⁹⁴ But the process is far from simple. It is also not clear how much of the organisation Otoniel controls, given internal divisions and the Gaitanistas' use of both uniformed fighters and subcontracted gangs. The process would also need to be complemented by a strategy to ensure the Gaitanistas' territory and illegal activities are not captured by other armed actors.

To speed the process, the Colombian government should fast track the passage of a law detailing what such armed actors can expect if they turn themselves into the justice system. Since the Gaitanistas are considered party to an internal armed conflict, commitments similar to those used in transitional and restorative justice processes would be appropriate, such as reduced prison sentences in exchange for handing

⁹⁰ Under the peace accord a cooperative known as Ecomun will eventually handle FARC reincorporation projects.

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, government official, Bogotá, 27 July 2017. Eduardo Álvarez Vanegas, "Y después de 'Cadete'...¿qué?", op. cit.

⁹² "Caracterización comunidad FARC-EP: Resultados generales", Universidad Nacional de Colombia, op. cit.

⁹³ Alias Mojoso, after handing himself in, was allowed to join the FARC again. "Alexander Mojoso ex-comandante del 14 Frente, retorna a las FARC-EP", op. cit. The FARC also provided information on a dissident faction of the 29th Front, leading to five arrests. "Detienen a cinco disidentes de las Farc en Nariño", *El Espectador*, 25 July 2017. There are reports of meetings between FARC fronts and dissidents in which each side agreed to respect the other's position. Crisis Group interviews, human rights activists, San José del Guaviare and Bogotá, 3 April and 7 September 2017; international organisation representative, Bogotá, 6 June 2017.

⁹⁴ "La historia detrás del sometimiento del Clan del Golfo", *Semana*, 9 September 2017.

over illicitly obtained assets, information on the drug trade and a commitment to truth-telling about and reparations for the group's victims. None of these would mean giving the Gaitanistas political status.⁹⁵

The case of the EPL is different. Given its political ideology and local reputation as a guerrilla organisation, the force is unlikely to submit to Colombia's judicial system. Second-generation disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) schemes, such as weapons for development, should be considered. An offer to the EPL to disarm, tell the truth, face reduced judicial punishment and contribute to reparations for victims, in exchange for economic and political development initiatives in Catatumbo, would put pressure on the group to prove it is not just a drug trafficking organisation. The government would also avoid direct political negotiations; it is adamant that it will not carry out a peace process like that with the FARC with either the EPL or Gaitanistas.⁹⁶

As a general rule, the government should base such strategies on the identity of each armed group, the territory where it operates, its relationship with local communities and internal cohesion. Focusing on armed groups' identity and territorial footprint would allow the government to offer enticements tailored to each group, such as specific initiatives in areas where that group operates. Understanding how these groups interact with communities can strengthen plans by ensuring they fill any potential void in local economic and political power. Finally, ensuring plans are adapted to each group's level of internal cohesion can help set more realistic expectations regarding potential security gains from a submission to justice initiative.

C. *Taking on Illegal Economies*

Colombia's fight against illegal economies is integral to its stability. The success or failure of efforts to combat both coca production and illegal mining, therefore, will have major security implications. In principle, both should enable local populations to shift from illegal activities protected by non-state armed actors to legal work and increased dependence on the state.

1. Crop substitution

The Colombian government intends to substitute legal crops for 50,000 hectares of coca this year. Under close scrutiny from the political opposition and the U.S. government, which has threatened to decertify Colombia for failing to combat drug supply, the government also has promised to forcibly eradicate another 50,000 hectares.⁹⁷ In August 2017, speaking alongside U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, President Santos stated that 27,000 hectares had been forcibly eradicated since January and 12,000 hectares removed through voluntary crop substitution.

The crop substitution program offers farmers who grow coca, marijuana or poppy two-year voluntary agreements. Signatories will receive around \$12,000 for imme-

⁹⁵ "Gobierno estudiaría la no extradición de jefes del 'clan Úsuga'", *El Tiempo*, 9 September 2017.

⁹⁶ On second generation DDR, see "Second generation disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) practices in peace operations", UN, 10 January 2010.

⁹⁷ "Presidential Memorandum for the Secretary of State", 13 September 2017. The consequences of decertification vary, but generally include the withdrawal of most U.S. foreign assistance to the country.

diate needs as well as technical support for long-term farming projects and short-term initiatives if they uproot their illegal crops between the first and second stipend payments. Officials are pushing to increase the number of families who receive payments to reach the goals for coca reduction before the end of 2017.⁹⁸

But the program faces several hurdles. First, there is a mismatch between the short timeline for coca reduction and the longer timeline needed for rural reform. The peace accord stipulates that the success of the two-year coca substitution program partially depends on a ten-to-fifteen-year reform plan aimed at transforming Colombia's rural economy, especially initiatives to improve infrastructure, assure market access and provide better public services.⁹⁹ Dissatisfied farmers could return to coca cultivation before these changes materialise. The government elected in 2018 may face frustrated former coca growers and respond by choosing to simply starve the substitution program financially and politically.¹⁰⁰

Second, implementing the program has generated high tensions in coca growing areas. Poor coordination between forced eradication and substitution efforts has led to conflicts between state forces, who claim to be eradicating industrial-size crops not eligible for substitution programs, and communities claiming the crops belong to small-scale growers who have expressed an interest in taking part in crop substitution. In one ominous recent incident in rural Tumaco, security forces were reported to have killed between six and fourteen coca growers and wounded dozens more during eradication efforts.¹⁰¹ There are still no clear criteria to distinguish between the two sorts of coca crops, although a government committee involving various state agencies has been working on the issue.¹⁰²

Third, coca eradication in areas under the control of armed groups could strengthen them politically. Forcible removal would corroborate their anti-government discourse, encouraging coca farmers to seek their protection. In Meta and Guaviare, where the dissident First and Seventh Fronts operate, some coca growers whose crops have been destroyed or are under threat of eradication have displayed precisely this reaction.¹⁰³ Armed groups also have pressured local leaders to oppose crop substitution, sometimes threatening reprisals. In Catatumbo and Tumaco, for example, armed groups have menaced whole communities.¹⁰⁴ The FARC, meanwhile, is using its role

⁹⁸ "Declaración del Presidente Juan Manuel Santos al término de su encuentro con el Vicepresidente de Estados Unidos, Mike Pence", Cancillería de Colombia, 13 August 2017. Crisis Group interviews, expert on U.S.-Colombia relations, Washington DC, 11 August 2017; crop substitution expert, Bogotá, 17 August 2017.

⁹⁹ That said, the government's "50 for 51" plan seeks to improve road conditions along 50km in 51 municipalities during 2017 and 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interviews, coca cultivation experts, Cúcuta and Bogotá, 14 and 17 August 2017.

¹⁰¹ Coca growers in the affected region were reported to have requested participation in the substitution program, but without success. The police have argued that FARC dissidents engaged in the defence of the coca farmers. "Un problema duro de erradicar", *El Espectador*, 8 October 2017.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Bogotá, 28 April and 17 August 2017; international organisation representative, San José del Guaviare, 3 April 2017; coca growers, San José del Guaviare, 3 April 2017; drug trafficking expert, 17 August 2017.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interviews, community leader, San José del Guaviare and El Retorno, 3 April and 2 September 2017; human rights activist, Bogotá, 7 September 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interviews, community leader, Tumaco, 10 May 2017; coca cultivation expert, Cúcuta, 14 August 2017.

as co-sponsor of the program to carry out patronage politics, promising crop substitution benefits in exchange for joining its favoured local organisations.¹⁰⁵

Finally, financial constraints could limit the program. The government estimates that 170,000 families may sign substitution agreements, entailing an outlay of some \$2 billion over two years. Very little of that money is available under current budgets. Nor has the international community provided financial support, either because this is not regarded as a priority or because of legal restrictions on giving money to farmers who still have coca, or concerns that resources could end up in the hands of the FARC.¹⁰⁶ Colombia's success in seizing a record amount of cocaine in 2016 should at least help persuade the international community, above all the U.S., to show patience in allowing for the coca substitution program to generate lasting effects in rural zones.¹⁰⁷ In particular, donors should look for ways to fund technical support projects that support post-conflict development goals in rural areas; this would allow them to avoid contributing to direct payments for former coca growers.¹⁰⁸

Despite these challenges, crop substitution is progressing. As of August, some 3,500 families had received their first monthly stipend, and the government is looking to lift these numbers rapidly. Additional measures, such as providing land titles for coca farmers, could help change the way farmers view their property and place in society.¹⁰⁹ But to achieve these goals, the government as a whole needs to make a firm and lasting commitment to goals beyond immediate crop reduction – including broader rural reform – and to secure further international support in the process.

2. Illegal mining

The fight against illegal mining poses a different set of problems. Led by the rural police force, DICAR, and its illegal mining unit, which includes 450 people, the campaign depends on cooperation by other government bodies, including the army's Anti-illegal Mining Brigade. Civilian authorities must be present whenever the police destroy illegal mining machinery.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interviews, community leaders, Puerto Asís, 27 February 2017; international community representative, Valle del Guamuéz, 2 March 2017; community leader, Tumaco, 15 May 2017; community leaders, San José del Guaviare, 3 April 2017; Miraflores, Guaviare, 6 April 2017. "La política detrás de la sustitución de cultivos", *La Silla Vacía*, 18 June 2017.

¹⁰⁶ "Consumo en EE.UU. también llevó al alza de cultivos de coca", *Semana*, 15 June 2017. Crisis Group interview, crop substitution expert, Bogotá, 17 August 2017.

¹⁰⁷ In 2016, Colombia reported seizing a record 300 metric tons of cocaine. How much of the total crop this represents is a matter of debate. See Mimi Yagoub, "Challenging the Cocaine Figures, Part II: Colombia", *Insight Crime*, 17 November 2016.

¹⁰⁸ "Colombia: Monitoreo de territorios afectados por cultivos ilícitos 2016", op. cit., p. 11. "Costa Rica officials warn of growing maritime drug trade amid cocaine surge", *Insight Crime*, 16 May 2017. Daniel Rico, Juan Carlos Garzón and Julián Wilches, "Cómo afectar el narcotráfico sin concentrarse en la mata de coca", *La Silla Vacía*, 6 March 2017. Crisis Group interview, navy officer, Bogotá, 18 July 2017; drug trafficking expert, Bogotá, 17 August 2017.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interviews, coca cultivation experts, Cúcuta and Bogotá, 14 and 17 August 2017.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, DICAR official, Bogotá, 26 April 2017. "Normatividad General Para El Control a La Explotación Ilícita De Minerales", Mining and Energy Ministry, April 2017. "Decreto Número 2235 de 2012", Defence Ministry, 30 October 2012.

There are various proposals to grant authorities wider powers to charge and penalise those taking part in criminal mining, either directly or by, for example, renting land for such purposes. Statistics show that police are making more arrests related to illegal mining and destroying more machinery. But there is a flip side: communities that depend on illegal mines could be further estranged from the state, turning to armed groups for protection. To avoid this, the government should accelerate the current process to register and formalise small-scale miners, which would protect them from state actions against criminal mining and undermine illegal actors' ability to use informal miners as a conduit for money laundering.¹¹¹

Also, local authorities are responsible for taking certain punitive actions against illegal mining. However, in many cases they do not have the resources or the political will to do so, often due to corruption.¹¹² To force regional and local authorities' hands, the Constitutional Court recently ordered the government to define its strategy against illegal gold mining in Chocó; it calls on different government institutions to create a "plan to give regional entities sufficient tools, in terms of institutional capacity, financial resources and personnel" to fight illegal mining.¹¹³ If the Chocó plan shows results, it should be studied and adjusted for application elsewhere.

D. *Responding to Local Social Demands*

Local dispute resolution is one of the most effective ways for Colombia's armed groups to gain community support and legitimacy. All the groups studied here resolve disputes in territories under their control, though generally with a highly authoritarian style of justice.¹¹⁴ To win local legitimacy, the state needs to offer or improve its own mechanisms.

Local access to state judicial mechanisms is insufficient and in some areas non-existent. The public prosecutor has offices in only 453 municipalities (out of 1,101) in 2014; most are in urban centres that rural inhabitants find hard to reach. Alternatives to the court system are needed, and models already exist in some places. In roughly 90 municipalities, 108 Justice Houses bring together national and local bodies as well as formal and informal judicial actors to offer services and information. These Justice Houses promote "alternative mechanisms of conflict resolution", though their efforts are undermined by uncertain local funding and lack of coordination between the national-level institutions involved.¹¹⁵ A process known as "conciliation" is

¹¹¹ See proposed laws: 169 of 2016 (Senate), 137 of 2016 (Senate), and 111 of 2016 (House). The latter two have been strongly criticised by the High Council of Criminal Policy. Estudio a los proyectos de ley no. 111 de 2016 (Cámara) and y no. 137 de 2016 (Senado), High Council of Criminal Policy, 6 October 2016. "Logros de la Política de Defensa y Seguridad Todos por un Nuevo País", Defence Ministry, July 2017, pp. 60-63. Crisis Group interview, DICAR official, Bogotá, 26 April 2017.

¹¹² "Corrupción: la aliada de la minería ilegal", *El Espectador*, 17 February 2017.

¹¹³ "Sentencia T-622/16", Colombian Constitutional Court, 10 November 2016.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group fieldwork, Barranquillita, Miraflores, Guaviare, 6 April 2017. Crisis Group interviews, local resident, El Retorno, Guaviare, 10 April 2017; human rights activist and international organisation representative, Quidbó, 29 August 2017. Mario Águilera Peña, *Contrapoder y justicia guerrillera, fragmentación política y orden insurgente en Colombia (1952-2003)* (Bogotá, 2014).

¹¹⁵ Mauricio Vargas, José Rafael Espinosa Restrepo, Sebastián Lalinde Ordóñez, Lina Arroyave Velásquez, and Carolina Villadiego Burbando, *Casas de justicia: Una buena idea mal administrada*,

also used throughout Colombia, allowing parties to resolve small problems without a formal judicial process.¹¹⁶ Once an agreement is reached, trained conciliators write a legally binding act with commitments from each side. Police inspectors also can mediate, are often respected by locals, and can take punitive measures in certain cases.¹¹⁷

Some agreements reached through conciliation suffer from enforcement problems in conflict-affected areas because no state body can swiftly coerce the parties into compliance. If a person does not fulfil his or her commitments, the case can be sent to the formal judicial system where enforcement tends to be exceptionally slow. While the police have begun a mediation program in twelve big cities, their ability to convince people to fulfil their commitments might not extend to conflict-affected areas, where the force is often lacking in legitimacy.¹¹⁸

In Tibú, Norte de Santander, only one of the 92 community leaders trained as conciliators in 2005 is still working, and relies on income from other jobs to make ends meet. This situation is repeated throughout much of Colombia's rural periphery.¹¹⁹ Better training and economic incentives, such as scholarships, stipends for transportation or improvements in housing, could help. But for this to happen, government officials will have to start treating conciliators not merely as a cost-saving device that can reduce pressure on the formal justice system, but as a model for satisfying communities' demands where the state is weak.¹²⁰

E. *Negotiations with the ELN*

Negotiations between the government and ELN in Quito have been mired in mutual mistrust, ongoing violence, and disunity within the guerrilla movement. The agenda remains undefined, despite pressure to reach an agreement before the 2018 elections since there is no guarantee the next president will continue the talks. The negotiations nevertheless received a boost when both sides reached agreement on a temporary ceasefire, which began on 1 October and will last until 9 January, and will be verified by the second UN mission.¹²¹

Dejusticia, (Bogotá, 2015). Crisis Group interviews, judicial experts, Bogotá, 25 May and 12 July 2017. "Responsabilidades", Ministerio de Justicia: Casas de Justicia, n.d.

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, government official, Bogotá, 14 July 2017.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, community leaders, Tumaco, 12, 17, 18 May 2017; mediator, government official and Church official, Tibú, 15 August 2017. The police inspectors' mandate is defined in various laws and decrees, the most recent of which is the new police code. "Ley 1801 de 2016", Colombian Congress, 29 July 2016.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, community leaders, Tumaco, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18 May 2017; conciliator, Tibú, 15 August 2017; judicial system experts, Bogotá, 25 May and 12 July 2017. "Sedes de los Centros de Conciliación y Mediación de la Policía Nacional", Policía Nacional, n.d.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, community leaders, Tumaco, 12, 17, 18 May 2017; conciliator, government official and church official, Tibú, 15 August 2017; international organisation representatives, Cúcuta, 14 August 2017 and Quibdó, 29 August 2017.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, government official, Bogotá, 23 August 2017. DNP, *Análisis Conceptual del Sistema Nacional de Conciliación en Colombia en sus 25 años: Construyendo diálogo y paz para el futuro*, (Bogotá, 2015).

¹²¹ Under the terms of the ceasefire, the ELN will have to cease kidnappings, attacks against infrastructure, including oil pipelines, child recruitment and use of antipersonnel mines. The government will strengthen measures to protect social leaders, carry out a humanitarian program with jailed

The ELN peace talks face the same challenges as those with the FARC: they need to achieve sufficient progress to make the political cost of changing course in 2018 prohibitively high. This means reducing the conflict's intensity and ending violations of international humanitarian law. The ceasefire, although temporary, is an important step in this direction; now agreement is needed on point 5.f regarding "humanitarian actions and dynamics", which looks to reduce conflict intensity and its effect on victims in the longer run. Extending the ceasefire and making progress on humanitarian issues before upcoming Congressional elections in March 2018 could provide political incentives to continue the talks, and help persuade the public to support further negotiations.

The ceasefire will be most difficult to guarantee in areas where the ELN is in open conflict with other armed groups, such as Chocó and Nariño. Violent ELN reactions to other armed actors may not violate the ceasefire, but will stir mistrust toward the ELN in Colombia's urban population. The ELN leadership states it will carry out internal discussions to explain the ceasefire, but its federal structure and high degree of internal autonomy may limit the effect of these talks.¹²² Critically, the Western War Front, based in Chocó, should honour its commitment to send a representative to the negotiating table during ceasefire implementation; this should increase the likelihood that it will remain in compliance despite conflict with the Gaitanistas.

ELN members, hasten application of new laws on protests, and carry out meetings with civil society leaders related to the ELN peace process. "Acuerdo y comunicado sobre el cese al fuego bilateral y temporal entre el Gobierno y el ELN", Colombian government, 4 September 2017. There is also apparently a private, more technical document with specific military commitments.

¹²² "Eln hará pedagogía sobre el cese en todos sus frentes: Restrepo", *El Espectador*, 5 September 2017. The ELN has justified kidnapping outsiders, for example, as necessary to protect communities where the group operates, falsely alleging it is part of their fulfilment of international humanitarian law. Crisis Group electronic communication, Radio Nacional – Patria Libre, 20 June 2017.

V. A Role for the International Community

Only recently has the international community begun to focus on addressing the security challenges still facing Colombia, though international organisations have already played a key role in the peace process. The UN mission is especially important, serving as the central political actor charged with verifying and monitoring progress on security in post-conflict communities.¹²³ While the UN mission risks being exposed to internal and external political pressure over its reporting on security conditions, it must continue to provide the Colombian government and public with a candid, evidence-based assessment of realities on the ground.

The 2003-2006 paramilitary demobilisation demonstrated that international organisations such as the Mission to Support the Peace Process of the Organisation of American States (MAPP-OEA) and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also can help promote frank debate on these issues and pressure the government to recognise the true scale of security threats, exactly as they did a decade ago when they publicly reported the presence and growth of armed groups that arose in the wake of the demobilisation.¹²⁴ Thanks to their robust presence in Colombia's outlying regions, these organisations can do the same again, while also supporting the UN mission through information sharing.

The international community is strikingly absent in the area of crop substitution.¹²⁵ While the issue is politically and legally troublesome for some international actors, all agree that high levels of coca production hinder the consolidation of peace. Additionally, since the early 2000s, many international actors have been pushing for a development-based approach to coca cultivation, which is essentially what the peace agreement and crop substitution program delineate. As discussed, the program suffers from underfunding and would benefit from financial assistance to help coca growers engage in productive projects, receive technical support and implement household food security projects.

¹²³ Crisis Group interviews, senior diplomats, Bogotá, 18 and 25 August 2017. "United Nations Security Council Resolution 2366 (2017)", UN, 10 July 2017.

¹²⁴ "La nueva guerra de Uribe", *Semana*, 16 March 2009.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, senior diplomats, Bogotá, 11 and 25 August 2017.

VI. Conclusion

Colombia has made progress on security since the FARC gathered its fighters in camps and began handing over its weapons. Yet these improvements are neither uniform nor stable. In some conflict-affected regions little has changed. Political polarisation over the merits of the peace deal, coupled with pressure on the government to broadcast consistently positive results, has undermined impartial coverage of emerging security threats within Colombian society and inside the government. Yet the evidence now shows that FARC dissident groups, organised crime groups of differing scales and the ELN still control territory or are looking to do so in the face of selective state resistance.

Still, the state response is taking shape. The Defence Ministry has crafted sophisticated plans to occupy territory vacated by the FARC and combat organised crime, even though they are progressing more slowly than anticipated or hoped for. Accelerating implementation of these plans, and adapting them to the specific challenges posed by each territory and armed group, will help ensure that other parts of the peace accord, notably coca crop substitution, rural development programs and reincorporation of FARC fighters, can be undertaken in more peaceful conditions. This is vital to ensure that the government to be elected in 2018 continues to honour the agreement.

Security, though, is not only a product of state coercion. The Colombian government is in a fight for territorial control, especially over border regions and river deltas. It finds itself continually hampered by the huge monetary incentives of illegal economic activity and the difficulties of curbing corruption. Armed groups flourish wherever they can claim to provide protection and justice for communities, and they tend to find their most willing partners and subjects in areas where locals fear the state and depend on illicit economic activity for their livelihoods. As the government looks to expand its control, it will need to focus not just on the use of coercion, but on providing protection for communities, substituting illicit economies with alternative means of development and resolving local disputes. Failure to meet any of these undertakings will open the door for illegal armed groups. The deployment of military and police units in post-conflict territories provides a window of opportunity that the state should not squander.

Bogotá/Brussels, 19 October 2017

Appendix A: Map of Colombia



Appendix B: Maps of Key Post-conflict Regions

Map of Chocó



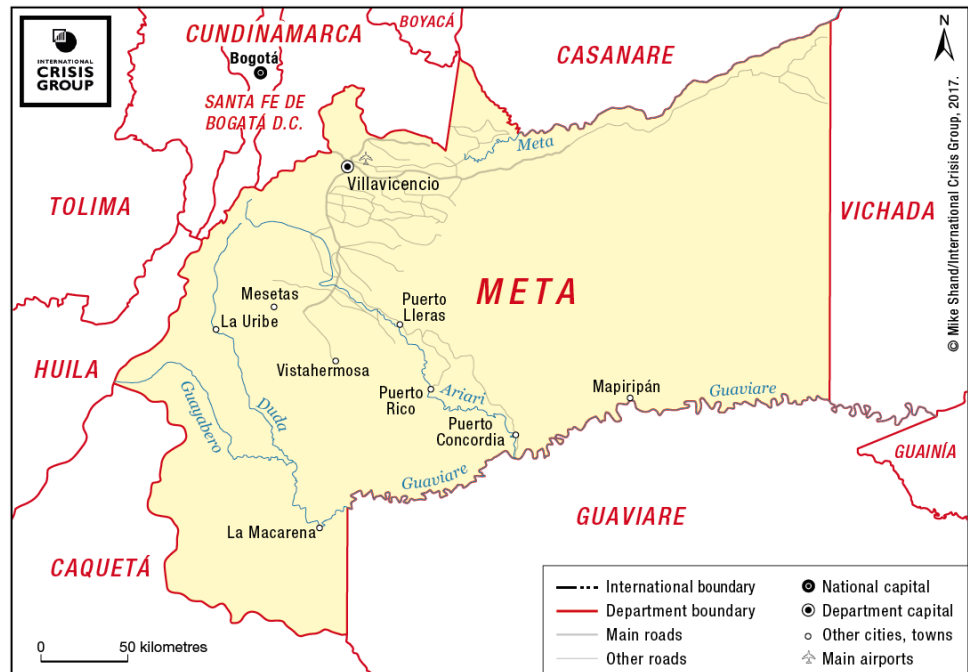
Map of Caquetá



Map of Guaviare



Map of Meta



Map of Nariño



Map of Norte de Santander



Appendix C: Map of Armed Groups and Coca Crops in Colombia, 2017



Appendix D: Reported Crimes in Colombia, 2016-2017

Crime	Areas	Jan – June 2016	Jan – June 2017	Difference (in %)
Homicides	Unaffected by conflict	4,979	4,465	-10
	Conflict-affected	1,011	1,164	15
	Total	5,990	5,629	-6
Threats	Unaffected by conflict	17,802	11,517	-35
	Conflict-affected	2,631	2,015	-23
	Total	20,433	13,532	-34
Extortion	Unaffected by conflict	2,610	1,448	-45
	Conflict-affected	464	300	-35
	Total	3,074	1,748	-43
Terrorism	Unaffected by conflict	51	23	-55
	Conflict-affected	45	23	-55
	Total	96	46	-52
Kidnappings	Unaffected by conflict	98	63	-36
	Conflict-affected	24	37	54
	Total	122	100	-18

Source: Data from National Police, in Katherine Aguirre, "Violencia y criminalidad tras la implementación de los acuerdos de paz", Razón Pública, 16 July 2017.

Appendix E: Confirmed and Alleged FARC Dissident Groups, 2017

Confirmed Dissident Faction	FARC Units Involved in Faction	Leader	Area of Operation	Estimated Size
First Front	1, 16 and Acacio Medina	Ivan Mordisco	Guaviare, Vaupes, Guanía, Vichada and southeast Meta and Caquetá	300-400
Seventh Front	7, 14 and 62	Gentil Duarte	Southern Meta, Caquetá, northwest Guaviare	70-100
40th Front	40	Calarcá	Western Meta	40-60
GUP	Daniel Aldana Mobile Column	David	Nariño	250-350
Ejército Patria Libre	6	Previously Simón el negro, killed in June 2017	Northern Cauca	N/A
Jacobo Arenas Mobile Column	Jacobo Arenas Mobile Column	Pija	Northern Cauca	80-100
29th Front	29	Previously Vaca, killed by own troops in August	Nariño	N/A
Ché Guevara Front	ELN and 29	N/A	Nariño	N/A
Guacho's Group	Daniel Aldana Mobile Column	Guacho	Tumaco	N/A
Previously Confirmed, Now Unclear	Front	Leader	Area of Operation	Estimated Size
32nd Front	32	Caballo	Putumayo	N/A
Miller Perdomo Mobile Column	MPMC	N/A	Northern Cauca	N/A
17th Front	17	Benjamin	Huila	10
Teófilo Forero Mobile Column	TFMC	N/A	Northern Caquetá	N/A
Reported but Never Confirmed	Front	Leader	Area of Operation	Estimated Size
57th Front	57	N/A	Northern Choco	N/A
21st Front	21	N/A	Tolima	N/A
48th Front	48	N/A	Southern Putumayo	N/A
3rd Front	3	N/A	Northern Cauca	N/A

Source: Crisis Group, 2017.

Appendix F: Coca Cultivation in Colombia by Region, 2001-2016 (in hectares)

Department	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Amazonas	532	783	625	783	897	692	541	836	312	338	122	98	110	173	111	167
Antioquia	3,171	3,029	4,273	5,168	6,414	6,156	9,926	6,096	5,096	5,350	3,104	2,725	991	2,293	2,402	8,855
Arauca	2,749	2,215	539	1,552	1,883	1,306	2,116	447	430	247	132	82	69	25	17	9
Bolívar	4,824	2,735	4,470	3,401	3,670	2,382	5,632	5,847	5,346	3,324	2,207	1,968	925	1,565	1,044	4,094
Boyacá	245	118	594	359	342	441	79	197	204	105	93	10	17	14	8	15
Caldas			54	358	189	461	56	187	186	46	46	16	8	0	0	0
Caquetá	14,516	8,412	7,230	6,500	4,988	4,967	6,318	4,303	3,985	2,578	3,327	3,694	4,322	6,542	7,712	9,343
Cauca	3,139	2,121	1,443	1,265	2,705	2,105	4,168	5,422	6,597	5,908	6,066	4,327	3,326	6,389	8,660	12,595
César							5					12	13	10	32	26
Chocó	354		453	323	1,025	816	1,080	2,794	1,789	3,158	2,511	3,429	1,661	1,741	1,489	1,803
Córdoba	652	385	838	1,535	3,136	1,216	1,858	1,710	3,113	3,889	1,088	1,046	439	560	1,363	2,668
Cundinamarca	22	57	57	72	56	120	131	12		32	18			0	0	0
Guainía	1,318	748	726	721	752	753	623	625	606	446	318	301	81	66	37	22
Guaviare	25,553	27,380	16,163	9,770	8,658	9,477	9,299	6,629	8,660	5,701	6,839	3,851	4,725	5,658	5,423	6,838
La Guajira	385	354	275	556	329	166	87	160	182	134	16	10	6	0	0	0
Magdalena	480	644	484	706	213	271	278	391	169	121	46	37	37	9	7	35
Meta	11,425	9,219	12,814	18,740	17,305	11,063	10,386	5,525	4,469	3,008	3,040	2,699	2,898	5,042	5,002	5,464
Nariño	7,494	15,132	17,628	14,154	13,875	15,607	20,259	19,612	17,639	15,951	17,231	10,733	13,177	17,285	29,755	42,627
Norte de Santander	9,145	8,042	4,471	3,056	844	488	1,946	2,886	3,037	1,889	3,490	4,516	6,345	6,944	11,527	24,831
Putumayo	47,120	13,726	7,559	4,386	8,963	12,253	14,813	9,658	5,633	4,785	9,951	6,148	7,667	13,609	20,068	25,162
Santander	415	465	632	1,124	981	866	1,325	1,791	1,066	673	595	110	77	26	21	37
Valle del Cauca	184	111	37	45	28	281	453	2,089	997	665	981	482	398	561	690	752
Vaupés	1,918	1,486	1,157	1,084	671	460	307	557	395	721	277	254	184	109	33	97
Vichada	9,166	4,909	3,818	4,692	7,826	5,523	7,218	3,174	3,228	2,743	2,264	1,242	713	511	683	699
National Total	144,807	102,071	86,340	80,350	85,750	77,870	98,899	80,953	73,139	61,812	63,762	47,790	48,189	69,132	96,084	146,139

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Colombia: Monitoreo de territorios afectados por cultivos ilícitos 2016", July 2017, p. 214.

Appendix G: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown. Its Vice Chair is Ayo Obe, a Legal Practitioner, Columnist and TV Presenter in Nigeria.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, served as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013.

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October 2017

Appendix H: Reports and Briefings on Latin America since 2014

Special Reports

Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

Left in the Cold? The ELN and Colombia's Peace Talks, Latin America Report N°51, 26 February 2014 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Tipping Point, Latin America Briefing N°30, 21 May 2014 (also available in Spanish).

Corridor of Violence: The Guatemala-Honduras Border, Latin America Report N°52, 4 June 2014 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Dangerous Inertia, Latin America Briefing N°31, 23 September 2014 (also available in Spanish).

The Day after Tomorrow: Colombia's FARC and the End of the Conflict, Latin America Report N°53, 11 December 2014 (also available in Spanish).

Back from the Brink: Saving Ciudad Juárez, Latin America Report N°54, 25 February 2015 (also available in Spanish).

On Thinner Ice: The Final Phase of Colombia's Peace Talks, Latin America Briefing N°32, 2 July 2015 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Unnatural Disaster, Latin America Briefing N°33, 30 July 2015 (also available in Spanish).

Disappeared: Justice Denied in Mexico's Guerrero State, Latin America Report N°55, 23 October 2015 (also available in Spanish).

The End of Hegemony: What Next for Venezuela?, Latin America Briefing N°34, 21 December 2015 (also available in Spanish).

Crutch to Catalyst? The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, Latin America Report N°56, 29 January 2016 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Edge of the Precipice, Latin America Briefing N°35, 23 June 2016 (also available in Spanish).

Easy Prey: Criminal Violence and Central American Migration, Latin America Report N°57, 28 July 2016 (also available in Spanish).

Colombia's Final Steps to the End of War, Latin America Report N°58, 7 September 2016 (also available in Spanish).

Venezuela: Tough Talking, Latin America Report N°59, 16 December 2016 (also available in Spanish).

In the Shadow of "No": Peace after Colombia's Plebiscite, Latin America Report N°60, 31 January 2017 (also available in Spanish).

Veracruz: Fixing Mexico's State of Terror, Latin America Report N°61, 28 February 2017 (also available in Spanish).

Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America, Latin America Report N°62, 6 April 2017 (also available in Spanish).

Power without the People: Averting Venezuela's Breakdown, Latin America Briefing N°36, 19 June 2017 (also available in Spanish).

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