

Colombia's Stumbling Peace Process: How Supportive Should Canada Be?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent trip to South America by Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy suggests that Colombia's internal issues have now captured the attention of the Canadian government. The visit was timely, as it gave the Canadian Foreign Minister the occasion to assess the gravity of the internal war unfolding in Colombia. Indeed, 18 months after President Pastrana came to office, prospects for peace in this country have never appeared so dim. While Canada has traditionally devoted little attention to the Colombian crisis, Minister Axworthy now seems prepared to support more actively the peace process initiated by President Pastrana. The main challenge for Canada will be to reconcile its commitments for a more prosperous and peaceful hemisphere with its own modest foreign policy capacity. The extraordinary complexity of the Colombian internal crisis might make it even more difficult for Canada to adopt a clear stance on the issues at stake. The basic questions are: what can Canada contribute, and how supportive should it be? The following analysis discusses the main challenges and obstacles to a greater Canadian participation in the current Colombian peace process, and suggests that Canada:

- should assess the complexity of Colombia's internal issues and the potential consequences of any foreign participation;
- should engage the international community by making use of its seat at the United Nations Security Council to engage like-minded countries and raise the profile of this issue among the Permanent Members;
- should help refining, complementing, and counter-balancing United States' approach to Colombia's internal issues;
- should weigh the importance of Colombia's internal conflict and its potential impact on the ability of Colombia to play an active role in the Summit process and hemispheric integration;
- could reallocate existing Canadian International Development Agency's resources to meet Colombia's most pressing needs.

RÉSUMÉ

La récente visite en Amérique du Sud du ministre des Affaires étrangères du Canada, Lloyd Axworthy, montre que la situation intérieure en Colombie retient désormais l'attention du gouvernement canadien. Cette visite est tombée à point nommé car elle a donné au ministre canadien des Affaires étrangères l'occasion d'évaluer la gravité du conflit interne qui déchire la Colombie. De fait, dix-huit mois après l'arrivée au pouvoir du président Pastrana, les perspectives de paix en Colombie n'ont jamais paru aussi minces. Même si le Canada a porté traditionnellement peu d'attention à la crise colombienne, le ministre Axworthy semble prêt à jouer un rôle plus actif dans le processus de paix lancé par le président Pastrana. Le plus grand défi que devra relever le Canada consistera à concilier sa volonté de promouvoir la paix et la prospérité dans l'hémisphère avec les moyens limités de sa politique étrangère. L'extraordinaire complexité de la crise intérieure colombienne rend encore plus difficile pour le Canada d'adopter une position claire par rapport aux enjeux en Colombie. Les grandes questions qui se posent sont les suivantes : dans quelle

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mesure le Canada peut-il contribuer et quel soutien peut-il apporter? L'analyse qui suit aborde les principaux enjeux et obstacles à une participation plus importante au processus de paix actuel en Colombie, et laisse penser que le Canada devrait :

- évaluer la complexité de la situation intérieure en Colombie ainsi que les conséquences potentielles de toute participation étrangère;
- mobiliser la communauté internationale en profitant de son siège au Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies pour encourager les pays qui partagent ses idées à intervenir, et pour amener les membres permanents à se pencher davantage sur ce problème;
- raffiner, compléter et contrebalancer la démarche des États-Unis dans la situation intérieure en Colombie;
- mesurer l'importance du conflit intérieur en Colombie et ses répercussions potentielles sur la capacité de ce pays à jouer un rôle actif dans les réunions du Sommet des Amériques et dans l'intégration hémisphérique;
- réaffecter les ressources existantes de l'Agence canadienne de développement international pour répondre aux besoins les plus urgents de la Colombie.

RESUMEN

El reciente recorrido que realizara por Sudamérica el Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores de Canadá, Lloyd Axworthy, es un indicador de que los temas internos de Colombia han atraído la atención del gobierno canadiense. La visita fue muy oportuna ya que brindó al Ministro la oportunidad de evaluar la gravedad de la guerra interna que se viene desplegando en Colombia. Luego de 18 meses de la llegada al poder del Presidente Andrés Pastrana, las perspectivas de alcanzar la paz en este país se debilitan cada vez más. A pesar de que Canadá nunca ha prestado mucha atención a la crisis colombiana, el Ministro Axworthy parece más resuelto a desempeñar un papel más activo de apoyo al proceso de paz iniciado por el Presidente Pastrana. El principal reto que deberá enfrentar Canadá será conciliar sus compromisos por un hemisferio más próspero y pacífico con su modesta capacidad en política exterior. La extraordinaria complejidad de la crisis interna en Colombia podría plantear una dificultad aún mayor para Canadá a la hora de adoptar una postura coherente con respecto a los temas en cuestión. Las principales interrogantes que nos asaltan son: qué puede aportar Canadá y, cuánto apoyo debería brindar. Más adelante se ofrece un análisis de los principales retos y obstáculos que deberá enfrentar Canadá en su mayor vinculación con el actual proceso de paz en Colombia y se sugiere que Canadá:

- Analice la complejidad de la crisis interna colombiana y las posibles consecuencias de cualquier intromisión externa;
- Desde su puesto en el Consejo de Seguridad de las Naciones Unidas deberá involucrar a los países de la comunidad internacional que tienen similares criterios y poner el asunto a consideración de los Miembros Permanentes;
- Deberá ayudar a definir, complementar, y contrapesar el enfoque norteamericano sobre los asuntos internos de Colombia;
- Deberá valorar la relevancia del conflicto interno en Colombia y su posible impacto en la capacidad colombiana de desempeñar un papel más dinámico en el proceso de las Cumbres y la integración hemisférica;
- Podría reorientar recursos existentes de la Agencia Canadiense para el Desarrollo Internacional hacia áreas de mayor prioridad en la actual situación de Colombia.

COLOMBIA'S NEVER-ENDING TURMOIL

Eighteen months after President Pastrana came to office, prospects for peace in Colombia have never appeared so dim. While the newly-elected President was launching a formal peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), rebel movements and paramilitary groups were intensifying their military activities, weakening governmental positions and plunging part of the country into social disruption. In recent months, Colombia has experienced widespread violence from both the left and right ends of the political spectrum. As the violence and intimidation increase, so does the number of displaced Colombians. Nearly a million Colombians have been displaced in the last ten years—a number exceeding the exodus from Kosovo. In 1999 alone, 275,000 fled their homes after incursions by belligerents from all fronts. The flow of refugees, as well as the presence of guerrilla battalions outside Colombia's borders, is now souring Colombia's relations with Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela and Panama.

To make things worse, Colombia has lurched into a deep recession, recording four straight quarters of economic slowdown in 1999, and a 7% decrease in GDP. The decline in commodity prices and the spill-over effect of the Brazilian financial crisis have put an end to four decades of sustained economic growth, which averaged 4.1% a year between 1984-1997. The industrial and manufacturing sectors have been hit the hardest. A deteriorating fiscal position and an unemployment rate that surged to nearly 20% during the first six months of 1999 have made governing difficult for President Pastrana. Rating agencies and international financial institutions are pressuring Pastrana to accelerate major structural reforms, including cuts in federal transfers to local government, more flexible labour laws, pension plan reforms, and privatization. At the same time, urban labour unions, peasants and social activists are accusing the President of destroying Colombia's economy with neoliberal reforms. These latter groups expressed their dismay by organizing a major strike of 1.5 million Colombian workers from across the country last September. Although the economic downturn is not responsible for the fragility of the peace process, it is unlikely to help President Pastrana in his quest to find a political solution for the Colombian internal war.

BELLIGERENTS' GROWING POWER

The Guerrillas: from ideology to pragmatism

With the fall of the Berlin wall, one might have expected that Colombia's Marxist guerrilla movements would lose their appeal, as happened in many other parts of Latin America. However, Colombia's unique political landscape has proven to be a fertile ground for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). Although these movements did lose their legitimacy among the Colombian public, they also increased their military capabilities and expanded their subversive activities in most parts of the country. This rapid expansion was the result of the guerrillas' increasing ability to fund their armed actions and take advantage of the country's poor economic conditions and social inequalities. The FARC has been particularly successful. More pragmatic than ever, the estimated 15,000 combatants in the movement now push for a widely acceptable social and political agenda in the current peace process. At the same time, they are consolidating their presence in almost half of Colombian territory (FARC is now present in around 450 of Colombia's 1,075 municipalities). In fact, the very nature of the internal conflict in Colombia suggests that the insurgents' motivations have more to do with *realpolitik* than class struggle.

Revenue generation strategy U.S. intelligence considers Colombia's guerrillas to be among the best-funded insurgents in the world. Funding sources include embezzlement of public funds, extortion in the transport, farming and mining sectors, kidnapping, and drug trafficking; the last two activities account for almost 70% of their revenues. The rebel movements were the first beneficiaries of the U.S.-led "war on drugs" and the dismantling of the Cali and Medellín drug cartels at the beginning of the 1990s. The decentralization of illicit drug activities that followed these developments fragmented the Colombian drug industry into highly-productive small organizations (there are now an estimated two thousand producers in Colombia). These more numerous, but also more vulnerable, drug producers and traffickers have found *de facto* allies in the guerrilla movements and paramilitary organizations. Indeed, the rebel organizations, especially the FARC, have often proven to be the only safeguard against

government assaults and drug eradication campaigns. Relations between the new drug lords and the guerrillas follow a paternalistic Mafia scenario: the latter allow the former to pursue their illicit activities in a secure environment in exchange for a financial contribution levied from drug revenues. Although the FARC have described drug lords as “enemies of the revolution”, guerrillas have gradually “instrumentalized” their relations with the drug industry to promote their own cause. The guerrilla movements now seem far less concerned with the ideological justification of their actions as they become more autonomous financially from their traditional peasant base.

Military strategy Over the last fifteen years, guerrilla control of Colombian territory has more than doubled, and now includes more than 40% of the country. Even though most parts of this underpopulated territory are not considered to be vital for the country’s economic development, guerrillas are now putting pressure on the more significant regions of Colombia. The FARC’s successes can be attributed to its strategy of bringing the war closer to major industrial centres, while forcing the Colombian army to do battle in the country’s most remote regions. With less than 50,000 available combatants (out of a total of 104,000) spread out in a harsh and difficult landscape, Colombia’s armed forces have been unable to contain the FARC’s progress. Poorly trained and often under-equipped, Army battalions sometimes have no choice but to retreat and give up portions of the national territory to the rebels. Geography seems to favour the guerrillas, as the Armed Forces generally lack adequate intelligence on rebel movements. However, the results of past U.S.-Colombian joint military operations suggest that an increase in U.S. intelligence aid to the Colombian military would significantly hamper FARC military initiatives.

Political strategy Military success only partially explains such territorial gains. More important is a sophisticated grassroots strategy, which uses political promises and the need for security as its main assets. The FARC’s establishment of new fronts in municipalities exemplifies this strategy. The rebels will use force and intimidation to take over small towns or regions, but only as a last resort when other political means fail. The FARC usually sends

combatants dressed as civilians to assess the local population’s needs and vulnerabilities, to propagate their political ideologies, and to court the local authorities. They pressure local authorities to invest in projects that benefit the communities in order to strengthen the FARC’s base of support among rural populations. All of this is done to persuade the locals that the guerrilla presence would significantly improve their well-being and security. However, this model of territorial expansion has its costs—complaints about human rights violations by the rebels have increased, while property and land prices have dropped dramatically and cannot be applied everywhere. The FARC’s imposed influence in small municipalities has not yet been translated into the national political arena. The urban elite and the more educated population often consider the FARC as a criminal organization rather than a legitimate political organization that can embrace and address Colombians’ aspirations.

The paramilitary groups: Colombian Army’s ruptured appendix

The paramilitary groups are considered to be chiefly responsible for the deadlock in the present peace process. Once an informal network of right-wing militias with no structured organization, the paramilitaries have now become a more unified movement that aspires to eliminate the left-wing guerrilla groups. The United Self-Defence Units of Colombia (AUC) rarely confront the guerrilla movements directly. Instead, they target civilian populations, mostly peasants, suspected of nourishing relations with the rebels. The AUC’s aggressions against civilians are often characterized by outrageous violence, and are intended to spread fear among its potential enemies. As a result, hundreds of innocent people have been massacred in recent years.

Traditionally composed of rich landowners’ private armies, the paramilitary groups’ modern reincarnation is rooted in the expansion of land-owning drug traffickers’ activities in the middle of the 1980s. During this period, the main Colombian drug cartels created private militias to guarantee their security in the face of constant guerrilla pressure, and to open up land by displacing local peasant populations. In 1986, former President Betancur launched a peace process that paved the

way for the reintegration of guerrilla activists into the civilian political arena. The drug lords and the paramilitary groups were quick to react, perceiving Betancur's overture to the leftist movements as a direct threat. They started a "dirty war" that has signed the death warrant of the new peace initiatives. Fourteen years later, the paramilitaries have not defeated the guerrilla insurgency; instead, they have spawned an endless spiral of violence in Colombia.

The very existence of right-wing militias has been a source of embarrassment for Colombian governments. Indeed, the paramilitary groups have often portrayed themselves as a complementary counter-insurgency force that would help the Colombian Army to crush the resistance. Although there is no formal link between the two organizations, evidence shows that the Colombian Army facilitated AUC's dirty operations on many occasions. Until recently, the Colombian authorities have done little to address the paramilitary issue. The *Fiscalía General de la Nación* (Office of the Attorney General) has worked to convict senior Army officers alleged to be in collusion with right-wing militias and the government has put a million-dollar reward on AUC leader Carlos Castaño's head. However, these actions have not been enough to calm speculation that the government still sponsors the paramilitary groups. Even worse for the Pastrana government, Castaño's men now claim that they should be formally included in the peace talks. Legitimately or not, the approximately 5,000 AUC combatants have the means to be heard. They also have the potential to derail the peace process.

PEACE TALKS STUMBLING

Lack of real commitment to peace

In October 1999, the Colombian government and the FARC decided to renew the peace talks which had been stalled since the end of the summer. In November, Pastrana proposed an unconditional Christmas cease-fire to all of the belligerents. The FARC initially refused this proposal unless the government satisfied a myriad of conditions, most of which had already been included in previous negotiation packages. Instead, the FARC launched its most important offensives since July 1999—assaults in 13 municipalities in west-central Colombia (November 1999) and in Choco state near Panama (December 1999). Even though the FARC did eventually

accept the truce on December 21, their message was clear: the peace dialogue will not mean the end of hostilities; rather the contrary. In some of the worst fighting in months, clashes between the FARC and security forces near Bogotá killed 50 people on January 14, 2000. The truce was over.

These latest assaults exemplify the FARC's *modus operandi*. While government and rebel negotiators quarrel over procedures, the FARC gains extra time to present a show of force and thereby strengthen its position at the negotiating table. Examples of the FARC's delaying tactics are numerous. On September 18, 1999, for example, the rebels issued a communiqué announcing that they were breaking off discussions indefinitely with the government. The FARC apparently was upset by Pastrana's newest proposal for peace, an ambitious program called "Plan Colombia". The peace talks finally resumed in November 1999, but some fear that the plan might not survive for long.

While it is unlikely that the rebels will overthrow the Colombian government in the near future, many experts fear that the FARC seek the creation of a state within a state: a free zone inside the Colombian territory where an illegal narco-economy would coexist with a collectivist political order.

"Plan Colombia" is the latest attempt by the Colombian government to restart the negotiations on solid ground. However, it fails to meet the insurgents' minimal requirements for a peaceful solution to the conflict: an end to U.S. intervention in Colombian affairs, the mandatory demobilization of the paramilitary groups, and the establishment of a new social agenda which satisfies the guerrillas' "collectivist political aspirations". Even if these difficult requirements were met, many analysts doubt that the FARC would give up the fight. While it is unlikely that the rebels will overthrow the Colombian government in the near future, many experts fear that the FARC seek the creation of a state within a state: a free zone inside the Colombian territory where an illegal narco-economy would coexist with a collectivist political order. The

very nature of the FARC's political agenda might explain why most of the guerrillas' demands appear to be deliberately unrealistic or overly procedural: they lack the essential ingredient of good faith. The rebels seem to have few incentives to negotiate a peaceful settlement.

Making progress does not seem to be enough: Pastrana's fading star

As the guerrillas become more intransigent, the Colombian government becomes more vulnerable. Few, if any, presidents in the recent history of Colombia have been able to advance the peace process as much as Pastrana; paradoxically, few have dropped as dramatically in popularity. Although he convinced the rebel armies to agree to a cease-fire and to make direct commitments to finding a peaceful solution, his popularity has nevertheless shrunk by almost 40% in recent months (only 20% of the population now support Pastrana). The Colombian president has dashed high (maybe unrealistic) hopes, and he is now paying the price for his unbridled optimism. His detractors have blamed him for giving in to all of the guerrillas' conditions without getting any guarantee in return. In some cases, these accusations have come from within his own government. In May 1999, Defence Minister Rodrigo Lloreda resigned, dismayed by what he described as the President's "excessive concessions" to the FARC. One of these was the creation, in October 1998, of a demilitarized zone the size of Switzerland (and home of 90,000 civilians) in five southern municipalities. Shortly after a compromise was reached with the government, the FARC took control of the clearance zone, using it to launch new attacks on military garrisons. President Pastrana also dropped a proposal for independent, international monitoring of the peace accords when the FARC objected. For the Colombian military establishment and the general public, this was a demonstration that President Pastrana's approach to the peace process would have to be revised significantly. Recent opinion polls suggest that 80% of the population disapproves of the way the Pastrana administration has conducted the peace talks. This public exasperation is shared in the rest of the hemisphere, where the Colombian armed conflict now has more direct repercussions.

THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION OF THE COLOMBIAN INTERNAL CONFLICT

Colombia: a problem for the region

Colombia's neighbours and the U.S. have expressed increased concern about the worsening of the armed conflict. The conflict has led to more frequent incursions by the FARC and the ELN inside neighbouring countries' territories, increases in coca production and drug trafficking, and a growing number of refugees crossing the Colombian borders. These developments have prompted many of Colombia's neighbours to take emergency action in response to what they now perceive as a regional risk. Peru has stationed 1,200 soldiers on its northern border with Colombia. Ecuador has redeployed troops formerly stationed on its border with Peru to its border with Colombia. Venezuela has recently deployed extra battalions to its border with Colombia. Venezuela can now rely on 12,000 soldiers to counter any aggression from the Colombian Marxist rebels and drug lords trying to secure a route for their product. Panama and the U.S. are juggling with many scenarios to compensate for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Panama Canal in December 1999. In January 2000, the Clinton administration announced a \$1.3 billion US (\$1.6 billion considering previous US aid package of \$300 million), two-year emergency aid package for Colombia, which is already the third-largest recipient of U.S. aid. Most of the new money will be spent on military training and equipment for the Colombian armed forces and police in their war on drugs. In addition, a portion of the assistance package will go to improving the judicial system and institutions protecting human rights, and to bolstering the economy.

The region: a problem for Colombia

In view of these strong reactions, many experts now wonder if the region itself has not exacerbated Colombia's problems. It appears that some of the neighbouring governments have exploited the Colombian issue for their own domestic purposes. In a bid to run for a third consecutive term in office, President Alberto Fujimori of Peru has used the deteriorating situation in Colombia to highlight his own successes in defeating the guerrilla and terrorist movements and sharply decreasing Peruvian coca production. Venezuelan President

Hugo Chávez also seems to have a vested interest in the Colombian armed conflict. His recent rapprochement with the Castro regime, and his offers to open talks directly with the FARC in the current Colombian peace process, hint at the possibility of an alliance to counter U.S. influence in the region. Chávez's defiant stance, which is likely to help him keep his grip on his own domestic constituency and supporters, has been a major source of tension with the Pastrana government.

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U.S. involvement in Colombia remains far more complex than in most Latin American countries. It also has more direct impact on the unfolding of the current peace process. The main difficulty with the U.S. is that it is seen by the Colombian authorities and many Colombian commentators, as both part of the problem and part of the solution. The Pastrana government desperately needs the U.S. contribution to strengthen its army's military capability and finance its expensive "Plan Colombia". At the same time, the Pastrana government needs to dissociate itself from the U.S. if it wants to achieve any progress in its discussions with the rebels. So far, the FARC has used the fear of a U.S. invasion to postpone the peace discussions and to blame the Colombian authorities for the current peace process deadlock.

The U.S. would surely not be involved in Colombia's internal conflict at all, were it not for the drug problem. Colombia produces almost 80 per cent of the world's cocaine and has become the main supplier of heroin for the eastern seaboard. The main challenge for U.S. authorities is to support anti-narcotics operations in Colombia without openly confronting the rebel groups, which remain deeply involved in the thriving drug industry. Until now, most of the U.S. anti-narcotics aid has gone to the Colombian National Police, which carries out coca crop eradication programs. However, a growing proportion of the current \$1.6-billion aid budget to

Colombia is now being spent on the army rather than on the police. The U.S. has been providing the Colombian Army with military intelligence about the movement of rebel troops in drug-producing areas. Although such support is likely to help re-establish the balance of power between the deprived Colombian armed forces and the powerful guerrilla movements, it also fuels political instability and generates a nationalist backlash that favours the guerrilla agenda. Some experts fear that this heavy-handed U.S. approach to the Colombian crisis may in fact increase human rights violations by the Colombian Armed Forces and paramilitary organizations, and indirectly help the guerrillas and the right-wing militias increase their revenues from the drug trade.

CANADA AND THE COLOMBIAN CRISIS

A newcomer

Canada is a newcomer to the current Colombian peace process. Until very recently, its overall participation has been limited to some specific areas included in the human development agenda. There have been good reasons for such a limited involvement. First, as an active member of the United Nations system, Canada's peace agenda has mainly been driven by the priorities set by its western allies and the U.N. Security Council. Generally speaking, Colombia is outside the radar of the international community's humanitarian concerns, which has focused its attention on events elsewhere, beginning with Hurricane Mitch in Central America, and continuing with the Balkans crisis, East Timor, Chechnya, and most recently the Venezuelan flood. Second, Canada has always been reluctant to get involved in what it has traditionally considered to be a U.S.-Colombia bilateral issue. The long and complex historical relations between these two countries, heavily focused on the thorny anti-drug cooperation agenda, have led Canada to step back from Colombia's ongoing turmoil. Third, greater involvement in Colombia has always been a hard sell to Canadian politicians (and the general public) due to the great complexity of the internal conflict, which resists easy rationalizations. Indeed, Colombia is still characterized by its startling contradictions. While it remains a wealthy nation by any regional standards, it suffers from the most glaring human problems caused by its internal war. However, a rapidly evolving context and an

increasing Canadian foreign policy engagement with the hemisphere may lead Canada now to devote more attention to the Colombia peace process.

New awareness

The recent hostage-taking in Ecuador has helped to raise awareness among Canadians of Colombia's dramatic internal conflict. The Canadian media, for example, have been paying more attention to Colombia's situation, reporting more systematically on the peace talks now under way. Voices asking why Canada is not doing more to resolve Colombia's most significant problems are also more numerous. At recent hearings of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (SCFAIT) in December 1999, NGO activists urged the Canadian government to increase its profile in an attempt to help improve human rights conditions in Colombia. Some feel that Canada should adopt a more proactive stance in relation to Colombia's problems, to reflect both its increasing hemispheric engagements and its human security agenda.

In recent years, Canada has become a more active player in the Inter-American System. In addition, Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy has made human security the cornerstone of his foreign policy in dealing with broad security issues. Canada will host two major hemispheric events in the next fourteen months—the OAS General Assembly (June 2000) and the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec City (April 2001). At these events, Canada is likely to push for the inclusion of a human security approach to deal with some of the issues already incorporated in the OAS mandate and in the Plan of Action of the Summit of the Americas.

Recent government initiatives suggest that Colombia might become a priority for Canada's foreign policy in the region. Pastrana's visit to Canada in May 1999 was an opportunity for both countries to enhance cooperation on the issues of narcotics trafficking and crime, humanitarian assistance, and economic integration. The Canadian government also raised its yearly quota for government-sponsored refugees to 450, up from 90 in 1999 and 20 in 1998. If this quota is filled, Canada will be a major recipient of Colombian refugees in the hemisphere. During his visit to Colombia in January 2000, Minister Axworthy discussed with President Pastrana and

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright ways to reinforce the current peace process and contribute to Colombia's anti-drug efforts. Canada and Colombia are expected to exchange information on experiences and practices to deal with trafficking of illicit drugs, diverting of chemicals used to produce illicit drugs, money laundering, preventing drug abuse and promoting drug treatment and rehabilitation, and prosecuting drug and related offences. However, Canada's position towards Colombia remains largely to be defined.

Why Canada should care

An ideal-case scenario for the application of a human security approach Colombia's internal problems, by their very nature, happen to represent an ideal case for the application of Canada's human security approach. Colombia remains one of the most dangerous places on earth for civilians. Recent figures show that Colombia has witnessed more than 25,000 murders per year in the last decade, and it also holds the world record for the number of kidnappings. Outstanding human security issues that need to be addressed include:

- the use of child soldiers by the guerrillas (more than 30% of the members of Colombian guerrilla units are children) and by paramilitaries;
- the proliferation of small arms and landmines;
- the displacement of large segments of the rural populations;
- the widespread violations of human rights by the guerrilla movements, the paramilitary organizations and the Colombian National Army; and
- the expansion of drug related activities.

A source of worry for hemispheric integration and the next Summit of the Americas The worsening of the situation in Colombia has revived the ghost of U.S. intervention in the region. It has also monopolized U.S. attention to the hemisphere in recent months, much as the Central American wars did in the 1980s. Some experts fear that the Colombian conflict might divert U.S. energies away from other, more positive issues that are part of the hemispheric integration agenda, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the promotion of democracy. Colombia's internal

conflict has also had direct repercussions on the Andean Community integration process. The ban imposed in July 1999 by the Venezuelan government on Colombian trucks carrying freight into Venezuela, has increased bilateral trade costs by as much as 50%. This supposed security-related measure has cast a chill on an already weak sub-regional economic process, which depends heavily on the two biggest Andean economies (Colombia and Venezuela account for more than 70% of intra-bloc exports). As the host of the next Summit of the Americas, Canada will have to weigh the importance of these problems and their potential impact on the ability of Colombia to play an active role in the Summit process and hemispheric integration.

An important economic partner Although Colombia's relative importance in Canadian trade has decreased in recent years, it remains an important commercial partner for Canadian businesses. Canadian exports to Colombia reached Cdn \$436 million in 1998. Two-way trade exceeded Cdn \$770 million (excluding services) in the same year. Canadian exports to Colombia are led by wheat, pulses, malt, newsprint and paper products, copper, telecommunications, machinery, asbestos, motor vehicles and parts, electronic equipment, polyethylene and polymers, chemicals, processed foods and beverages. Major export opportunities exist in sectors such as environment, telecommunications, oil and gas, electricity transmission, transportation, mining, agriculture and processed foods. Canada has become a leading foreign investor in Colombia, primarily in the oil and telecommunications sectors, with direct investment totalling Cdn \$5 billion. The hostage-taking of seven Canadians in 1999 might have a negative effect on Canadian-Colombian economic relations as Canadian investors become more reluctant to invest in Colombia and neighbouring countries for security reasons.

COLOMBIA NEEDS INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

There is a large consensus in the international community that Colombia's internal issues should be resolved primarily by Colombians. However, a domestic survey conducted in 1999 shows that more than half of all Colombians would welcome some sort of U.S. military intervention. These figures

illustrate the growing sense of despair in the country and the urgent need to put an end to the 35-year-old conflict. Colombians long used to living on the edge now fear they are about to fall off, and they are seeking help. In October 1999, up to 12 million Colombians took to the streets across the country to demand an end to violence (*¡No Más!* movement), in what is considered the biggest display of public frustration in recent Colombia's history.

Towards intervention? No easy answers

Military intervention The Clinton administration has repeatedly stated that the U.S. will neither intervene in Colombia's armed conflict, nor push for intervention by armed forces of other South American countries. The spectre of a direct U.S. military intervention belongs more to the guerrilla's own rhetoric than to geopolitical reality. Given the extraordinary complexity of the Colombian armed conflict, any direct military intervention would likely result in complete debacle. A more realistic fear, expressed by some experts, is that U.S. military support to Colombia might lead to widespread violations of human rights by the Colombian armed forces, as has happened in the past. It might also badly affect U.S.-Latin American relations, which are already greatly troubled by the still unilateral nature of U.S. policy on narcotics.

International mediation Despite the FARC and the Colombian government's refusal to rely on any outside guarantors to help resolve the 35-year-old conflict, the parties at the negotiating table may eventually resort to international mediation if no solution is found to break the current impasse. Should this scenario become more likely, the question would remain as to which countries would be willing to get involved, and what would be the most appropriate international forum to deal with this issue. While there is no easy answer to this question, diplomatic solutions are unlikely to come from this hemisphere. Rather than facilitate the peace discussions, Colombia's immediate neighbours have poured more confusion into an already complex process. Because of its vested interest in the drug issue and its tradition of rightist interventionism in the region, the U.S. would not be considered as a credible regional mediator. Venezuela has repeatedly offered to mediate

between the guerrillas and Colombian government, but these offers have not been welcomed by President Pastrana. With the exception of Cuba, which is now facilitating peace discussions with the ELN, the remaining Latin American countries are either not interested in playing a leading role in the peace process, or not able to provide the necessary resources to carry out such a challenging activity. The OAS Secretary General, former Colombian President Cesar Gaviria, has avoided taking any posture that could be perceived as a conflict of interest. Given this situation, the United Nations might be considered a better forum for the mediation process. The U.N. has more resources, more experience, and despite some major breakdowns in peacekeeping missions, more credibility.

International Assistance There is no doubt that Colombia needs international assistance. Whether this should be the primary tool to break the current deadlock in the peace process is another issue. The problem to date is that there is no direct correlation between the level of poverty and social exclusion in Colombia and the upsurge of internal conflict. What is more certain is that the insurgents and the paramilitary organizations have used the poverty and development issue in many ways to support their causes and strengthen their legitimacy. In this respect, any attempt by the state to improve social conditions for its citizens is likely to undermine the guerrillas' own propaganda. It might at best create favourable conditions for peace.

Any efforts to improve social conditions will require patience and long-term support that few developed countries are prepared to provide to Colombia. Those who have decided to give significant international assistance (such as the Scandinavian countries) have had to face major challenges. Aid programs and initiatives often have no tangible impact on the peace process, making them hard to sell to the general public. Domestic pressures to achieve quick and measurable results from international aid programs are often incompatible with the receiving country's real needs and conditions. Another challenge is that the population most requiring help is located in remote regions controlled by insurgents, where foreign NGOs have limited access and where Colombian NGOs face repeated aggression by the guerrillas and

paramilitary groups. As a result, long-term assistance programs and ambitious alternative development projects cannot be implemented. This ongoing political turmoil has proven to be President Pastrana's main obstacle in his attempt to attract international support for his cause. The Colombian President dearly wants funds for his expensive "Plan Colombia", but cannot give sufficient assurances that his peace initiatives will succeed.

Preliminary Observations on Canada's Participation in the Colombian Crisis

Canada can only play a limited role in the current Colombian peace process. In recent years, Canada has exhausted much of its resources and energy for peace-building operations and international assistance in other troubled spots of the world. However, Canada still has the diplomatic skills and credibility for engaging influential players to embrace its causes. It has also the possibility of re-defining its existing international assistance priorities and programs.

Any Canadian efforts should aim at easing the unintended consequences of U.S. military support to Colombia, enlarging the scope of intervention beyond the narrow U.S. focus of the "war on drugs", and broadening the base of international support to include other countries.

Canada should assess the complexity of Colombia's internal issues and the potential consequences of any foreign participation There is no easy solution to Colombia's problems, given the extraordinary complexity of its internal issues. Canada needs to better understand the Colombian crisis and then assess whether or not direct involvement in the peace process makes for sound policy. Some observers caution that this stance might inhibit Canada's ability to react and speak out on more focused issues like human rights, where its contribution would be more useful. Canada may also be tempted to strongly oppose the enhanced U.S. military aid to Colombia. The fact is that the Colombian National Armed Forces are constantly

losing ground to the guerrillas and the paramilitary organizations. Doing nothing to equalize the balance of power between the parties may prove to be fatal to the already-faltering peace process. Canada will have to carefully scrutinize these kinds of considerations before taking any further action.

Canada should engage the international community and counter-balance the U.S.' grip on the Colombia issue U.S. participation in Colombia must be refined, complemented and counter-balanced. Any Canadian efforts should aim at easing the unintended consequences of U.S. military support to Colombia, enlarging the scope of intervention beyond the narrow U.S. focus of the “war on drugs”, and broadening the base of international support to include other countries. Canada can make use of its seat at the U.N. Security Council to engage like minded countries and raise the profile of this issue among the Permanent Members. Canada can also continue to promote a multi-layered anti-drug strategy based on the conceptual framework designed for the Foreign Ministers’ Dialogue on Drugs, which considers the

relationship between the complex drug issues and the broad human security and good governance agenda.

Canada could reallocate existing resources to meet Colombia’s most pressing needs Canada’s current aid programs to Colombia do not meet Colombia’s most pressing needs, nor do they focus directly on human security issues. Most international assistance resources are now devoted to two major industrial-based development projects—Cdn \$4 million over five years for telecommunication reforms and Cdn \$11.3 million over five years for assistance in the mining, hydrocarbons and environment sectors. Canadian assistance projects dealing with human rights issues remain marginal. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) now publicly recognizes the need to shift its priorities in order to address Colombia’s main challenges. During his visit to Colombia, Canadian Foreign Minister, Lloyd Axworthy stated that Canada would examine carefully Pastrana’s “Plan Colombia” to identify guidelines and priorities for future Canadian assistance plan.

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