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FEATURED Q&A

Will Colombia Be Able to Make Peace With the ELN?



The National Liberation Army, or ELN, rebels this month released nine of the hostages they have been holding. Three of the released hostages are pictured above. // Photo: ELN.

Q Colombian President Iván Duque pulled his government's negotiators out of talks last week with the National Liberation Army, or ELN. Duque has demanded that the rebels free all of their hostages and cease criminal activity before the talks resume. The ELN has called Duque's conditions "unacceptable," but has nevertheless begun to release some hostages. Is Duque taking the right approach to dealing with the ELN? Will his government eventually be able to reach a peace deal with the rebels? How does Duque's negotiating style differ from that of Santos?

A Peter DeShazo, visiting professor of Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies at Dartmouth College and former deputy U.S. assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs: "Reaching an agreement with the ELN should be a high priority for the Duque administration. While the ELN does not pose a military or political threat to the state, the violence, criminality and environmental damage it perpetrates take a heavy toll. Recent polling shows a large and growing majority of Colombians favoring a negotiated deal with the ELN. With this political cover and the FARC deal concluded, Duque has a strong hand to play. He can insist that the ELN release all of its hostages as a prelude to starting the talks but must offer some confidence-building measure by the government in return. Reaching a deal will not be easy, however. For starters, the ELN must come to terms with the reality that it—like the FARC—has almost no popular support and no prospect of success. The ELN's decentralized structure and lack of internal consensus may prevent a sizeable sector, especially those cadres linked

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Cuban President Makes First Visit to United States

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel arrived in New York, where he is scheduled to address the United Nations General Assembly and submit an annual demand for the end of the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba.

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ECONOMIC

U.S. Close to Bilateral Deal With Mexico: Official

The United States is getting "very, very close" to reaching a bilateral trade deal with Mexico and leaving out Canada amid talks to renegotiate NAFTA, said a top White House economic advisor.

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POLITICAL

China Opens Embassy in DR

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called China's new embassy in the Dominican Republic "a historic breakthrough." The Caribbean nation established diplomatic relations with China and severed ties with Taiwan earlier this year.

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Wang // File Photo: Chinese Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Cuban President Arrives in New York for First Visit to U.S.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel arrived Sunday afternoon in New York for his first visit to the United States, where he is expected to denounce the U.S. trade embargo during an appearance at the U.N. General Assembly, Cuban state-run newspaper Granma reported. "We bring the voice of Cuba, which above all,



Upon his arrival in New York, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel was greeted by Cuba's ambassador to the United States, José Ramón Cabañas (L-R). // Photo: Granma.

comes to denounce the aberrant blockade policy, a policy that has already failed, that will continue to fail," Díaz-Canel said during a visit to Cuba's mission to the United Nations, Granma reported, adding that the embargo has "condemned generations born before and after the revolution." Díaz-Canel's trip comes amid heightened tensions between Havana and Washington. U.S. President Donald Trump tightened the embargo after taking office last year, and Trump has said he believes Cuba is responsible for a series of so-called "sonic attacks" on U.S. diplomats in Havana. Cuba has denied that any attacks occurred and has said that the White House has used the situation as a pretext to toughen its stance toward Cuba, Reuters reported. During his visit to New York, Díaz-Canel is to address the U.N. General Assembly's Nelson Mandela Peace Summit today and the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday, according to Cuban state-run website Cubadebate. During the U.N. General Assembly meeting, Cuba is expected, for the 27th consecutive year, to submit a resolution

calling for an end to the embargo, Reuters reported. The non-binding resolution urges the United States to repeal the embargo, which only the U.S. Congress can do. During his visit, Díaz-Canel is also expected to meet with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, U.S. supporters of greater engagement with Cuba and Cuban-Americans, according to Cubadebate. He is also scheduled to speak at Manhattan's historic Riverside Church.

BUSINESS NEWS

Dreyfus Sugar Unit Sells Brazilian Mill to Pay Down Debt

Commodities trader Louis Dreyfus' Brazilian sugar firm sold a mill for 203.6 million reais (\$50.38 million) to pay debt and take measures to lift its ethanol stocks, Gustavo Lopes Theodozio, the company's chief financial officer, said Friday, Reuters reported. Biosev, the sugar unit, sold the Estivas sugar mill in Rio Grande do Norte, a state in Brazil's north-eastern region, to an unnamed investment fund. The mill has a capacity to crush 1.8 million metric tons of cane per year, which represents a value per metric ton processing capacity of just \$27, low given the mill's selling price, the wire service reported. Theodozio said the company sold the mill because it was a "market opportunity" for Biosev, which seeks to boost its ethanol stocks as global sugar prices remain at a 10-year low.

ECONOMIC NEWS

U.S. Getting Close to Moving Forward on Mexico Deal: Official

The United States will soon have to move forward with a bilateral trade deal with Mexico and without Canada, White House economic advisor Kevin Hassett said Friday in an

NEWS BRIEFS

Trump, Piñera to Discuss Venezuela During Meeting at White House

Chilean President Sebastián Piñera is to meet Friday in Washington with U.S. President Donald Trump to discuss the crisis in Venezuela, the White House said last Friday. "The leaders expect to discuss a shared commitment to pro-growth policies, combating corrupt and illicit networks, strategic partnerships in energy and cyber security, and efforts to restore democracy in Venezuela," said the statement. Trump has accused Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro of running a "dictatorship."

Pope Accepts Resignations of Two More Chilean Bishops Amid Scandal

Pope Francis accepted the resignation of two additional bishops in Chile on Friday, as a sex abuse scandal and alleged cover-ups continue to sweep the South American nation, the Associated Press reported. The bishops of San Bartolomé de Chillán, Monsignor Carlos Eduardo Pellegrín, and of San Felipe, Monsignor Cristián Enrique Contreras, have been replaced by apostolic administrators. The announcement brings the number of bishops whose resignations Francis has accepted to seven.

China Opens Embassy in Dominican Republic

China opened its new embassy in the Dominican Republic on Friday, several months after the Caribbean nation cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan, Reuters reported. "We have witnessed a historic breakthrough," said Wang Yi, China's top diplomat, in a speech at the event. In the past two years, Panama and El Salvador have also recognized China, a move that angered the United States amid increasing tensions between the two powers. The United States recalled its top diplomats from the three countries following their decision.

interview with Fox News Channel. "We're still talking to Canada, and we're getting very, very close to the deadline where we're going to have to move ahead with Mexico all by themselves," said Hassett. A U.S.-imposed Oct. 1 deadline to publish the updated text of the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, is just a week away, and the United States has still not come to an agreement with Canada, said Hassett. U.S. negotiators reached a deal with Mexico in August. Last Thursday, Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland left Washington after two days of talks with U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, Reuters reported. In response to Hassett's comments, a spokesman for Freeland echoed her previous comments, saying Canada "will not be driven by a deadline but by reaching a good deal." [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Aug. 30 issue of the Advisor.]

Dispute Over Taxes Splits Bolsonaro, Economic Advisor

The chief economic advisor to the front-runner in Brazil's presidential election canceled two events on Friday following a disagreement between the two, Folha de S.Paulo reported. Paulo Guedes, far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro's choice for economy minister if he wins the October election, canceled events at the American Chamber of Commerce and at

“He doesn't have political experience.”

— Jair Bolsonaro

brokerage firm XP Investimentos in São Paulo. Market-friendly Guedes on Wednesday defended reviving an unpopular tax regime that was in place from 1997 to 2007, the so-called "check tax," which cuts income taxes on the wealthy from the current 27.5 percent to 20 percent, the Associated Press reported. He also reportedly

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to drug trafficking, from adhering to any agreement. That should not prevent the talks from going ahead. The Duque administration should take advantage of international support and efforts by domestic civil society in the negotiation process and be flexible in seeking solutions. Most importantly, President Duque needs to double down on investments aimed at building an effective state presence—stronger law enforcement, administration of justice, infrastructure, teachers, health clinics, economic support—in rural areas most affected by past violence and where the ELN is still active.”

A **Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli, director for the Andes at the Washington Office on Latin America:** “Colombian President Iván Duque set himself apart from his predecessor, Juan Manuel Santos, by placing strict conditions on the National Liberation Army, or ELN, in order to continue peace talks. These include that the guerrillas free all of their hostages and end criminal and narco-trafficking activities before the process can resume. While the ELN has made it clear it does not accept these conditions, it did release six hostages it had in its custody in the Chocó. However, it swiftly undermined this confidence-building measure by kidnapping a 15-year-old girl in Chocó two days later. Duque pointed out that this was a sign of

cowardice on the part of the guerrillas. He reaffirmed that talks will not resume until all hostages are released. Duque is right to demand that all hostages be released. The ELN

“Duque is right to demand that all hostages be released.”

— Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli

can easily prove to the international community that it is serious about talks by abiding by this and renouncing kidnapping as the FARC did during its negotiations. However, urging the ELN to end all criminal activities and narco-trafficking is a harder ask that is not readily attainable nor easy to measure and verify. As such, Duque should not hold out until a complete cessation of criminal activity takes place before resuming talks. The security and subsequent humanitarian situation in ELN strongholds like the Chocó and Arauca, as well as the ELN cross-border activity into Venezuela make finding a negotiated solution a priority. The international community should urge both Duque and the ELN to negotiate a bilateral cease-fire so

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said he would implement a 20-percent income tax on Brazilians earning less than \$500 a month. On Friday, Bolsonaro said in a tweet that his economic team “always ruled out any rise in taxes,” adding that “free market and less taxes is my motto in the economy.” Later that day, he defended Guedes in an interview with Folha, the first since he was hospitalized after being stabbed earlier this month at a campaign event. “He doesn't have political experience,” Bolsonaro told the newspaper. “He gives one-hour long lectures, says one thing in a few seconds and the press goes after him.” He also said a single levy income tax “seems

to be a good idea.” Also on Friday, a judge on Brazil's top electoral court ordered Twitter to submit the data of 16 users who celebrated Bolsonaro's stabbing on the social media platform, Reuters reported. Judge Carlos Horbach rejected an appeal from Twitter regarding the request, ruling the company be fined 50,000 reais (\$12,345) per day until it hands over the data. The users could potentially face charges under Brazil's hate crime laws. Bolsonaro leads the polls ahead of the Oct. 7 election, and is tied or slightly behind all rivals in the expected Oct. 28 runoff, according to surveys, Reuters reported.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 3

they can advance talks and work toward the dismantlement of the country's second-longest insurgency."

A **Maria Velez de Berliner**, managing director of RTG-Red Team Group, Inc.: "The ELN is a federalized organization without central command and control. Each group under the ELN name umbrella is autonomous in strategy and tactics within its own operational environment, holding its own 'political hostages' to use as the group decides. Therefore, the ELN cannot fulfill Duque's preconditions: Cease all hostilities, including attacks on the oil infrastructure, and release all non-combatant civilians in its custody. 'Comandante Uriel,' 'Pablo Beltrán,' 'Gabino' and 'Antonio García,' the ELN's self-proclaimed leaders, cannot agree on whether to negotiate and for what. This complicates Duque's preliminary negotiating strategy. The FARC agreement is the model for any negotiation with the ELN or any other criminal group. However, the undeniable unraveling of this agreement does not bode well for Duque to 'sell' negotiations with the ELN to Colombians who are experiencing the FARC's return to violence and crime in full force, directly or through proxies, in areas

of strategic importance, such as Antioquia, Catatumbo, Caquetá, and Nariño. Duque's government cannot even confirm how many demobilized FARC and their leaders ('Márquez,' 'El Paisa,' Romaña, and others) are confined, as agreed, within the FARC's reintegration zones. Not to ignore is the role

“The ELN's self-proclaimed leaders, cannot agree on whether to negotiate and for what.”

— Maria Velez de Berliner

the Trump administration is likely to play in any negotiations under the conditions set forth in its enhanced military collaboration with Colombia. In the midst of the resurgence of the FARC, widespread violence, and without national political support, Duque will have a very difficult time negotiating with an organization as federalized as the ELN."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gene.kuleta@thedialogue.org.

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A Conversation with Carlos Holmes Trujillo

An Inter-American Dialogue Discussion with Colombia's Minister of Foreign Affairs

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