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Restoring Peace to Nations in Conflict: Understanding the Challenges ahead for Colombia and South America

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This essay aims at offering elements to encourage discussions among participants in the 2016th edition of the Forte de Copacabana Conference, which will focus on issues of “Might and Right in World Politics”. I conceived it not as an academic article, but as an unambitious attempt to bring to participants’ attention several evolving processes relevant to understand the impact of the current Colombian peace process on South America’s security dynamics. It may also encourage further thought about international cooperation with Europe as well.

The text responds, though not extensively, to some of the questions raised by the organizers in preparation for the Conference; and it offers clues to Brazilian and South American perspectives on the use of force and dialogue in mediating, transforming and solving conflicts. I organized the argument in short sections, searching for brevity, attempting to render it reasonably light – hopefully also enlightening. I will discuss with greater detail the complexities inherent in the peace agreement negotiated in Colombia and its negotiation, focusing on the implications of this for South America and beyond in the final section.

Are we finally witnessing an end to the decades old struggle in Colombia?

Honestly, no one knows. It is an open process. Therefore, it is too soon to assert any categorical conclusion about it. Most of us hope so. To many involved in this armed conflict, it has been a war. And, as Erasmus wrote in his Adagia, “the most disadvantageous peace is better than the most just war”. Far from disadvantageous to any of its brokers, the peace agreement and the ceasefire that followed are certainly a great breakthrough that shall be supported, even more than praised.

Having taken a side in favor of President Santos and the FARC-EP’s remarkable achievement (it is a joint venture, let us not forget it), the best contribution a scholar can offer to that process is to play the role of the Devil’s advocate. I will hence raise several issues that should command the attention of observers and politicians in the years to come.

To start, this is at best the beginning of one long process. It is unclear how events will unfold, as much as the degree of confidence that the Colombian population have, and will maintain, in it. The pace and quality of its implementation will tell. The fact that it will affect the whole Colombian society – and beyond – complicates the process, since most of those who will suffer the consequences, for the better or for the worst, of the agreement did not participate in it.

Yes, it seems obvious, but it is worth stressing that this agreement involves only one key organization, the FARC-EP and the Colombian government. Colombia has at least a dozen similar, though smaller and less organized, entities which have not taken part in the deal. Some important ones, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), have already openly opposed the Agreement, announcing that they will not change their behavior in the years to come. Others remain silent, which is even more disturbing.

This explains why the government has already announced that it does not intend to demobilize its Armed Forces. This is wise. It is an intelligent move also because it helps maintaining the support of the military to the government. Indeed, they have benefited from generous budgets, particularly during the tenures of Uribe & Santos, and they are highly respected in the Colombian society. I will not go as far as to assert that the security forces in general, and the military in particular, have a vested interest in the conflict; but they will certainly have to adapt to new standards of budget and prestige in the future, assuming that the situation will change for the better, as everyone wants.

Whatever is the case, we are talking about the first step to end the most important armed conflict between the Colombian government and one important organized group. It happens to be one that still has political aspirations, fortunately. It is unclear whether the following steps will allow their leaders to fulfill their expectations, and suffice to end this conflict. Hopefully so.

By contrast, it is certain that the government will have to manage more conflictive relations with several other armed groups whose protagonists may not be interested in becoming regular political organizations. Indeed, in the case of organized groups that use violence as a means to make money out of criminal activities, it is unclear how to set a path for dialogue and negotiation.

More challenging struggles: Transnational Organized Delinquency

At least though the last 4 decades, the FARC-EP have established ties with drug dealers in order to finance its political project.¹ Because the FARC-EP had a cause & a political purpose, it organized itself to endure long periods of struggle. It thus developed methods to disguise and finance its criminal activities, which now may come to an end. Assuming that the FARC-EP will maintain its compromise, and that it maintains a reasonable grip on its members, it will be one less kid in the block, perhaps the strongest one. But it no longer controls the methods and technologies it has developed to support its underground activities. And it no longer controls some of its “soldiers”, even those who have not left the organization. Other organized groups, which are not interested in politics, appropriated such methods and developed their own. And they are not open to dialogue or negotiation.

Such groups benefit from the limited capacities of governments to control flows of riches that are often used to corrupt civil & military servants who promised to dedicate their lives to combat crime. This problem goes far beyond Colombia. It involves developed & developing countries, legally established actors & criminal organizations. Its connection with drug trafficking received greater attention, but it involves a plethora of transnational illegal activities. Certainly these activities produce spillovers to the legal economy and stimulate, for instance, the acquisition of precursors & other chemicals substances that are legally traded, paying taxes, employing people, laundering profits in markets as diverse as tourism, arts, sports, gambling, and advertising.²

South American governments are concerned with it. Because the region is particularly affected by the networks of drug trafficking, in April 2016, UNASUR was the first regional organization to present a common view on what it considers to be “The World

¹ See, for instance, Cook, T. (2011): *The Financial Arm Of The FARC: A Threat Finance Perspective*, in *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4, no. 1 (2011): 19-36. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.4.1.2>; Youngers, C. A. & Rosin, E. (2005): *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers; Ottis, J. (2010): *Law of the Jungle*, New York: HarperCollins; and Bagley, B. (2012): *Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in the Americas*, Woodrow Wilson Update on the Americas, August 2012, for competent overviews of the problem.

² It is very difficult to estimate those links, as most criminal activities evolve underground and are themselves only superficially known my nation states. Pedroni & Verdugo Yepes (2011) indicate the links between the production of cocaine in Peru and the country’s legal economy. See Pedroni, P. & Verdugo Yepes, C. (2011): *The Relationship Between Illicit Coca Production and Formal Economic Activity in Peru*. IMF WP/11/182, 2011. See also Steiner, R. (1998). *Colombia’s Income from the Drug Trade*, In *World Development*, Vol. 26, No. 6: 1013-1031, Calderón, F. (2015) *Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime: Connected but Different*, in *Harvard International Review*, 36 (4), Summer 2015, available at <http://hir.harvard.edu/drug-trafficking-and-organized-crime-connected-but-different-2/> (Access: September 2nd, 2016; Ending the Drug Wars Report of the LSE Expert Group on the Economics of Drug Policy, May 2014, available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/pdf/LSE-IDEAS-DRUGS-REPORT-FINAL-WEB.pdf> (Access: August 25th, 2016).

Drug Problem”. It is such an important issue in this region that the Union created a Council to coordinate public policies in combatting the crimes associated to drug trafficking. The document is worth reading³. Based on the Principle of Common and Shared Responsibility, it reminds the UN General Assembly that the global community shall assess this problem through an “open, frank, and realistic debate”, to set a “comprehensive, balanced, multidisciplinary and sustainable approach”⁴, if the intention to solve it is serious.

This is not a challenge that one government, even with the generous support of those who are immediately affected by it, can tackle successfully. Over 4 decades of a failed “war on drugs” have already convinced some people in Washington and beyond that it is time to adopt a different approach. UNASUR thus encourages a “comprehensive, balanced, multidisciplinary and sustainable”, one that combines simultaneous efforts to reduce the demand & the supply of drugs and proposes a “comprehensive and sustainable alternative development including prevention, judicial cooperation and international cooperation”, while creating “effective tools” to reduce “the probability of financial reward from those crimes”, particularly in regard to “the existence of tax havens or jurisdictions with financial or corporate opacity that could be used for laundering money from the illegal drug trade and related crimes.”⁵

It is unclear whether UNASUR’s suggestion will be adopted, notwithstanding its soundness. Major powers have other priorities and need no further divisive subject on their political agendas.

As for Colombia, it has already renegotiated the terms of its bilateral cooperation with the US, to assure further financing and expertise to face the consequences of the peace. The Colombian government also acknowledges the fact that the peace process disturbs a longstanding equilibrium. The rearrangement of socioeconomic and political forces may certainly spillover to neighboring countries, which now receive greater attention from the Colombian diplomacy. Illegal migration and transnational crime may increase significantly in the subcontinent.

The good news is that the Colombian government will be able to dedicate its energy & resources to those challenges, hopefully helped by its former antagonists, who understand better than most public servants the methods employed in the underworld of international crime. International cooperation will be necessary to maintain domestic order, even more than it was to help combat the FARC-EP.

But this is another issue, one that commands everyone’s concerns in the years to come. Let us get back to the struggle in focus.

³ It is available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/ungass2016//Contributions/IGO/UNASUR/UNASUR_common_position_on_UNGASS_english.pdf (Access: September 1st, 2016).

⁴ Paragraphs 3 & 9.

⁵ Op Cit, par. 12 & 21.

Crossing an unknown river

The old metaphor of crossing a river is appropriate here. Colombians know the miseries they have endured in the last 52 years at this side of the river; that's why most of them are eager to cross it. They are also tired of living in a divided country, or, as the saying goes, in two countries. And they are exhausted with the costs of a conflict that each day consumes an amount of money that would be sufficient to feed 3,000,000 families per day.⁶

But few people in Colombia discuss, in their full complexity, the challenges they may face at the other margin of the river. And the reader shall remember that this is an Amazonian river, full of curves, mysteries, and dangers. Only locals, or those who have spent there a long time, know that in the Amazon even the rivers change their course and evolve, more often than not, in unpredictable ways.

Hence, it is understandable that more than a few people do not want to embark in what appears to be an adventure. Colombian society is divided regarding the Peace Agreement. More importantly, its elites are divided in relation to it. In itself, this puts in risk the implementation of the Agreement, if not its approval. As I write this essay, recent polls indicate that most people, roughly 2 out of 3 Colombians, intend to vote in favor of it. But one month is an eternity in politics.

Reaching the deal required sense of direction, leadership, and perseverance. If ratified by the plebiscite, Colombia would have crossed that river, engendering another process, far more complex and delicate. Curiously, the government and the FARC-EP have discussed the specifics of their relation. Attentive readers can anticipate the political agenda in the first few years, an agenda that galvanizes actions for and against the proposed measures. As economic growth decreases⁷ and social needs demand further expenditures, fiscal equilibrium will sooner or later face greater risk. However, no one is talking about the long term.

The difficult years at the horizon will require greater social cohesiveness, which can only be achieved through a common purpose. The search for an end to this struggle played that role in the last couple of decades or so. Now there is a void in the agenda. And it is unclear whether the current leaders will be able to fill it, since they are looking at and discussing the peace process.

⁶ The full cost of the war is estimated to have imposed on the Colombian public Budget a burden of \$411 Billion in current pesos, roughly US\$ 140 billion. In his first mandate, President Santos has increased public expenses in US\$ 14 billion, when compared with Uribe's Second term. This mere increment in the budget, perceived as necessary to strengthen his position in negotiations could have been employed in the construction of 400,000 houses for poor families in Colombia. See Gonzalez Posso, C. *Las Cifras de la Guerra y de la Transición*. Available at <http://www.acpaz.org/las-cifras-de-la-guerra-y-de-la-transicion/> (Access: September 14, 2016).

⁷ In August 31st the Central Bank just readjusted its expectations downward, to something between 1.5% and 2.3% of the GDP in 2016.

A gifted politician with a clever strategy at the right place & moment: But is this enough?

President Santos will probably succeed in approving his proposal in the plebiscite on October 2nd. This will help approve the deal in Congress, where he has already built sufficient support what is presented to the population as “the best possible deal”.

In fact, Santos managed to design both the plebiscite and the voting procedures in Parliament in a way that favors its approval. And he gathered most opinion-makers, including the most influential part of the media, in a coalition to support the deal. Finally, he intelligently uses his position to sell the Agreement as an unique opportunity to end a conflict that killed as much as 220,000 people, displaced over 5,7 million people (almost 1/8th of the country’s population of roughly 48 million people), provoked more than 30,000 kidnapping and over 13,000 documented victims of sexual violations, plus countless violations of human rights.

The whole process shows how gifted a politician Santos is. Technically prepared, with a comprehensive understanding of the Colombian political system and its main actors, Santos has always shown a superior analytical mind and the political courage to make & carry on difficult decisions. It is thus understandable that he wants to make history.

His opponents suggest that he is in fact targeting the Nobel Peace Prize, with little concern with how things will settle once the Agreement is approved, as he would only be in charge only for a couple of additional years. Unfair as this may be with the President, the assessment stresses the nature of this moment: All attention focuses on the deal; no one is concerned with its political sustainability in the long run.

This is understandable. It is unusual to observe history in its making, being aware of it. Santos understands it and measures his words and deeds accordingly. But depending on what will come next, the deal and its initial implementation, even if successful, may not be sufficient to establish a pattern of long term growth & stability in a country that for so long cultivated habits of violence and mistrust.

Son of a former President, trained in excellent schools, able in manipulating the media⁸, Santos considers himself to be intellectually and emotionally prepared to break it through. Having founded one of the main political parties that supported Uribe’s government in Parliament, and having served in the cabinets of Gaviria, Pastrana, and Uribe, he entered the Presidency with an uncommon ease for new incumbents. He came with a strategy, with a duty in mind: “to try to match purposeful military effort and its consequences with the country’s political interests expressed as policy”, as Gray proposes⁹.

⁸ Santos acquired experience as the editor of *El Tiempo*, one of the most traditional media groups in Colombia – which was founded by his family.

⁹ Gray, C. *Schools for Strategy: Teaching Strategy for 21st Century Conflict*. SSI-US Army College, Pennsylvania, 2009: vii.

The policy was clear, at least in the mid-term: To end the conflict with the FARC-EP. The military effort joined intelligence to spot the leaders of the FARC and to impose the military defeats that weakened the morale and the sense of purpose of the “enemy”. International cooperation came from the US¹⁰ and Israel, mainly, but the whole region supported this effort diplomatically, even when Colombia violated Ecuador’s sovereign space in March 2008 to kill a senior FARC leader and his closest associates. Santos was serving as defence ministry and knew that Marulanda, the charismatic founder of the FARC, was sick, having died from a heart attack in the same month.

Acephalous, cornered and debilitated by the military offensive undertaken under Uribe’s presidency, and partially demoralized by its links to drug dealers & violations of human rights perpetrated by its members, the FARC-EP eventually would have to negotiate its survival as a political entity.

In this context, Santos sized the moment to advance the deal.

Settling an old divide in a new political context?

Santos also understood that the whole process was essentially political. (So did Uribe, who immediately opposed the deal.) The combination of force and dialogue then started to shift in favor of the latter. Initial arrangements for the conversations considered the original political purposes of the movement. The main point in the agenda had never been seriously addressed by the Colombian Government: Land reform, with financial & technical support from the central government to render small farmers viable.¹¹ Now it has. Will it work?

As the informed reader knows, both the FARC-EP and the ELN (National Liberation Army) emerged in 1964 as organizations that engaged in an internal armed conflict with the Colombian government precisely because it failed to address the socioeconomic demands associated to land tenure and social inclusion. Those organizations in fact evolved from a reaction to the Army’s aggressive persecution of political leaders who raised these issues in the late 1940s, ensuing a period that Historians labeled as “The Violence” (La Violencia), which in less than 2 decades left almost as much lethal victims (200,000) as the current 52 years struggle that may now come to an end.¹²

¹⁰ Over 9.3 US\$ Billion since 1996. See Isacson, A. Ending 50 Years of Conflict: The Challenges Ahead and the U.S. Role in Colombia. WOLA; April 2014, Available at http://colombiapeace.org/files/1404_colpeace.pdf (Access: August 02, 2016).

¹¹ The first agrarian census to cover the entire Colombian territory was completed late last year. It found out that 0.4% of the population holds over 46% of the country’s lands while 70% of farmers own 5% of farms with more than 5 hectares. Over 83% of farmers have no access to machinery and 90% receives neither technical assistance nor financial support. Roughly 2/3 of young people (17-24 years old) in rural areas receive no education. See Albertus, M & Kaplan, O The Key to Peace in Colombia is in the Countryside. Forbes, Oct 29, 2015. Available at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2015/10/29/the-key-to-peace-in-colombia-is-in-its-countryside/#4055fae25e26> and Colombia: Agricultural census evidences unjust distribution of land, available at <http://lainfo.es/en/2015/08/16/colombia-agricultural-census-evidence-unjust-distribution-of-land/> (Access: September 02, 2016).

¹² The whole process goes back to the 1928 banana massacre, an episode in which the Colombian government, violently repressed workers at the United Fruit Company who asked it to formalize their labor relations with the company. This also marked the involvement of the US, backing its commercial interests, in political processes in Colombia and launched a campaign for modernizing labor relations in the country. The assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, one of the leaders of this campaign, in 1948, followed by the “Bogotazo”, is commonly considered the beginning of the process that ignited

In the context of the Cold War, governments in this part of the world had little margin for maneuver in their infrequent attempts to establish redistributive public policies in general. Any proposal of increasing labor rights or supporting small farmers would immediately receive the label of communist, attracting huge opposition from domestic & international political actors.

Currently this kind of policy faces no serious prejudices, as it did in the 1960s, a period shadowed by the “communist threat”. It is thus palatable for any government, particularly in a context of high demand for sustainable agriculture, food production, and social inclusion. Framed as a price to pay for the peace agreement, land distribution may finally take place in Colombia, bridging the gap that still separate the two countries. But this does not mean that landowners will accept a land reform in exchange for the peace agreement.

Whatever is the case, the issue is back on the agenda – to some actors. To others, it has never left the political agenda. It remains divisive, though perhaps not as much as it was several decades ago. And it still requires a sensible approach, perhaps enlightened by the commitments undertaken by the Colombian government in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. This would be consistent with the overall decision to align the commitments set by the Peace Agreement with international law and would certainly help organizing the country’s political agenda in the long term.

This is one possibility of reframing an old divisive issue in terms that may help its solution in contemporary Colombian politics. Others may emerge. What shall not be ignored is the necessity to tackle it with public policies that simultaneously address the immediate needs of those who the peace process intend to demobilize & (re)integrate in the civilian life and the long term equilibrium that may create a healthy agricultural sector. After all, this sector may not only be sustainable in socioeconomic & environmental terms; it must also compete with the production of drugs for the international market.

Disarming, demobilizing, and (re)integrating former combatants in Colombia

The mere announcement of these challenges point to their complexity. Disarming will certainly be the easiest part, at least in regard to those over whom the FARC-EP leaders have ascendancy. The scheme that has been conceived to make it happen is sound, the schedule is reasonable, the UN will supervise improving the level of transparency and effectiveness in the procedures. This is already a huge achievement. Total confidence in the abandonment of the arms by the rebels will only come with the passing time, but this is inherent in such processes. It is worth betting in the success of the planned arrangement.

“La Violencia”, leading to the civil war that engulfed the country ever since. A concise summary of these events appears in Gillin, J. Understanding Colombia’s Armed Conflict: International Actors. In Peace Talks, January 15, 2015, available at <http://colombiareports.com/causes-colombia-conflict-international-actors/> (Access: September 07, 2016)

In fact, disarming is the least important part of the deal for irregular combatants. They know that this process may serve the most to build confidence, since it can be verified objectively. They also know that, with the abundance of arms sold in the black market, they can easily rearm if they ever decide to resume conflict.

A more complex challenge pertains demobilizing and (re)integrating former combatants. The parenthesis is important in the sentence above, for some of those combatants have never been integrated in civilian activities. Their whole life experience evolved within the struggle, fighting for their lives. This is all they know. Some of them feel too old to learn other ways of living. And those skills may be useful in many parts of the world, in case they do not find a smooth adaptation to new lives in their own country. In itself, this phenomenon will be a huge challenge at the other margin of this Amazonian river.

Judged by its letter, the intentions expressed in the Peace Agreement regarding demobilization and (re)integration do not guarantee that former combatants will easily adapt to the routine of small farmers. Old habits die hard, and sensible studies of similar cases in Africa show that those who dedicated their lives to the professions of arms tend to become addicted to immediate achievements, as much as to the adrenaline inherent in combats. In contrast, small farmers need more patience to crop their production and sell it, living far less adventurous lives. Hopefully those who decided to settle and hand over their arms intend to rest and to help build a new country.

Otherwise, this may open a Pandora box of transnational organized delinquency, for they have connections and knowledge to operate illegal arrangements that are difficult to follow, let alone to control.

Experts in the Colombian conflict have spotted this risk. Isacson, for instance, stresses the challenge of demobilization, asserting that:

*“The most problematic former guerrillas will be those who have had some middle-ranking position of authority, or involvement in fundraising, especially in areas where the FARC controls illegal income sources like drugs, unlicensed mining, or extortion. These individuals would be demobilizing with a large head start in the criminal underworld, controlling key trafficking corridors and enjoying extensive criminal connections. They pose the highest risk of returning to their zones of operations, rearming, and generating new violence as the heads of emerging criminal groups.”*¹³

In fact, the raise in the number of criminal organizations (Bandas Criminales, also known as BACRIMs) indicate that many have already taken this decision.

¹³ See Isacson (2014), op cit: 15.

A new struggle against drug trafficking and other criminal activities

The successful implementation of the Peace Agreement will probably help sacking the FARC-EP from the drug business. However, this may have come too late. Indeed, the very success of the anti-drug policy conducted by the Colombian government under the auspices of the Plan Colombia helped create a situation that may be more difficult to manage. Having taken the heads of the former cartels, ruthless people such as Pablo Escobar, the Government of Colombia changed the whole game, unintentionally favoring its opponents.

Without their capos, soon the acolytes of the former leaders understood the utility of organizing themselves in dispersed cells, much like the contemporary terrorist organizations, only with different purposes. They employ methods that are similar to those of the terrorist networks and also benefit from the limited capacity of states to impose order, but they do not request strict loyalty or suicidal discipline from their followers. They are not involved in a messianic endeavor, but running a business. As long as their profits do not suffer significantly, they are open to share part of the total income with an extended network, developing alternative routes to traffic not only drugs and arms, but also counterfeited products, gems, minerals, biodiversity, organs, and persons.

These are neither issue-oriented nor locally organized criminal gangs. They are cells in a network of transnational organized crime, which can only be effectively combatted through a concerted effort of governments from all over the world. However difficult, this has to be part of the post-conflict long term stabilization efforts to be hold by the Colombian government, which will need enhanced international support to carry it on.

This will remain as a complex challenge, perhaps one of the most complex ones, future Governments will have to address – challenge that it will have to tackle while implementing the Peace Agreement.

Setting the path to the agreement...

The Colombian Government and the FARC-EP took 4 years to negotiate a detailed agreement that points to every key issue in their relation. They both showed political courage to make important concessions and needed international support to break the deal, as much as they will need to assure its implementation. At the end of the day, they found a political solution for the conflict, which inspires hope and deserves support.

But precisely because the deal results from a political compromise between those important actors in Colombian politics, it induces those who are not part of the deal to oppose it. The louder opposition comes from former President Uribe, but former presidential candidate Óscar Iván Zuluaga also presents a vocal opposition to it.

Having decided to settle the political conflict, it became a matter of discussing the terms under which former FARC-EP leaders would engage in the regular, institutionalized,

country, as well as of the other dimensions that structured the deal: establishing a ceasefire; reincorporating combatants into the civilian life; supporting the victims; joining efforts to face the problem of drugs; and establishing the mechanisms to implement and verify the Agreement.¹⁴

Wisely enough, the government accepted to assure that the FARC-EP¹⁵ will hold 5 seats in each of the Parliament Houses, out of 266 in total, for two constitutional mandates starting in July 20, 2018, without vote.¹⁶ They will also participate in the electoral Council, without vote. Santos bets in the incapacity of the FARC-EP to reinvent itself, particularly in a moment when South America observes the discredit of left-wing governments and the dramatic situation created in Venezuela as a result of the intent to impose the 21st Century Socialism.

This is what most people see from abroad and one shall expect that opposition will remain, perhaps increase, depending on how successful will be the reintegration of former combatants to the civilian life.

And some challenges in implementing it

Helping former combatants to adapt to some kind of a civilian life is a great challenge. The fact that the commission does not point to reconciliation and proposes unclear methods to evaluate each case on an ad hoc basis raises concerns.

On the one hand, resentments among families whose members disappeared (we are talking about more than 30,000 kidnappings) are high, proportional to their expectation that some kind of Justice will materialize. On the other hand, it is clearly impossible to bring each of the over 17,000 current FARC-EP combatants to Court, while their leaders have negotiated their special treatment in the context of the political deal that brought about the Peace Agreement.¹⁷ Only the future will tell whether the Colombian society will be satisfied with the level of transparency and fairness it will manage to achieve through this process.

Few countries, like South Africa, have got it right, and they focused simultaneously on Justice and reconciliation. (Brazil hasn't and to this day deals uneasily with its past). It was a different context, though, in which charisma and religion played a more important role in a country that was preparing to face a whole new world. It was a time

¹⁴ <http://www.acuerdodepaz.gov.co/acuerdos/acuerdo-final> (Access: August 27, 2016).

¹⁵ Sooner or later, it shall find a new label, as "People's Army" no longer fits in a political movement or party.

¹⁶ A local media news offer an interesting Comparison with other countries that negotiated peace agreements: In Angola, former rebels kept 70 out of 220 places plus 5 positions in the cabinet, among others; in Nepal, 83 out of 330, plus several cabinet positions; in Sudan, 126 out of 450, plus the Vice-Presidency and 8 cabinet positions. See <http://www.semana.com/confidenciales/articulo/el-acuerdo-de-paz-en-la-habana-garantiza-cinco-senadores-y-cinco-representantes-para-las-farc/492428> (Access: September 07, 2016).

¹⁷ As always, the Devil lies in the specifics. It is improbable that even FARC-EP leaders know who did what and whether perpetrators of human rights violations are still in their forces. Moreover, the level of loyalty between leaders and followers is also unknown. To break the deal, FARC-EP leaders may well have exaggerated the control they affirm to have over the organization.

of high expectations with the end of the Cold War and enhanced confidence in global multilateral institutions.

Partially as a result of this confidence – and of the failure of the international community to deal with humanitarian disasters such as Srebrenica, Kosovo, and Cartoum, institutions such as the ICC evolved. Gradually, peacekeeping operations created an apparatus to support transitional justice and developed a deeper understanding about it, establishing clear procedures to be followed in cases like this. This is positive insofar as it imposes international standards to complex processes. But it also makes things more difficult for key actors to negotiate, precisely because they have less room for maneuver, as those standards constrain the possible outcomes.

In the case of Colombia, the peace agreement does consider international humanitarian law and abides by international standards, but this rendered the process bureaucratic. Because it lacks the positive inputs that both charismatic politicians and religious leaders may provide¹⁸, it is more difficult to sell it to the population, and the judicial & administrative processes appear to matter more than the persons who are involved in these processes.

In this context, opposition has mounted, particularly in small towns. Local, less known leaders, oppose the deal in their own way, and have already engaged in violence. Between August 26 and September 12th, 13 political leaders and human rights activists who supported the peace agreement were assassinated, almost one per day.¹⁹ As it becomes clear that a new equilibrium is in its way, many of them will try to reposition themselves in this process, which may revive political violence at the local level.

Add to this the immediate material needs of the local population, which will be harder to meet timely due to the bureaucratic nature of the measures previewed in the agreement, as well as the gap between expectations and possibilities inherent in these processes, and tensions will tend to increase.

Summing up

A more appropriate answer to the question raised in the beginning of this text is thus that we now witness the initial steps of a process that may hopefully lead the end of one decades old conflict in Colombia. This negotiation in part results from an intelligent combination of might and right in internal politics, conducted with perseverance by a gifted politician that happens to be at the right place, at the right time. Santos would not be able to engage in this negotiation had the FARC not been weakened militarily through the last couple of decades, mainly during Uribe's administration, which he supported and served as a defence minister.

¹⁸ A combination of statesmen like Mandela and prayers like Tutu at the right place, at the right time occurs once in a generation, if not in a century.

¹⁹ See A Semana: Los 13 líderes asesinados después la firma del acuerdo de paz. Available at http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/los-13-lideres-asesinados-despues-de-la-firma-del-acuerdo-de-paz/493528#cxrecs_s

The political nature of the conflict, or at least what remained from that in the behavior & interests of the FARC-EP leaders, along with their own relative weaknesses, made easier for Santos to identify a common ground, negotiating a deal that shall be approved and may redefine the political landscape in Colombia in the near future. Notwithstanding the difficulties to reach such an agreement, future challenges will be even more complex and difficult. While recognizing the importance of the deal, there is neither room nor time to celebrate.

The Agreement solves one important problem, but reminds us of the difficulty to employ the same model to dozens of others, whose protagonists are not interested in political acknowledgement or in transforming the Colombian society. It reinstates an old divisive issue, perhaps the most conflictive one, in Colombian politics: Land reform and the sustainability of small farms. It disturbs an equilibrium that offered prestige and generous budgets to the security forces, particularly the military, and somehow involved economic sectors that benefited from the spillovers of the underworld activities carried on by the FARC-EP. Obviously the peace deal does nothing to solve this problem, which is of a different nature, but it sheds light on it and, somehow, transforms it.

Indeed, the fact that the country was immersed in an internal armed conflict imposed one key agenda to political leaders and to the society as a whole. Once it fades away, attention will turn to longstanding unsolved problems in the Colombian society, such as the Land issue and the incapacity to control rural violence, huge socioeconomic inequalities and the resentments they unleash; and the high degree of autonomy enjoyed by criminal organizations to operate not only drug-related activities. On top of that, Colombians will now face the extraordinary challenge of (re)integrating former combatants in activities that requires scarce skills among people who always lived immersed in conflicts: patience and perseverance to achieve goals through regular jobs, rather than force; disciplined adaptation to repetitive routines, social connections and tolerance towards organized groups that share different worldviews.

And this will happen in a context of reduced economic growth, dropping commodities prices, and mounting demands from those who were told that the post-conflict situation would be happier. The government will also have to deal with longstanding frustrations that were kept at bay by the situation of conflict inherent in the confrontation with the FARC-EP. If it does not understand the necessity to create a positive political agenda in the long run, it will fall in the short-term trap of implementing the agreement, allowing tensions to mount up to an untenable point. Yet, no politician in the current debate has shown serious concern with building a convergent long-term agenda that directly responds to peoples' basic anxieties.

Neither has anyone showed a consistent strategy to deal with the important international repercussions of the Peace Agreement, to what we turn now, very briefly.

Implications from the Colombian case for the region in terms of conflict mediation and mitigation

If successful, the implementation of the Colombian peace process will offer South America a great opportunity to consolidate its political identity in a turbulent world. This region has always been relatively marginal in global geopolitical and geo-economic processes. Since its ‘discovery’ by Europe, i.e., since its aggregation in a dependent pattern to the world economy, great powers perceived it either as an object that had to be dealt with or a rich and large piece of land that could be invaded, conquered, divided, exploited, or merely incorporated into their global strategies. This partially explains why it has become a land of opportunities for adventures or economic migrants from all over the world, a refuge for immigrants escaping from religious and national wars in Europe and in the Middle East, and a destination to slaves captured in other regions equally marginal in the modern era, mainly Africa.

It also explains its peripheral participation in World Wars I & II, notwithstanding its material contributions to – and Brazil’s active participation in – the Allies’ efforts to “make the world safe for democracies”.²⁰ After the war it has become clear that combatting communism was far more important than helping establish democratic governments in this part of the world.

For several reasons, Portugal and Spain adopted different strategies in dealing with their colonies, but the countries that emerged from the independence wars in the early 19th century shared common features, such as the establishment of creole elites that had a stake in maintaining the dependent incorporation of their economies in global capitalism, an special attachment to international law as a means to define their frontiers²¹, ethnically mixed societies, and the perception that regional wars would serve only further divisions, putting in risk the mere existence of the recently independent national states, their local elites and their economic interests.

As a result, they tacitly agreed in avoiding regional wars, developing a culture of dialogue and negotiation to deal with states’ divergent interests, while actively engaging in strengthening norms and institutions at the international realm, as this was perceived as a shield against power politics dynamics, clearly unsuitable for countries that have poor military capabilities. Already in the mid-18th Century, those elites managed to convince Portugal and Spain, under the Treaty of Madrid, to avoid taking to South America the wars they might undertake in continental Europe. Contrasted with other continents, South America has observed a small number of frontier wars, most of which have ended through diplomatic means.

Through history, these countries have also shown particular attachments both to excessive bureaucratic controls and to social contracts that simultaneously kept their

²⁰ The occupation of the Galápagos Islands during the conflict, as well as the plans to establish a base in Natal and Fernando de Noronha (in the Brazilian North-east) had the country not entered the conflict voluntarily illustrate this perception.

²¹ This explains not only the Brazilian early involvement in arbitrations – even those that involved major powers –, but also the profusion of regional international cooperation initiatives and creative proposals, such as the Drago Doctrine.

economies closed, concentrated wealth, and produced highly unequal and violent societies. Their sophisticated political elites benefit from this pattern and managed to keep the region marginal in international geopolitics, avoiding wars between them, which created room for them to focus on unifying their nation states and benefiting from their trade relations with major powers.²² The idea of integrating the region is relatively new in their foreign policy deeds, despite its obvious advantages and its presence in diplomatic discourses.²³

Isolated from one another by the socioeconomic and political patterns of relation with the rest of the world, as much as by the physical obstacles imposed by the Andean mountains and by the Amazon, only recently have South American countries started to think about the subcontinent as a political entity. The very idea of a geographical identity has come to light in the late 19th century, by the way. Seen from Mexico or from the US, the Southern Cone was perceived as a region whose political dynamics were completely different from those in the Andes.

Ideas of a common Latin-American shared identity, as much as of an Ibero-American common heritage made more difficult for South American countries to start discussing their common identities and their shared views of the future. Only in 2000 have the 12 heads of state met alone for the first time in history, in Brasilia, to set an obvious common objective: develop the infrastructure necessary to integrate their economies and societies. UNASUR results from this process, with its ambiguous promise to promote the union of the nations and peoples of the continent through arrangements that are set to manage the coordination of sectorial public policies as ordered by states. In the field of security, however, the region has already advanced in the process of creating a common identity.²⁴

By then, illegal activities had already integrated those markets, effectively operating underworld businesses in the shadows of, but somehow connected with, the legal economies of these countries. The high levels of violence in these countries indicate that governments do not have the capacity to monitor, let alone to control, the activities of these groups.²⁵ The region has always witnessed illegal networks trafficking minerals, gems, biodiversity (the history of how Malaysia started to produce gum is perhaps the best known example of that) and other riches at the sidelines of the established authorities.

²² Now they work in purposefully building confidence measures that help strengthen the already positive regional dynamics in the field of security and defence. A thoughtful approach to this process appears in SAINT-PIERRE, Héctor Luis; PALACIOS JUNIOR; Alberto Montoya Correa. *As medidas de confiança no Conselho de Defesa Sul-americano (CDS): análise dos gastos em Defesa (2009–2012)*. RBPI 57 (1), 2014.

²³ See, for instance, Simões, A.J.F. *Integración: Sueño y Realidad en Sudamérica*. Brasília: Fundação Alexandre Gusmão, 2011.

²⁴ See, for instance, Namihas (Org). *El proceso de construcción de una Comunidad en Seguridad entre Bolivia, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador y Perú*. Lima, Red de Política de Seguridad, IDEI-PUC/Peru & SAS, 2016.

²⁵ PNUD (2013) registra los altos niveles de violencia ciudadana en América Latina y la baja credibilidad de los agentes públicos, con estadísticas que subrayan crecientes inversiones privadas en ese campo. La Oficina de Referencia sobre Población (2015) apunta los siguientes niveles de homicidios por 100.000 habitantes en los países de UNASUR: Argentina 9; Bolivia: 5; Brasil: 26; Chile: 3; Colombia: 25; Ecuador: 6; Paraguay: 8; Perú: 7; Uruguay: 8; y Venezuela: 90. No hay estadísticas para Guyana y Surinam. Como parámetro de comparación, el promedio en Europa y en Asia son, respectivamente, del 2,1 y del 3,8 por 100.000 habitantes, de acuerdo a las estadísticas de la Oficina de Naciones Unidas para las Drogas y el Crimen. See UNODC. *Homicide Statistics 2013*. Available at <https://www.unodc.org/gsh/en/data.html> (Access: April 12th, 2016).

In the last 4 -5 decades, as the demand for drugs increased in the US and in Europe, the production of marijuana and cocaine took hold in countries like Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela. As it often happens with those networks, they function in both ways. Bringing arms from industrialized countries soon became an interesting way to acquire drugs and to make more money, closing the circle. The spread of safe havens in the international financial system, including in the Caribbean (but also in Europe), helped laundering the money obtained in these activities, which also fostered corruption in the region, creating a vicious cycle that goes far beyond these activities.

The Colombian conflict lasted so long in part because of this context. Whenever repression became more effective there, the production of cocaine increased in Peru and Bolivia – and vice-versa. As we have discussed, it is impossible to understand the emergence of the FARC-EP and the ELN without considering both the unsatisfied social demands in the Colombian society and the Cold War setting in which they developed their political ideology. At that time, similar demands took place in countries like Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay, which were repressed with coups. In some of these countries, governments have been more effective in combatting the organized groups; In others the jungle did not offer the same competitive advantage both as a hiding place and as a source of income obtained through the association with drug dealers.

Whatever the case might be, now, more than ever, the challenges those countries face are similar. And the degree of interconnectedness, as much as of joint ventures, between those organized groups has grown consistently. They now have access to means of communication and to established economic flows that are far more sophisticated and effective than in the past. They have also diversified their activities, adding to their portfolio extortion, kidnapping, counterfeiting, human & organs trafficking, and other sources of income.

No government can effectively confront those challenges by itself. This is one of the lessons of the Colombian achievement. The mere diagnosis of the challenges ahead point both to the need to acknowledge the negative spillovers of the successful implementation of the Agreement to neighboring countries as well as the necessity to join efforts with them to combat those threats, which are in fact common. In this context, the positive historic trend that led to a degree of confidence among South American countries may certainly help develop effective cooperation policies in other areas. This has already begun, in fact. The very creation of UNASUR's Council on Citizen Security, Justice, and the Coordination of Measures against Transnational Organized Delinquency resulted from discussions undertaken at the South-American Defence Council, which in turn benefited from deep examination of the implications of conceptual differences to promote regional cooperation in juxtaposed fields of interest.²⁶

²⁶ The Council was entitled "Consejo Suramericano en Materia de Seguridad Ciudadana, Justicia y Coordinación de Acciones contra la Delincuencia Organizada Transnacional" and is already fully operational. A sensible summary of conceptual discussions appear in Alda Mejía, S. & Gomez Ricaute, V. El concepto y las relaciones multilaterales de seguridad y defensa em el contexto de la UNASUR. Instituto Universitario General Gutierrez Mellado & Ministério da Defesa do Equador, 2012.

There are other lessons and implications, particularly from the point of view of the government: The need to persevere in pressure, combining forceful means with the perspective of a negotiation that gradually emerged as the best alternative for the FARC-EP; The ability to size the moment to open negotiations with the other side; The perception that it was necessary to offer the FARC-EP a reasonable way out of the conflict, a deal that it could sell to its followers; The competent employment of multiple tools in dealing with the FARC-EP, from intelligence to hard weapons; The courage to bear the costs of negotiation with an illegal organization (therefore legitimizing it), as much as the capacity to assume the risk of reaching the unknown at the other margin of the river; The necessity to frame the agreement in accordance with the existing international standards, particularly in regard to Humanitarian law and to the procedures inherent in disarming, demobilizing, and (re)inserting former combatants; The redefinition of the country's political agenda, both by bringing in new actors and by reinstating old divisive issues that the Colombian society will sooner or later have to address consistently.

These are not simple lessons. These are not inconsequential implications. If the Peace Agreement allowed for reframing and transforming the conflict, if it opened room for a political solution that involves (re)integrating part of the Colombian society to the civilian life, it also sheds light on a more complex political agenda that the government, by itself, will not be able to manage effectively. As a result, the future may become even more messy and difficult to manage than the past, as political tensions mount, while the available means to respond to social demands tend to decrease. Colombians will need even more support and solidarity in the years to come.

This presents the international community as a whole, and UNASUR in particular, with a great opportunity for international cooperation, insofar as the coordination of actions will have to occur at the supranational level. Though the organization is well placed to meet this challenge, as its contributions to set a common strategy to tackle the World Drug Problem illustrates, it does not appear to be seen as such by the Colombian government, at least up to the moment. Gradually, however, it will become clear that this organization is peculiarly well placed to help concert the public policies necessary to tackle these challenges: It is non-intrusive and issue-oriented; it has developed effective procedures in fields as different from each other as health, defence, and infrastructure, which created an expertise that can be employed here; and it is aligned with the international development agenda, particularly the sustainable development goals.

In conclusion...

I intended this essay to be as provocative as possible, but also informative. I know that some readers of this forum are less familiar with the specifics of South American security dynamics than they wanted to be. I also know that the media enthusiastically welcomed the breakthrough created by the Peace Agreement in Colombia. By so doing, it may unintentionally encourage the misperception that everything is set, a behavior that may engender frustrations in the years to come.

Indeed, while the deal between the Colombian government and the PARC-EP deserves consistent support from all over the world, it is not yet a reality. Moreover, once implemented, it will unleash a set of challenges and threats, old and new, that are far more complex than solving this conflict. Hence we need to be conscious of them and we shall prepare to the spillovers that will emerge from the peace process.

Hence I tried to summarize the most challenging implications of the peace process to Colombia and to South America, hoping that this will also serve Europeans with a clearer view of this region's agenda in the years to come. This may obviously serve to identify possibilities for cooperation among our countries.

As it often happens, encouraged by the instigating questions raised by the organizers of this Conference, as much as by the complexities of the subjects under analysis, I developed my arguments longer than expected. Hopefully the strategy to organize it in brief sections might have taken the curious reader up to this point.

I thus welcome the opportunity to engage in further conversation with those who generously persevered in dedicating their time to this text in the debates to take place at the Forte de Copacabana Conference next October.