

The Enduring Colombian Conflict: A Canadian Perspective

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colombian President Andrés Pastrana has devoted his energy for more than three years of his mandate toward the peace effort. Despite increased international engagement in the effort to produce constructive dialogue between the respective parties, limited gains have been achieved. The government is under mounting public and international pressure to extract concessions beyond a negotiated cease-fire. Meanwhile the guerrilla and paramilitary groups operate with complete impunity and are gaining increasing ground amidst public opposition.

The challenge of peace building is paramount to Colombia and it's success or not will have an effect on the entire region. Canada can play a role and can commit to support of the peace talks over the long term while strengthening the mechanisms of good governance in the short term. This effort translates into deeper bilateral and multilateral dialogue and the support of democratic institutions and human rights. Canada is well placed to take the lead on corporate social responsibility and could take concrete measures to engage civil society and the business community in the process.

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis plus de trois ans qu'il est au pouvoir, le président colombien, Andrés Pastrana, consacre toute son énergie aux efforts de paix. Malgré l'engagement accru de la communauté internationale pour tenter d'établir un dialogue constructif entre les différents partis, les progrès réalisés ont été bien modestes. Le gouvernement est soumis à une pression grandissante de la part du public et de la communauté internationale qui lui demandent d'obtenir des concessions qui vont au-delà de la négociation d'un cessez-le-feu. En attendant, les guérillas et les groupes paramilitaires sévissent en toute impunité et gagnent du terrain malgré l'opposition publique.

Le défi que représente la consolidation de la paix est extrêmement important pour la Colombie et le succès ou l'échec de cette politique affectera toute la région. Le Canada a un rôle à jouer dans ce

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processus et peut s'engager à appuyer les pourparlers de paix à long terme tout en renforçant les mécanismes de bonne gouvernance à court terme. Cet effort se traduit par un approfondissement du dialogue bilatéral et multilatéral et un appui aux institutions qui défendent la démocratie et les droits de la personne. Le Canada est bien placé pour assumer un rôle de leader en matière de responsabilisation sociale des entreprises et pourrait prendre des mesures concrètes pour faciliter la participation de la société civile et du milieu des affaires au processus de paix.

RESUMEN

En sus más de tres años de mandato, el Presidente colombiano, Andrés Pastrana, ha orientado sus esfuerzos a la consecución de la paz. A pesar de la creciente participación internacional en pos de lograr un diálogo constructivo entre las distintas partes del conflicto, los resultados han sido insuficientes. El gobierno está bajo presiones crecientes, tanto interna como internacionalmente para que obtenga concesiones que vayan más allá de la negociación del cese al fuego. Entretanto, la guerrilla y los grupos paramilitares operan con plena impunidad y continúan ganando terreno en medio de la oposición pública.

La edificación de la paz reviste una gran importancia para Colombia y su logro o fracaso tendrá repercusiones en toda la región. Canadá podría desempeñar un papel más activo y respaldar el diálogo de paz a largo plazo y el fortalecimiento de los mecanismos de buen gobierno a corto plazo. Estos esfuerzos se traducirían en un acercamiento bilateral y multilateral más profundo y en el apoyo a las instituciones democráticas y a los derechos humanos. Canadá ocupa un lugar ventajoso que le permitiría tomar la vanguardia en el tema sobre la responsabilidad social de las empresas y podría adoptar medidas concretas para la participación de la sociedad civil y los círculos empresariales en este proceso.

INTRODUCTION

Peace in Colombia was the identifying element of the government of Andrés Pastrana, yet the government is well into its final year in power, peace talks are once again at a standstill and the Colombian conflict continues to intensify. Despite these setbacks, Canada, in conjunction with other countries supporting negotiated peace, has steadily increased its engagement with Colombia over the past year and a half, participating as an invited observer and facilitator in government-guerrilla talks that have taken place throughout the year. The creation by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) of a specific "Fund for Governance and Human Security for Colombia" – whose aim is to introduce Colombian organizations to Canadian models and experiences in the areas of governance and

human security – is one of many examples of constructive engagement by Canada.

In light of increased international involvement amidst a worsening crisis, this paper analyses the current dynamic of the Colombian conflict. It focuses on significant shifts and continuities in the context of the conflict, and explores both the rationale and options for expanding Canadian engagement in the Colombian peace process, as well as potential challenges Canada could expect to encounter over the long-term.

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CURRENT CONTEXT

Canada's strategy for engagement with Colombia is shaped by its understanding of the dynamics of the conflict. Accordingly, this section looks at significant continuities and shifts in the conflict and the context in which it is taking place, which

have particular relevance for Canadian intervention. They include:

- Intensifying conflict.
- Declining legitimacy of the State and the precariousness of Colombian democracy.
- Increasing engagement of the international community.
- Shifting regional interests and the emergence of regional approaches.

Intensifying conflict

One of the most significant shifts over the past year has been the steady worsening of the Colombian conflict. This is evident in the proliferation of political violence, the ever-rising number of displaced people, increasing urban violence, and the challenges of narco-trafficking.

In quantifiable terms, the number of insurgents—both guerrilla and paramilitary—have dramatically risen over the past several years: the paramilitary United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), responsible for the majority of civilian deaths, have doubled their size since 1998, with an ever-growing contingent of approximately 8,500 members. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) guerrillas have also boosted their ranks, currently counting over 15,000 recruits with stated plans to grow significantly over the next several years. The National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas, a relatively smaller guerrilla organization, are the only actors to have decreased in size, with between approximately 5,000 - 7,000 members, although their ongoing targeting of natural resource sectors continues to have large human and economic costs.

Perhaps more telling than the numbers of armed insurgents are the increases in political violence, human rights violations and the number of deaths resulting from the conflict (well over 40,000 since 1985). Although the statistics in this area are varied and imprecise, with many left

unreported, there is general consensus that the conflict is worsening. According to most sources, the number of people who have died as a result of the conflict in the first four months of 2001 is nearly double the number killed in the same period the previous year. Last year over 4,000 people were killed as a result of the conflict.

One of the greatest repercussions of the political violence is the ever-growing numbers of displaced peoples in Colombia, the highest in the hemisphere, and fourth in the world with over two million people displaced since 1985. Last year alone, over 300,000 Colombians were forced to abandon their homes and seek refuge in other parts of the country, in bordering countries or abroad. This represents the highest number of displaced persons in a single year than in any of the five preceding years. Also telling is the high number of political killings of journalists, academics, human rights workers, trade unionists and Indigenous leaders, which have serious implications for Colombian democracy, undermining fundamental democratic rights of free speech and association.

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Right-wing paramilitary groups under the umbrella of the AUC carry out the vast majority of political killings. However, the two main guerrilla organizations (FARC-EP, and ELN) also have a worsening record of human rights violations against civilian populations which includes: kidnapping, extra-judicial executions, use of child soldiers, extortion and forced displacement (*see Human Rights Watch 'Letter to FARC-EP Commander' July 2001*).

In addition to the violence directly attributed to the conflict, other forms of violence are also on the rise. Colombia holds the unenviable record for the highest number of deaths due to homicide in the world. Of the over 38,800 violent deaths reported during 2000, approximately 25,500 were labelled as homicide, many a result of armed urban gang warfare. It is

significant to note that deaths resulting directly from the political conflict in Colombia represent approximately 10% – 5% of the total number of violent deaths caused, for example, by widespread urban violence.

Declining State legitimacy and precariousness of Colombian Democracy

Support for the Colombian State and the peace process is at one of its lowest levels in recent history, with popular approval of the current government hovering around a mere 15%. The Colombian State has historically had to struggle for legitimacy, and continues to face challenges of persistent corruption, weak institutions, and the inability to deliver even basic public goods, as well as growing disillusionment with the current peace process. Attempts to address these failings, notably the 1991

Constitution, have had little success. As Colombian academic A. M. Bejarana noted in recent writings (2001), although the 1991 Constitution served to open up political participation and promote some positive institutional reforms, its implementation has been limited. It has been unable to overcome entrenched clientelist practices, or address deeper structural issues such as agrarian reform.

Also worrying is the fact that a large majority of Colombian citizens (statistics range from 80%-94%), feel that the country is on the “wrong path” – el mal camino – to peace. From the point of view of most Colombians, the government’s approach to negotiated peace has resulted in too many concessions and too few gains. The fact that the guerrilla and paramilitary between them have control/presence in approximately 40% of the country is seen as testimony to this. Disillusionment with a negotiated peace is a dangerous predicament for Colombia and the Colombian government, as it leads to increased popular support for a more hard-line government and paramilitary insurgents. Revelations of

‘secret’ talks and pacts for joint-governmental arrangements between the government and FARC-EP have further undermined support for Pastrana, whose political career was premised on the promise of peace. The struggle for government credibility is not confined to the domestic context. Internationally, the Colombian government continues to confront questions on its human rights record and, in particular on its lack of willingness to crack down on the paramilitary organizations.

One of the most serious repercussions of declining State legitimacy is an increasingly precarious democracy. This should give countries in the region and the wider international community cause for serious concern. Colombia represents one of the toughest challenges to our

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thinking about democratization in the hemisphere. The country has the paradoxical status of being one of the oldest democracies in the region (at least by minimal procedural definitions), yet the state is not able to deliver some of the most fundamental rights, notably personal security. Also, in the context of conflict, civil-military relations and specifically the subordination of military to

civilian rule are often at greater risk of being compromised. The Colombian government’s recent move to increase legal freedoms of the armed forces and reduce external scrutiny of the military, despite the military’s historically poor human rights record, is a sharp reminder of this risk.

Increasing engagement of the international community

Unlike many other conflicts around the globe, the participation of international actors in the Colombian conflict has, until recently, been relatively limited, mainly due to the reluctance of the guerrilla organizations to include outsiders in peace negotiations. This changed through the 1990s, particularly over the course of the past

year and a half. Countries have been invited to act in official capacities in government-guerrilla negotiations, both with the ELN and FARC-EP. It is this participation of international actors that distinguishes current peace processes from previous ones over the past several decades, and represents, to many, a positive step towards peace.

Although not widely publicized at home, Canada is part of both of these initiatives – as one of the so-called ‘Group of Ten’ countries supporting government-FARC negotiations, along with Sweden, Norway, France, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Cuba, Venezuela, and Mexico, and also as one of five countries selected to participate in ELN-government peace negotiations and verification of a possible future demilitarised zone and political incorporation, with Japan, Germany, Sweden and Portugal.

However, the formal role of the international community largely remains to be operationalised as peace talks with both FARC-EP and the ELN continue to stumble. Additional setbacks have further undermined meaningful participation of international actors including the revelation of ‘secret’ talks between government and guerrilla groups, and the extremely polarized conditions for ceasefire that the government/guerrillas respectively hold.

The increasing ‘internationalisation’ of the Colombian conflict is also evident among armed insurgents. Although certain trans-national connections of guerrilla organizations are longstanding, they were recently put in the spotlight with the arrest of three members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Colombia in August 2001, who were alleged to have been training members of FARC-EP in the use of explosives. Evidence of this apparent cooperation among international guerrilla organizations could have longer-term negative implications for the peace talks in Colombia.

Shifting regional interests and the emergence of regional approaches

It is now common currency to view Colombia’s crisis from a regional perspective rather than only through a national lens. A regional perspective recognizes the broader implications of the conflict including the spillover of violence and drug production into neighbouring countries, along with cross-border refugees. Regional support for Colombia’s current peace process is longstanding, evident for example, in the Meeting of Presidents in Brazil in September 2000 and the drafting of the Brasilia Declaration of support for Colombia. What is new, however, is the increased focus on its implications for the region as a whole. Although it is useful to take an area perspective, the neighbouring countries are affected by the conflict in different ways and

have distinct relations with Colombia, which are important to take into account in understanding the regional dynamic.

All of the neighbouring countries’ governments, with the exception of Brazil, have expressed degrees of support for Plan Colombia. Venezuelan-Colombian relations have been frequently chilly through the 1990s mainly due to

the Venezuelan government’s perceived support to Colombian guerrilla organizations, the spillover of guerrilla activity, and tense border relations. Although still on shaky ground, there has been some shift towards increased cooperation, in part due to a re-activation of the G3 (Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico), and various bilateral commercial and cross-border initiatives, as well as collaboration in the context of the Andean Trade Pact. Venezuela is one of the Group of 10 international participants in government-FARC dialogues, and recently hosted the now broken-off government-ELN meeting.

Peru shares Colombia’s concern for drug production and narco-trafficking. It has not only pledged support for Plan Colombia, but presidents Toledo and Pastrana agreed to the

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creation of an Andean Strategy Against Drug-Trafficking. Ecuador, although supportive of Plan Colombia, is perhaps the most vocal in its concern about the spillover effects. This is not surprising as it has arguably been most directly affected by the conflict with increased incidence of related violence, guerrilla penetration into the northern Andean and Amazonian regions, the effects of crop-spraying, and the growing numbers of refugees. Ecuador has responded by fortifying security along its northern border, with the support of the United States (US), which is constructing an American airbase in Ecuador's coastal town of Manta. Panama has also increased security along its border with Colombia, largely as a response to the increase in displaced people.

Although Brazil has been South America's loudest critic of Plan Colombia and US influence in the region, it too is concerned with the repercussions of conflict spill over. Brazil shares over 1000 kilometres of sparsely populated Amazonian borderline with Colombia. In order to prevent the spread of drugs and violence, Brazil launched Plan Co-Bra in 2000 as a means to reinforce military presence in the region. It continues to take steps to prevent the spread of drug production and migration from Colombia, partnering pointedly with non-US corporations. Despite Brazil's continued opposition to US involvement, President Cardoso confirmed support for Pastrana in the peace process at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. The links between Brazil and Colombia in drug/arms trafficking were recently put into the spotlight with the capture of the notorious Brazilian drug trafficker Fernandino. One of the most significant implications of his arrest was the direct links it revealed between FARC and drug/arms trading, undermining FARC's position that its only connection is via the taxation of coca farmers. Links between FARC and members of Brazil's Landless Movement (MST) have also raised regional eyebrows and given cause for concern.

Regional approaches to the conflict are emerging endogenously as well as internationally. Of the latter, the US shift from Plan Colombia to the recently approved Andean Regional Initiative (ARI) is the most controversial. The US\$567 million dollar ARI, which is to be administered primarily by the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), allocates roughly 60% of its budget to an Andean Counter-drug Initiative (ACI) and approximately 40% to development and democracy programs in the region. Although Colombia will likely still receive a significant portion of the funding, approximately 50% will be given to other neighbouring countries, including Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Panama and Venezuela, in that order.

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Despite general agreement both regionally and internationally that the conflict in Colombia cannot be viewed in isolation, there is justified concern, both within the US and internationally, that the ARI will result in increased militarization in the region. Critics point to the US air base under construction in Manta, Ecuador, as an example. There is also a concern that it does not redress the shortcomings of its predecessor, Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia included an unsuccessful military approach to counter-narcotics with coca eradication by fumigation as a central strategy and a failure to focus on human rights. It also used outsourced private military operations, and took a unilateral approach, which lacked consultation both domestically and regionally.

International actors supporting a negotiated resolution, including Canada, the European Union (E.U.) and Japan, have also recognized the need for a regional approach to the Colombian conflict and its broad repercussions, however no cohesive perspective or action plan has been outlined.

There is also growing support for a regional approach to the conflict and its spill over effects among the Andean countries themselves. At the Andean Summit in June 2001, respective Heads of State committed to develop a joint counter-narcotics strategy given the spill over potential from Colombia. Concrete steps have yet to be listed, and it will be interesting to see to what degree an endogenous strategy will differ from the ARI.

This section has highlighted certain changes in the dynamic of the Colombian context, as a basis for looking at deeper Canadian involvement in peace processes. Prior to outlining specific options for Canadian engagement, it is important to answer the question of why Canada should involve itself in Colombia's peace process at all – particularly given the intractability and complexity of the conflict.

The next section will review our current involvement and outline a rationale as well as options for deeper and sustained Canadian engagement.

TOWARDS DEEPER ENGAGEMENT: RATIONALE AND POLICY OPTIONS

Current Canadian Involvement

As government and NGOs in Canada and Colombia will attest, Canada has consistently been engaged in successful development initiatives, many at the local level in Colombia. These range from support for war-affected children, aid to displaced populations, to connectivity, health, and basic needs projects. Official Canadian development assistance, both bilateral and multilateral, supports human rights and human rights training programs, some institutional strengthening initiatives, the UN High Commissions for Human Rights and Refugees, gender equality and humanitarian relief projects. Other programs administered through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) include support for

the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Colombia and promotion of the application of the Ottawa Convention on Landmines. Canada has also had a distinct immigration program for Colombians seeking refuge as a result of security threats and displacement.

There are numerous Canadian non-governmental and civil society organizations involved in developing and implementing these and other programs in Colombia –demonstrating positive results. It is clear that despite the challenging context and setbacks faced, Canadian assistance has had an overall positive impact in Colombia and the region. With regard to peace negotiations, Canada is also emerging as a key player in the peace process, actively participating in government-guerrilla negotiations.

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There are, however, compelling humanitarian, political, and economic reasons for Canada to deepen its engagement with Colombia including: a commitment to 'Canadian values' of democracy, human rights, and equity; regional security; Canadian engagement and leadership in the hemisphere; trade and economic investment; and post-Summit of the Americas commitments.

Commitment to 'Canadian values'

There are few other countries in the hemisphere where so-called Canadian values of democracy, justice, and respect for human rights are being violated as profoundly as in Colombia. Levels of violence, rates of displacement and civilian persecution, the inability of the State to provide minimum standards of security to its citizens, levels of institutional corruption, judicial impunity and the declining legitimacy of the State all demand outside humanitarian and political intervention. It is the worst conflict in the hemisphere with the highest of human costs. This alone should justify sustained Canadian engagement and support.

Post-Summit of the Americas politics and the peace process

From a political perspective there are further compelling reasons for Canada to deepen its engagement in Colombia's peace processes and sustainable development. Strategically, it is an important moment for Canada to act on its commitment to support democracy in the hemisphere, and to consolidate its role as a credible actor in its own so-called neighbourhood. In the wake of the Quebec City Summit of the Americas, and the OAS General Assembly hosted by Canada in 2000, there is no better time for Canada to position itself as a serious actor and leader, building upon recent momentum generated at the Summit. To remain on the sidelines would undermine Canada's commitment to hemispheric issues, and democracy in particular in this post-Summit period.

The Colombian conflict was singled out as a key concern at the Quebec City Summit, as evidenced in the statement in support of the Colombian peace process. The statement, although relatively vague with regard to international involvement, was nonetheless a commitment of support for the peace process. If Canada wants to act and be taken seriously, it must recognize that sustainable peace will not be achieved in Colombia in the short-term and sign itself on for the duration. Canada must also consider that Colombia likely faces a longer period of armed peace, and that due to the multiple forms of violence, and the mixture of armed insurgents, moving beyond this will present a serious challenge. Commitment to assist Colombia with its peace negotiations might include:

- A long-term commitment as a member of the international negotiating/verification group.
- Enhanced resources and commitment to facilitating negotiations, for example offering a

space for dialogue outside of Colombia. Canada's advantage is its perceived neutrality that regional neighbours and the US do not hold. This is partially a result of Canada's relative non-military involvement not only in Colombia, but historically in conflicts of the region, such as Central America in the 1980s.

- Promotion of partnerships among like-minded actors for alternative non-military options for peace and development.

In order to encourage domestic buy-in, it would be useful for Canadian commitment to be made explicit both at home and in Colombia – as noted, few Canadians are aware that Canada is involved in the peace process.

There are also compelling domestic reasons for Canada to increase its engagement in Colombia, and specifically to expand its focus on alternative development. Canadians are clients in the narcotics trade, and the majority of cocaine and heroine in Canada originates in Colombia. This significant illicit

investment, amounting to billions of Canadian dollars, helps fuel the conflict and sustains current power dynamics in Colombia. Accordingly, further research for long-term strategies for alternative development emerges as a priority, and is perhaps an area in which Canadian institutions can add value. As demonstrated by last year's increase in Colombian coca production and Bolivia's current civil unrest, it is increasingly apparent that a military approach to eradicating drug production is deficient. Aggressive counter-narcotics strategies (e.g. fumigation), which serve to isolate cocaine from the context of production and the broader conflict, have not met with success. A singularly focused 'war on drugs' is also considered by many to exacerbate violence, creating further economic obstacles and in many cases allegiance for armed insurgents. As long as

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poor peasants can attain a better livelihood from growing coca rather than corn, there is little incentive to shift production. It is clear that the underlying so-called objective causes of violence and drug production cannot be ignored, including poverty, resource distribution, basic health, education and infrastructure. Although 'alternative development' is a favourite buzzword, there is yet little evidence of successful programming.

Trade and investment

In addition to the human and political interests, there are also strategic reasons why Canada should deepen its engagement in Colombia. With regard to economic interests, Colombia represents Canada's fourth largest

investment partner in South America, with over CAN\$790 million dollars in accumulated investments. We are the leading investors in Colombia's telecommunications sector and key players in oil and gas, as well as mining exploration and extraction. Not only are these economic investments affected by the conflict, they also affect the conflict directly and indirectly.

Armed insurgents, most notoriously the ELN, directly target foreign investments primarily in natural resource sectors as part of their strategy of terrorist attacks, kidnapping, extortion, and political visibility. Persistent corruption, judicial impunity, and the inability of the state to enforce regulatory frameworks also undermine foreign investment in Colombia. Increasing concern for employee security and growing revenue loss as a result of the conflict threatens the rate of foreign investment in these sectors. This is significant as revenue from oil is Colombia's most valuable export representing about 30% of foreign earnings.

Foreign investment is not only affected, but also affects the crisis in Colombia. Whether it is by indirectly funding insurgent groups as a result of extortion, or working in environmentally

sensitive areas in a country where population displacement is so high, private sector investors must pay close attention to the context within which they are operating and the potential repercussions their operations may have. Issues of corporate social or ethical responsibility, which emerge in this type of discussion are not new, but require careful analysis in the complex Colombian context. A focus on this area, which includes the role of the private sector in peace building, is a potentially important area for Canadian contribution. Corporate social responsibility is also emerging as a domestic and hemispheric priority for Canada, as revealed in Canada's Summit of the Americas initiatives. The Canadian government can play an important role in ensuring that the negative impacts of

investment are minimized and address persisting ambiguities and contradictions in current regulatory frameworks, such as end-use legislation.

Not only is there compelling humanitarian, political and economic motives for deeper Canadian engagement in Colombia, but there are also serious costs if Canada does not

increase its involvement, particularly in humanitarian and peace initiatives. These costs include a loss of credibility as a country committed to democracy and respect for human rights in the hemisphere, and as a key contributor to global peace-building and peacekeeping.

Looking Forward: Short and Medium-term Prospects

If Canada does deepen its involvement in the peace process, there are several likely developments that will shape the nature of its engagement, which therefore must be taken into account. They include: the likelihood of an extended period of armed peace; a shift to the right in government; and the repercussions of increased militarization of the region as a whole.

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The deadlocked peace negotiations, combined with the reluctance of any of the armed insurgents to relinquish their arms and the time needed for deeper, structural changes for sustainable peace, make the expectation of an extended period of ‘armed peace’ likely in the medium-term. Canada should therefore be prepared to continue to support negotiations amidst conflict, accepting the slow pace of negotiations. Experience shows that each time negotiations have been broken off in the past they become increasingly harder to re-initiate.

In the shorter term, Presidential elections in May 2002 will also have an impact on prospects for peace and the shape of negotiations. No clear front-runner has emerged and events closer to the election date will undoubtedly affect the election. It is evident, that current dissatisfaction with the Pastrana government and peace process, the economic setbacks of the past several years, and the continued degradation of the conflict create space for a harder-line victory. Even the strong liberal candidate, Horacio Serpa, advocates a harder line with regard to peace negotiations – including incorporating the AUC paramilitary into political dialogue. This would affect the nature of the peace process and Canadian involvement, particularly if it resulted in escalated violence and increased the likelihood of a military solution to the conflict. If this were the case, Canada would want to re-evaluate its support in light of international laws and human rights implications.

The effects of increasing militarization not only in Colombia, but also through the region as a whole, in large part supported by the US, must also be considered from a Canadian perspective. Canada should take care not to become bogged down in the polarized debates about US involvement, either Plan Colombia, the Andean Regional Initiative or recent global anti-terrorist

activities, but stay firm in its commitment to peace through democratic, non-military means and advocate this with other international like-minded actors. The debate surrounding the Colombian conflict within Canada has tended to be polarized with concerned human rights activists advocating against militarized approaches and paramilitary impunity on the one hand, and the Canadian government advocating for negotiated peace and democracy through support to the Colombian government and non-military components of Plan Colombia on the other. Although there have been several public fora for civil society–government consultation, this polarization within Canada exacerbates fragmentation among the variety of interested actors, rather than promotes constructive multi-stakeholder dialogue.

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Recommendations and Policy Options

Given the humanitarian, economic, and political motivations for Canada to deepen its support for negotiated peace in Colombia, potential policy options are listed below. These options are clearly contingent on available resources, the security risk they pose for Canadians, and roles identified for the international community by the Colombian government and civil society. They represent both continuities as well as potential areas for new or enhanced involvement.

- Make explicit both domestically and in Colombia, Canada’s commitment to supporting negotiated peace over the long-term. Support other mechanisms for peaceful resolution, for example: serve as a potential liaison in the parallel government-guerrilla negotiation processes (as one of only two countries participating in both); offer a safe space for dialogue outside the region.
- Increase support for the strengthening of public democratic institutions, and continue

to exert political pressure on issues of human rights and citizen security, through bilateral and multilateral channels.

- Continue humanitarian assistance and human rights advocacy and training, particularly in the context of civil-military relations. CIDA's recent establishment of a "Fund for Governance and Human Security for Colombia" is an excellent initiative in this regard.
- Inscribe the issue of peace building in Colombia on the agenda of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade as a subject for special consideration. Travel to Colombia by Committee members would serve the useful role of further sensitizing Canada's political leadership to the constraints and challenges facing Colombia and the Colombian people.
- Cooperate actively with like-minded international actors such as the E.U. and Japan in exploring opportunities for negotiated peace and support for regional approaches to deal with the repercussions of spillover. Rather than a proliferation of competing regional

approaches it would perhaps make sense for like-minded international actors to provide human and financial capital to non-military regional initiatives developed by the Andean countries themselves, specifically in areas of governance and development. Although their potential has not been realized, the Andean community has the institutions in place for the required regional cooperation of this nature.

- Capitalize on the emerging domestic and hemispheric focus on corporate social responsibility to take the lead on related issues in the Colombian context.
- Continue support for multilateral initiatives towards peace and development in Colombia, including the United Nations, and the Organization of American States (e.g. Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism initiative). In particular full support should be extended to the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Assistance to Colombia who has been playing a quiet behind the scenes role by encouraging deeper dialogue between the parties.

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