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FEATURED Q&A

Is Colombia's Peace Accord Successfully Being Implemented?



Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, who meets today with U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House, has made the peace negotiations with the FARC rebels the centerpiece of his presidency. // File Photo: Colombian Government.

Q In early May, an employee of the United Nations was kidnapped in Colombia by the FARC rebel group during a visit by the U.N. Security Council to support the country's recent peace accord. The captors are part of a unit of the FARC that has refused to disarm as part of last year's peace deal. The following week, eight people were kidnapped by the ELN rebel group, but were later released. How is the implementation of the peace accords between the government and the FARC rebel group going? Does there appear to be any progress in the peace talks between the government and the ELN? Will the United States make good on former President Barack Obama's pledge to give \$450 million to Colombia to aid in the implementation of its peace deal? How can the Colombian government ensure citizen security as the two sides implement the peace accord?

A Marta Lucía Ramírez, former Colombian defense minister and foreign trade minister: "The agreement with the FARC can't reach its objectives if it does not have legitimacy, and this agreement lacks precisely of legitimacy. Instead of bringing citizens together around peace, the government of Juan Manuel Santos divided them. The campaign led by Santos was sold an impossible peace by the concessions that he granted to the terrorists, and stigmatized the Colombians by making them choose between identifying as enemies or friends of peace. Additionally, it is necessary to remember that the agreement of the Colón Theater with the FARC was signed despite being defeated in a popular vote, by a discredited government that does not enjoy popular confidence. All this led to a deep division of Colombi-

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U.S. Brings Concerns Over Venezuela to U.N. Security Council

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said the closed door discussions were aimed at conflict prevention, not Security Council action.

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Santiago Stock Exchange to Use Blockchain

The technology will be used to help reduce errors and processing time for transactions.

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POLITICAL

Temer Reportedly Recorded Endorsing Bribes to Cunha

On a recording, reportedly made by an executive of Brazilian meat-packing company JBS, President Michel Temer is allegedly heard encouraging bribes to buy the silence of Eduardo Cunha, the jailed former Chamber of Deputies speaker.

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Temer // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Temer Reportedly Taped Encouraging Bribes to Cunha

The chairman of Brazilian meatpacking giant JBS recorded a conversation with President Michel Temer in which Temer was allegedly heard endorsing the businessman's bribing of Eduardo Cunha, the jailed former speaker of the lower house of Congress, in order to buy his silence, Brazilian daily newspaper O Globo reported late Wednesday. The businessman, Joesley Batista, reportedly recorded the conversation with Temer in March in which he told the president that he was regularly paying

Temer's office confirmed that the president met with Batista, but denied he requested payments to buy Cunha's silence.

Cunha to remain silent. Temer, O Globo reported, was heard in the recording, saying, "You have to maintain that, alright?" The recording was submitted to Brazil's Supreme Court as part of a cooperation deal between Batista and federal prosecutors. Batista made the recording the evening of March 7 at Temer's residence in Brasília, the newspaper reported. Batista told prosecutors that he had paid a total of \$1.6 million to Cunha since Cunha's arrest last October, according O Globo. The plea bargain is connected to the massive graft scheme involving state oil company Petrobras, The New York Times reported. The Supreme Court did not confirm nor deny the existence of the recording, and Temer's office said in a statement that the president met with Batista but "never requested payments to obtain the silence" of Cunha, The Wall Street Journal reported. "He didn't participate in or even authorize any movement [of funds] with the objective of preventing the ex-congressman from plea-bargaining or collaborating with [prosecutors], the

president's office added in the statement. Batista declined to comment, as did a lawyer for Cunha, who in March was sentenced to more than 15 years in prison on corruption charges. JBS also declined to comment. The report led to calls for Temer's resignation from the opposition. "This government has to fall now," Senator Lindbergh Farias of the Workers' Party said in a video posted to his Facebook page, calling for Temer's resignation. "We're meeting here with our legal advisors to prepare articles of impeachment."

U.S. Brings Venezuela Concerns to U.N. Security Council

The United States on Wednesday called consultations at the U.N. Security Council to discuss the worsening crisis in Venezuela, saying the Trump administration wants to prevent another conflict like the one in Syria, the Associated Press reported. "We've seen 150 political prisoners, over 1,500 arrests and clearly we're starting to see serious instability in Venezuela," said U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, following a more than 90-minute closed-door briefing and discussions. "We've been down this road with Syria, North Korea, South Sudan, Burundi, with Burma." Haley said the meeting was aimed at conflict prevention, not Security Council action. Venezuela's U.N. ambassador, Rafael Ramírez, objected to the discussion, saying Washington was trying "to interfere in our domestic issues."

Colombia's Santos to Meet With Trump Today in Washington

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos is set to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump today at the White House, where he will ask for assurance from the Trump administration that the United States intends to continue to cooperate with Colombia on the country's peace process as well as hemispheric issues,

NEWS BRIEFS

Peña Nieto to Meet Next Month With Guatemala's Morales

Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto will travel to Guatemala to meet with President Jimmy Morales on June 5 and 6, Peña Nieto's office said in a statement Wednesday, Reuters reported. The meeting comes as Mexico is looking to take a larger role in the region's migration issue. The majority of migrants headed from Central America to the United States cross the border between Guatemala and Mexico. A diplomatic source also said the visit is in part to offer support to Morales, whose family has been ensnared in a corruption scandal, and to discuss the extradition of Mexican politician Javier Duarte, who was arrested in Guatemala after fleeing Mexico over graft and organized crime charges.

Two Killed in Crash of Private Jet Near Mexico City

Mexican aviation authorities say a private jet crashed on Wednesday near the Toluca International Airport, killing the two people aboard the aircraft, the Associated Press reported. The captain and co-pilot were the only people aboard the plane, which crashed shortly after takeoff, about 200 yards outside the airport's perimeter fence. The airport is approximately 15 miles outside Mexico City.

Chile's Stock Exchange to Use IBM Blockchain Technology

Chile's Santiago Stock Exchange will use blockchain technology from IBM in order to help reduce errors, possible fraud and processing time for transactions, the U.S.-based company said in a statement. The Chilean exchange, which built the technology with IBM, is the first in Latin America to use such a system, according to IBM.

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an society with respect to the agreement, and under these conditions, the enormous collective effort that is necessary to execute the accord cannot be materialized. Proof of the above is that the timelines are not being met, which is generating complaints, ranging from logistical and security problems in the concentration areas to dark negotiations in Congress to deal with the rules that the government requires to implement the agreement. With this background, the other groups outside the law feel empowered to obtain greater concessions from the Colombian state and society. That is why I am skeptical about the process with the ELN, which has not renounced abduction as a tactic and continues with terrorist actions. For Colombia, it would be very helpful if the United States government reminded President Santos that his main job is to preserve the integrity of the nation of Colombia, not only in its territory, but as a single people struggling to escape poverty, social injustice and violence."

A **Adam Isacson, senior associate for the regional security policy program at the Washington Office on Latin America:** "The FARC peace accord's implementation has been better-than-average, as peace processes go. Violations of the cease-fire have been exceedingly scarce. Dissident guerrillas, like the faction that kidnapped the U.N. official, make up perhaps 5 percent of the demobilizing force. The FARC's exit from the drug trade has caused a drop in coca-leaf prices around the country as farmers seek new buyers. And disarmament, though behind schedule, is proceeding with little apparent cheating, and the U.N. monitoring mission gets high marks. Still, big problems exist. The government's slowness in setting up 26 guerrilla disarmament sites augurs poorly for its ability to fulfill more than 570 other commitments made in the peace accords. And other criminal and guerrilla groups are filling the vacuum of state presence in

formerly FARC-dominated areas, while the state stands idly by. The ELN peace talks are in a holding pattern amid mounting evidence that the group's commanders cannot control key units, especially in Chocó and Arauca, which appear to have little interest in negotiations. The need for a rapidly established

“Disarmament, though behind schedule, is proceeding with little apparent cheating.”

— Adam Isacson

government presence is urgent, but I don't see a sense of urgency among many key Colombian government agencies right now. Still, U.S. aid can help: it is positive that the 2017 appropriation that became law on May 5 included the full \$450 million that the Obama administration requested in February 2016. Still, with the Trump administration promising a more than 30 percent cut in foreign aid for 2018, next year's aid budget may bring some severe storm clouds."

A **Sergio Guzmán, analyst for global risk analysis at Control Risks in Bogotá:** "It is unlikely the government and the ELN will reach any tangible agreements to the results in the second round of negotiation. According to ELN Commander Pablo Beltrán on May 16, the guerrilla group maintains that the negotiations must produce bilateral concessions and that it will not yield to unilateral demands by the government—it insists on discussing resource sovereignty and the country's economic model. Continued armed actions by the ELN, as well as requests to negotiate items not on the agenda, make government concessions, especially a ceasefire, unlikely. The govern-

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including the illicit drug trade and the political and economic crisis in Venezuela, the Financial Times reported. The talks will be the first time the Colombian and U.S. presidents have spoken in person since Santos signed a peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, rebel group late last year. "We'll get to see what Trump's stance is towards Colombia," said Jorge Restrepo, the director of the Conflict Analysis Resource Center in Bogotá. "Will this be a relationship that follows the path set by the U.S. Congress, which recently approved the Peace Colombia plan, or will it be more confrontational and marked by protectionism?" The U.S. Congress has agreed to honor former President Barack Obama's pledge to give \$450 million to Colombia to assist in implementing the country's peace accord with the FARC rebels, and Trump has not indicated that he wants to turn back on the agreement.

BUSINESS NEWS

Exxon to Open First Mobil-Branded Gas Station in Mexico

U.S.-based Exxon Mobil on Wednesday announced it would open its first Mobil-brand gasoline service station in Mexico later this year, The Wall Street Journal reported. The station will be located in central Mexico, and the company plans to open additional stations later in the year. Exxon Mobil is planning to invest \$300 million in Mexico over the next 10 years. "Recent energy reforms present a unique opportunity to help meet the growing demand for reliable fuel supplies and quality service in Mexico," the company said. Exxon Mobil is following in the footsteps of British multinational oil company BP, which opened its first service station in Mexico in March and expects to have 1,500 in operation in five years. Until last year, all of Mexico's gas stations were franchises of state oil company Pemex. The rules changed as a result of a sweeping energy reform enacted by President Enrique Peña Nieto in 2013.

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ment is pressed to reach an agreement with the ELN before the end of its term in August of next year and before the electoral season gains momentum this December. However, the ELN has not demonstrated an urgency to reach a solution and has not shown that it is committed to ending kidnappings or attacks against infrastructure and government forces. Furthermore, the delays in the implementation of the peace agreement with the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group have cast a shadow of doubt regarding the government's ability to keep its word. This is particularly important when it comes to filling the vacuums of power left by the FARC, which are reportedly being filled by the ELN, Organized Armed Groups and dissident FARC factions. These groups are likely to engage in organized crime, such as extortion and drug trafficking, and will continue to pose security challenges in remote areas of Caquetá, Cauca, Arauca, Norte de Santander, Nariño and Putumayo departments."

A **Maria Velez de Berliner, president of Latin Intelligence Corporation:** "Assassinations, kidnappings, forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions of civic leaders, plan pistola (the ordered assassination of policemen) by Clan del Golfo and other organizations dissident from the FARC, or acting as criminal proxies for the demobilized FARC, and the violence and insecurity under which many Colombians live all demonstrate that the government cannot guarantee security and safety, thus making the peace process a misnomer. Whatever results from the negotiations with the ELN, which is being counseled by the FARC, will hinge on three issues, as Santos' fast-track authority (the legislative backbone of the agreement) nears its end: 1) implementation

of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) and to what degree it will guarantee special judicial protections and treatment to ELN militias, ex-military officers accused of massacres and human rights violations, former

“...the government cannot guarantee security and safety, thus making the peace process a misnomer.”

— Maria Velez de Berliner

self-defense operatives, and 'repentant' cartels' sicarios. 2) How the Land Law (Proyecto de Tierras) is drafted and implemented. The law encompasses 11 laws that range from a complete restructuring of land ownership and forfeiture to who is responsible for land upgrades, what can be grown, and by whom. Current landowners, who criminally appropriated land from peasants or whole communities, have established the Army Against Restitution, which, along with the Auto-Defensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, are ensuring only current 'owners' will occupy 'their' lands. 3) How the Supreme Court files for the Land Law, given that it already filed against the government in the case of Land Decree 2204/2016, stating the executive was 'assuming powers the 1991 Constitution does not grant it.' The disbursement of the U.S. contribution to Paz Colombia may depend on the Trump administration's believing that today's 710,000 acres planted in coca attests to the elimination of drug trafficking in Colombia."

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