

Colombia's Fork in the Road?

President Santos' Treaty with The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

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Abstract. Colombia is considered Latin America's most stable democracy, and at the same time, it is war-torn by the internal conflict with the guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The armed conflict with the FARC has lasted for fifty-two years and has claimed the lives of 220,000 innocent civilians. The year 2016 marked the historical and controversial moment that President Santos of Colombia signed a peace treaty with the FARC, ignoring the results of a referendum that was intended to ratify the treaty. Importantly between the years 2015 and 2016, years in which the negotiation was taking place, Colombia's cocaine output increased by 37 percent, which calls into question the FARC's real motives in the peace treaty. This paper will argue that in neglecting to recognize the FARC's role in drug trafficking allows for future repercussions in Colombian politics and does not ensure that the democracy of which Colombia has boasted can be maintained. Furthermore, this paper will argue that in bypassing the results of the referendum allows leeway for the next government to oppose the peace treaty and create severe consequences for Colombia. In sum, President Santos has embarked Colombia on a journey it did not choose, leaving the future uncertain.

Introduction

Latin American countries are infamous for their rocky road towards democracy, with a history replete with military coups and violence between the major political parties. However, Colombia does not fall into the category of an unstable democracy, where it has boasted of a strong democratic tradition, having only two military interventions in its governments since 1958 (Lorente, 2010). Throughout its modern history, Colombia is infamous for the armed conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, from here onwards called "FARC." The armed conflict with the FARC has claimed the lives of 220,000 civilians and has converted Colombia into one of the major producers and exporters of illegal drugs, specifically cocaine (Otis, 2014). The year 2016, marked the historic and controversial moment President Santos of Colombia signed a peace treaty with the FARC, which, as of the time of this paper, has produced an end specifically to the armed conflict (Isacson, 2017). Of the many conditions imposed by the FARC, the most significant was to ignore their role in drug-trafficking. Thus, this paper will argue that in refusing to acknowledge the role the FARC has had in drug-trafficking hinders a genuine peace process, where the government is unable to ensure that the democratic stability, of which Colombia has boasted, can be maintained.

The internal conflict with the FARC has lasted for fifty-two years (Colombia's FARC rebels- 50 years of conflict, 2016) and has produced atrocious consequences that are ever present in the Colombian population. It was specifically drug trafficking that allowed the FARC to transform itself during the 1980's and 1990's into a strong guerrilla group that could challenge the

Colombian government. Before the peace treaty that the government of President Santos enforced with the FARC, former President Uribe took a hard-line stance against the guerrilla group with aid from the United States, aimed at strengthening Colombia's institutions and combating drug trafficking, saw a dramatic drop in violence (Renwick & Felter, 2017). Kidnappings decreased by 80 percent and homicides dropped by 40 percent. Significantly, with the crackdown against the FARC, saw the guerrilla group losing ground where membership loss was down to an estimated seven thousand members in 2012, from sixteen thousand in 2001. Thus, one must ask, if the government was gaining significant advances against the FARC, entering territories previously controlled by the FARC, if the peace treaty truly is in the best interest of the future of Colombia? Furthermore, it must be noted that the FARC only agreed to the peace negotiations after suffering considerable losses. In other words, did they adopt a strategy that would ensure their survival, and if so, what does a peace treaty that does not recognize drug trafficking as a crime mean for the democratic future and stability of Colombia?

This paper is structured as follows. First, it will provide a history of the FARC, analyzing the base for their foundation as a rebel group and ideological views. Secondly, it will review the crimes committed by the FARC, specifically drug-trafficking. Thirdly, it will examine the current peace process, studying the implications that the conditions of the treaty will have on Colombian politics and the issues that are not addressed in it. Further expanding on the peace treaty, it will review how President Santos's actions do not express the results of the referendum and by ratifying the treaty through approval of Congress by the means of "Fast-Track" to bypass a second referendum, allows leeway for future repercussions in Colombian politics. Furthermore, it will focus on the behaviour of drug-traffickers and their pursuit of political power and analyze the effects this can have on the country. Finally, this paper will comment on the outlook of Colombian politics and the implementation of the treaty.

History of the FARC

Origins of the FARC

So, who are the FARC and what is their objective? The factors that would allow the birth of the FARC begin with the negative consequences of colonial rule by Spain in Colombia (Leech, 2011). Colonial rule produced ruling elite, which divided itself into two political parties, the Liberals and the conservatives. Political differences and tensions between these two, mainly among their peasant supporters, whose desire to show loyalty to their party, would result in outbreaks of violence, that were not the result of class struggles, but of preserving the interests of the political elites.

Why did the peasants fight in the interests of the elite? It was mainly for reforms that would improve their quality of life (Leech, 2011). The political tensions and division between the two parties would result in the origin of many of Colombia's present day problems (Thousand Day War, 2011). There were series of civil wars which rampaged Colombia and they would culminate with the "War of a Thousand Days" beginning in 1899 and ending in 1902. Further prolonging the tension and war, was the continuous targeting of members of the opposition by the government in place, which in 1900 saw Vice President Jose Marroquin take over the government and imprison President San Clemente, who would go on to die in prison in 1902.

Although it is cannot be confirmed, it is estimated that 100,000 people died over the course of this war (Bushnell, 2010) and those who suffered were the most vulnerable members of society, the peasants (Thousand Day War, 2011). During this time, the economy of Colombia had taken a

large toll, reducing the government to bankruptcy, and allowed Panama (with support from the United States) in declaring independence from Colombia under the Treaty of Wisconsin. After having supported Colombia's loss of Panama, the United States agreed to recompense the government with a payment of \$25 million USD (Leech, 2011). This payment would become known as the "Dance of the Millions", benefiting the petroleum and manufacturing sectors and coffee and banana production. Importantly, it left out a majority of citizens who did not receive these benefits, which would result in the necessary conditions for the birth of the FARC.

The Violence or "La Violencia"

What would become known as "La Violencia" resembled the riots and tensions provoked in earlier years, when political divides between the elites resulted in violence. The Liberal Government at the time (1946), lost power after a party split (Bushnell, 2011). Most of the trouble and outbreaks of violence can be attributed to the actions pursued by the Conservatives, whose disdain for the Liberals, resulted in them inspiring trouble and violence. The climax of violence resulted in the assassination of popular Liberal leader, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan. Although the evidence pointed to a lone wolf act, the Liberals construed that the Conservatives were behind his murder and their followers began to ransack Conservative stores.

The rioting took place mainly in Bogota, where Gaitan was mayor, and this stirred fear that the violence would result in a peasant-based social revolution (Leech, 2011). Moreover, the violence was not retained to strife between the Liberals and the Conservatives, but included violence between the peasants and the oligarchy. Further complicating the situation was the involvement of the United States, who began training and providing military assistance to the Colombian military in hopes of deterring a communist revolution. The inability of the government to suppress the violence resulted in General Rojas Pinilla taking power in 1953.

General Rojas offered an amnesty to the armed peasants, in hope of putting an end to the conflict (Bushnell, 2011). However, backtracking on his first decision, the government began targeting the demobilized Liberal guerrillas and a year later, a military offensive was ordered against all armed peasants who had refused to demobilize (Leech, 2011). While the peasants sought refuge from the government attacks, the political parties of Colombia united to form the National Front, resulting in an end to the political violence inspired by these. The offences against the peasants continued and would result in them mobilizing themselves elsewhere for protection, under the advice of the Colombian Communist party, creating the ideal circumstances and environment for the birth of the FARC.

Birth of the FARC

The displaced peasants settled in the eastern departments of Caquetá and Meta, and in Southern Tolima, regions that are now governed by the FARC (Leech, 2011). Originally, the purpose of moving away from government controlled areas was mainly for self-defence. It would be a member of the Communist Party of Colombia (PCC), who would become the first leader of the FARC, Jacob Arenas. Along with another member of PCC, Manuel Marulanda, in 1964, Arenas began to form the guerilla group which would be called the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or "Las FARC" (Stanford, 2015). The official birth of the FARC would take place after the Colombian military attacked Marquetalia, which resulted in the First Guerilla Conference and in 1966 after the Second Guerilla Conference, the FARC came into existence. The FARC

proved successful in the rural areas, but politically it was left marginalized (Leech, 2011). Having been founded by peasants, the FARC sought to transform society and overthrow the government, focusing on local power over regional power.

The main reason that has worked to the advantage of the FARC is that the government of Colombia has never fully controlled all Colombia, where principal cities such as Bogota and Medellin are separated by tropical jungles and vast mountainous areas (Leech, 2011). So, the FARC's influence spread throughout 1965-1976, where peasant colonizers sought refuge from cattle ranchers and the army which supported them, who were taking over the land that the colonizers did not have the resources to defend and to care for (Pearce, 1990). Wherever the state was absent, the FARC fulfilled its role and became the governing authority, which allowed the FARC to survive the 1970's (Pearce, 1990).

Ideology and Influence of the FARC

The FARC was founded by members of the Communist Party of Colombia, originally being the military wing of the party (COHA, 2007). The ideological driver behind the guerrilla group is Marxist-Lenin ideology. Their primary goal has been to overthrow the Colombian government and replace it with a Marxist-style government, and they advocate for land reforms to benefit the poor (COHA, 2007) and are against the privatization of natural resources (Renwick & Felter, 2017). Although the FARC claim to be the defenders of the poor, their overwhelming lack of support suggests that their goal is not in the best interest of those they claim to protect (COHA, 2007).

So, are the FARC guardians of the poor or criminals? In its inception, it is fair to conclude that the FARC has had humble origins in a violent past. The group consisted of peasants seeking refuge from a Colombian government backed by the United States who sought to demobilize and rid themselves of socialist and communist peasants. Furthermore, the rights of peasants were blatantly being violated during and the period after "La Violencia". However, although the group first sub-served the peasants, their ultimate goal was not a social transformation, but complete political control. So, why does the FARC still receive some support? It is theorized that some join for self-defence, others for ideology, and some for the ideology of self-defence, feeling excluded from society. To understand how the FARC has evolved into a powerful force in Colombia, it is necessary to understand link between the crimes committed by the FARC and their involvement in drug-trafficking.

Drug-Trafficking and Crimes committed by the FARC

The criminal activity of the FARC has involved kidnapping, extortion, rape, and assassinations (Renwick & Felter, 2017). They have also engaged in the planting of landmines which has killed or disabled more than ten thousand people. In the kidnapping, it is estimated that the group kidnapped twenty-five thousand people between 1970 and 2010 (CNMH, 2013). Although the crimes that were committed by the FARC are crimes against humanity, refusing to acknowledge the role that the FARC has had in drug-trafficking allows leeway for severe repercussions in Colombian politics as the peace process advances.

To sustain itself, the FARC needed an income, and it turned to the fastest way of accumulating vast sums of wealth, drug-trafficking. In the year 2000, it is reported that Colombia exported around 90% of cocaine in the world (CNMH, 2013), the trafficking of illegal drugs

provided the FARC with most of its revenue (Renwick & Felter, 2017). Furthermore, in 2009, it was reported by the U.S. government that 60% of the cocaine exported to the United States from Colombia was trafficked by the FARC (Drug Control, 2009). Although calculating the income of the FARC is not entirely accurate, revenues obtained from drug trafficking were estimated to be between \$1.1 billion USD by the United States Attorney General Office, and \$3.5 billion USD by the Colombia government. As of 2015, Colombian authorities found a massive cocaine processing complex which is under control by the FARC in western Colombia (Renwick & Felter, 2017) and since then, cocaine output has risen by 37% and reached an all-time high in 2016, where 710 tonnes were produced (Coca-growing in Colombia is at an all-time high, 2017). It is vital to understand the FARC's role in drug trafficking, as it is the source of their power and the fifty-year protracted conflict with the government of Colombia. The profits that the FARC has received from drug trafficking expanded their membership from 6,000 in the year 1982, to 20,000 in the year 2000.

Significantly, the FARC was in existence decades before the trafficking of illegal substances would assume a vital role in Colombia (Otis, 2014). It was in 1982 that the FARC was first involved in drug trafficking, by taxing smugglers and drug producers. In the 1990s, when prominent cartels lost power and influence, the Andean coca crop was moved to regions that were under FARC control, which resulted in them acquiring 400,00 acres in the year 2000 that could produce 680 tons of cocaine, where they previously only had a few thousand acres. The new power and wealth consolidated the power that the FARC had over rural civilians.

Their role in drug trafficking has earned them the status of the richest and largest guerrilla army in the world (The guerrilla groups in Colombia, 2017). Moreover, the US justice department reported that the FARC supplied more than 50% of cocaine in the world. Not only has the FARC been involved in crimes against humanity and illegal drug trafficking, but their actions in kidnappings and extortion has resulted in them being placed on US and European lists of terrorist organizations. Five million Colombians have been displaced from their homes concerning drug relate crime, which has also resulted in the stealing of land contributing to 42.8% of the poverty rate in the countryside of Colombia (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas, 2014). Furthermore, the income obtained from drug trafficking has allowed the FARC to gain access to the international arms market, which allowed them to continue their war against the government and innocent civilians (Farah, 2011). Therefore, the question remains, who were the FARC fighting against? Were their motives socially inspired or were the revenues obtained by the top leaders so profitable that promulgating a leftist ideology to accumulate supporters, where behind the façade, their real motives were the accumulation of wealth and power?

Peace Treaty with the FARC

The fundamental issue with the Peace Treaty that the government of Colombia has agreed to with the FARC is precisely its neglect in recognizing the FARC's role in drug trafficking and the underlying implications it has in Colombia's future. Not only is it a source of enormous profits and wealth, but it is a source of power, as demonstrated by the FARC consolidating their rule over rural civilians. Specifically, the wealth accumulated by the FARC directly related to drug trafficking will not be confiscated. Although the government has already undertaken a process to track the drug money, it has proved unsuccessful (Yagoub, 2016). So primarily, the most important issue is: "how can the government of Colombia seize the illegal money if the FARC are not accused of drug trafficking? And if an investigation has already taken place and the FARC's wealth

was not declared illegal, what will happen to the money accumulated by the top officials over the years?"

Per section four, paragraph one, of the final treaty between the FARC and the government of President Santos, it attributes the internal conflict in Colombia to issues not related to the cultivation of illegal substances and the trafficking of illegal drugs (Acuerdo Final, 2016). In addressing the drug trafficking in Colombia, the government of President Santos refuses to acknowledge the FARC's role and their responsibility in the propagation and spreading of trafficking and cultivation of illegal drugs which has prolonged the conflict in Colombia. What is even more interesting is that the final treaty is correct in stating that the conflict began before the appearance of drug trafficking in Colombia, but it fails to mention that the scale of crimes committed and power accumulated by the FARC after its appearance is too great to ignore.

Furthermore, section four of the final treaty, states that the cultivation of illegal drugs is linked to poverty, marginalization and a weak government presence, and the presence of criminal organizations dedicated to drug trafficking (Acuerdo Final, 2016). Has the government of President Santos not been made aware that the FARC, after major cartels lost their influence and power, forced rural civilians into the cultivation of coca plants (Otis, 2014), reaping the benefits and threatening these communities, is not also the result of organized crime? Even more, the question remains as to how the FARC can assist the government of Colombia in eradicating the cultivation of illegal drugs, specifically the coca plant, if it is demobilized? Illegal drug cultivation and trafficking is a source of violent crime, mainly because of the wealth it creates. Already, in regions where the FARC has left and the government has not advanced and established a strong presence, violence is once again on the rise (Graham-Harrison, 2017). Importantly, it goes to say that not all members of the FARC are readily agreeing to give up their arms, for most, it is the only way of life they have known, where the opportunity to join other guerrilla and rebel groups is a huge possibility.

The Final Treaty also names one of the objectives of the government of Colombia, and that is to install a strong government presence in areas that the FARC has given up (Acuerdo Final, 2016). The important issue to note is that these regions did not ever have a strong government presence, and if President Santos does not begin sending reinforcements immediately, this vacuum will be the source of instability and primary cause of the possible dissolution of the peace process. Colombia has suffered for many years from civil wars and internal conflicts with guerrilla groups and armed rebels, but the most important lesson has been ignored, and that is that if conditions are to be improved and lasting, sometimes the road to stability is weary and long, but nevertheless effective.

Referendum and Ratification of the Final Treaty

Not only is the lack of acknowledging the FARC's role in the trafficking of drugs an issue, but the means through which the Final Accord was ratified allows for future repercussions in Colombian politics. President Santos had determined that the Final Accord with the FARC would be approved through a referendum, stating that if the Colombian citizens rejected the treaty, the country would return to war (Cobbs & Casey, 2016). After having declared that there were no other alternatives, only war or peace, the question on the ballot just asked, "do you support the final agreement to end the conflict to construct a stable and enduring peace?" The results of the referendum were 50.2% for the no vote, and 49.8% for the yes vote, with the no vote winning by a small margin. It is rhetorical to ask a nation tortured by internal conflict and war if peace is

something they desire or do they prefer war. What the results of the referendum showed was that although many opted for a shortcut to a stable environment, was that the accord did not address the fundamental issues of the conflict, and could not ensure that a stable and “enduring” peace would be the result.

The results of the referendum did not change President Santos' stance on the final treaty between his government and the FARC. To quickly pursue his objectives, the revised peace deal did not go through a second referendum, but was ratified through Colombia's Constitutional Court (Maas, 2016). President Santos' hurry to demobilize the FARC resulted in Congress being allowed to “Fast-track” legislations of priority. To avoid a period of debate on each law, Congress could vote a “yes” or “no” on each law, and President Santos was granted power to issue executive decrees, allowing the implementation of the agreement. It is important to note that President Santos's government forms a majority in congress, which would produce the results he so eagerly desired (BBC Monitoring, 2016). However, what President Santos has apparently failed to notice is that there have been failed peace treaties before in Colombia and perhaps prolonging the debate on important issues on the agreement, was the best option.

Importantly, with President Santos pushing the peace treaty forward, it is necessary to note that his term as president is coming to an end in two years' time. If history serves as a lesson, then the failed truce with the gangs in El Salvador is strikingly similar to the actions being pursued by President Santos. After having successfully negotiated a truce with the gangs in El Salvador, and watching the murder rate fall by 40% in 2012, a change in government radically reversed these actions (Hernandez & Hamilton, 2016). When the new government of President Salvador Sanchez Ceren took power, the truce was dissolved, and once again the gangs resorted to violence to maintain their status. President Mauricio Funes denied his role in the negotiation of the truce, but sources close to him later confirmed the President's role, where they negotiated a deal with the leaders of the gangs to put an end to the violence (Martinez, 2013). The lesson is this: the results of the referendum did not support Pres. Santos' treaty with the FARC, ratifying the treaty through Congress using “Fast-Track,” and ignoring the role of the FARC have in drug trafficking, leaves a leak in the system that will burst if the next government does not support these efforts, or if Pres. Santos does not introduce a strong government presence in the power vacuums left by the FARC in the nearby future.

FARC; Drug Lords to Political Emperors?

Perhaps, the most unstable aspect of the peace treaty is allowing some members of the FARC a role in politics (Murphy & Acosta, 2016). Not only is their involvement in politics a threat to Colombian democracy, but the wealth accumulated from drug trafficking has not been confiscated. The implication this can have on Colombian politics is drastic, where the drug money can be used to finance political campaigns and consolidate their power in politics. Or perhaps the FARC have perfected the tactics used by drug lords to obtain complete control over their home country, after they have accumulated vast wealth. Reminiscent of Pablo Escobar and his brief period as a congressman in Colombia (Stringer, 2013), the FARC will not be charged or arrested on drug trafficking crimes and banned from political power, which leaves the future uncertain.

Conclusion

Colombia is a country stricken and war torn by civil wars and armed conflicts with guerrilla and rebel groups. President Santos actions and intentions could be perceived as noble, in attempting to reduce the number of murders and restoring peace to his beautiful country. But, what President Santos refuses to acknowledge is that shortcuts can sometimes make the journey longer than it need be. Not only is this treaty a dance with the devil, but there is no assurance that FARC cannot have access again to international arms since the wealth it accumulated from drug trafficking can now be considered “clean money.” Furthermore, in allowing the FARC an opportunity to participate in politics does not assure that they will remain demobilized and that peace is ensured. If Latin America's experience with socialist and Marxists leaning government has proved anything, is that once in power they intend to maintain authority. Likewise, as president Uribe has advocated is that the No vote was not against peace, but it is in favour of ensuring a stable democracy that can maintain peace. Finally, one question lingers: “can peace be obtained at the expense of justice? Or is it just bowing to the demands of criminals?”

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