



WILLIAM J. PERRY CENTER FOR HEMISPHERIC DEFENSE STUDIES
2016 EDITION, No. 2 (NOVEMBER)

REGIONAL INSIGHTS



Photo caption: U.S. Special Envoy Bernie Aronson speaks with Professor Pat Paterson during his visit to the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies in June 2016. Photo credit: Perry Center.

One-on-One with U.S. Special Envoy Bernie Aronson

By Pat Paterson and Anastasia Sendoun

On June 1, 2016, U.S. Special Envoy to the Colombian Peace Accords, Mr. Bernie Aronson, visited the William J. Perry Center to share his insights into the negotiations between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Mr. Aronson served as the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs from 1989 until 1993. During that time, he helped negotiate the end of the civil war in El Salvador between rebel groups and the Salvadoran government. On February 20, 2015, at the request of Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, he was selected by President Obama to serve as the U.S. Special Envoy to the Colombian Peace Process.¹

Peace talks between the FARC and the Colombian government began in September 2012. The two sides in Havana negotiated solutions to difficult obstacles including land reform, the political rights of insurgents, ending the FARC's role in drug production and trafficking, reparations for victims, and transitional justice measures that could see perpetrators of war crimes put in jail or extradited out of the country.

Pat Paterson is a Professor at the Perry Center. Anastasia Sendoun is a Research Assistant at the Perry Center and is completing a degree in Government and Spanish at Georgetown University in Washington DC.

In less than a year and a half, Special Envoy Aronson made two dozen trips to Havana. His role as the Special Envoy permitted him to assist both sides of the conflict as they negotiated an end to the 52-year conflict. His experience illuminates the delicate high-level negotiations that occur as two parties maneuver for settlement terms, disarmament, transitional justice, property restoration, and reintegration of guerrillas into society. On August 24, 2016, Colombian government representatives and members of the FARC announced they had reached agreement on the six agenda items and would sign a final agreement the following month. The two sides declared ceasefires in the days following the announcement. On September 26 in Cartagena, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and FARC leader Timoleon “Timochenko” Jimenez signed the historic peace deal to end the half-century conflict that had taken the lives of more than 260,000 people. The signing ceremony was attended by 2500 people including United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, and numerous Latin American leaders including Cuban President Raul Castro.

However, when the Colombian people were given a chance to vote for or against the peace deal during an October 2 country-wide plebiscite, the Colombian voters did not approve the terms of the peace agreement by a margin of less than one percent. Critics complained that the FARC, under the accountability conditions agreed to in Havana, would escape justice for the countless crimes and atrocities they committed during the long internal conflict. Just days after the nationwide vote, Special Envoy Aronson joined the delegations from the Colombian government and the FARC in Havana to map out the next steps in the peace process.

During his visit to the Perry Center on June 1, 2016, Mr. Aronson sat down with Professor Pat Paterson for a one-on-one discussion of his experiences in Havana. Approximately 75 people were in the audience while another 200 watched the event from elsewhere

in the United States and Latin America via a live broadcast of the discussion. Members of the audience were able to submit questions to Mr. Aronson as he shared his experiences on conflict resolution and negotiations in Havana.

The following transcript includes selected portions of the discussion with Special Envoy Aronson.

PP: Can you give us an update on what has been happening recently in the peace talks in Havana?

BA: I recently returned from my nineteenth trip to Havana, and I came away from that trip more encouraged than I have been in a long time about the momentum toward final settlement.

The parties are focusing on three end-of-conflict issues. The first is security for demobilized combatants, as well as wider security against potential successors to paramilitarism. That issue has been largely resolved, and both sides are confident in what they have agreed upon. Secondly, they are negotiating the terms and modalities of a formal ceasefire. As you know, the parties agreed on an informal ceasefire, but there are presently no boundaries, no observers, and no monitoring. The two armies thus far have been respectful of each other and have done their best to avoid confrontation. However, the present situation is inherently unstable and, during the peace process last spring, we sometimes saw very destructive confrontation. Therefore, we are hoping for a formal ceasefire under the oversight of the United Nations. The final issue, which is being negotiated as we speak, is the terms of disarmament or what the members of the FARC call “*leaving weapons behind.*” This will be a process by which the FARC will turn over their weapons according to a timed schedule and in certain modalities under U.N. supervision.

While there are several more issues that remain to be negotiated, if those three issues are resolved soon, we will be able to say that the war will be over in a serious way. The parties hope to sign sometime in the next few months, and while I prefer not to predict



Photo caption: Mr. Bernie Aronson, a former U.S. diplomat with extensive experience in conflict resolution, was selected to be the U.S. Special Envoy to the Colombian Peace Accords on February 20, 2015. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry listens as Mr. Aronson addresses the press. Photo credit: Brendan Smialowski, Agence France-Presse.

dates, there is momentum and substantive progress on these difficult end-of-conflict issues.

PP: How do negotiations work in Havana? How do the teams come together? What additional facilitators are there, and specifically, what is your role in the negotiation process?

BA: Unlike some negotiations, such as when we negotiated an end to the war in El Salvador, there is no designated institution overseeing the discussions at the top. There is no designated mediator that has the power to convene the parties and propose drafts. Rather, there is a more *ad hoc* structure that the parties have developed and agreed upon which has proven effective.

There is a table with the two parties on both sides, as well as the two representatives of the two host or guarantor countries— Norway and Cuba—who can mediate the discussion and try to help the parties find solutions. There are also many individuals involved in the technical work on both sides that do the drafting and legal work. Sometimes, the parties will bring in outside experts, as we did for the transitional justice issue, where we had a team of three lawyers

from each side working as a sub-commission on that very complicated issue.

As for my role as the Special Envoy, once the Secretary of State introduced me and I delivered some opening remarks, I was given a folder with a copy of the job description. When I opened the folder, it was blank—there is no job description for what I do. I am there because President Santos and his government have asked me to be there. While I am not neutral, I think I have been able to build up a trusting relationship with both sides. Sometimes I help interpret one side to the other—I can explain a political problem one side might have to the other, and when the parties are stuck, I can suggest a new alternative to help move the issue forward.

PP: Conflict resolution literature emphasizes special skills of firmness, diplomacy, patience, empathy, and emotional intelligence. How do you approach these delicate issues when you are dealing with two opposing parties like this?

BA: I would emphasize some of the traits you just mentioned. For example, patience is crucial, particularly in the Colombian negotiations. There is nothing

that can be solved quickly or easily, since the process requires overcoming 52 years of warfare and all the distrust, pain, loss, and violence that was attendant on that.

I think you have to be able to understand and not automatically dismiss the narrative of each side. While you do not have to necessarily agree with what the narrative of the guerrillas is, for example, you have to understand it and acknowledge some parts of it that may be legitimate. If you come in with a partisan attitude, you are not going to make any useful impact and will just be another mouthpiece. Therefore, you have to have the ability to listen and be fair-minded.

I think you also have to know what belongs to the parties and what an outside participant can and should do. At the end of the day, it is not the job of the United States to come in with formulas to end the civil war and impose them on Colombians. Ultimately, it is up to the Colombians to end the war.

PP: You participated as a negotiator in the El Salvadoran peace accords in the early 1990s. What is different this time in terms of comparing the peace processes in Colombia and El Salvador?

BA: In my experience in both countries, at least one side has to believe that the future is not going to get better according to the status quo in order for peace talks to be possible.

In El Salvador, the guerrillas launched a major offensive in October of 1989 and actually held some territory in the capital. The military fought back and overcame the guerrillas, but overall, it demonstrated to the guerrillas that the Salvadoran people were not ready to rise up in response. While the guerrillas enjoyed a political victory, they suffered a devastating military loss. On the government's side, the security forces carried out a massacre of Jesuits and some of their attendants, which shocked the U.S. Congress and the conscience of the country, and brought with it the threat of a suspension of military aid. Both sides were looking to the future, and both sides had an incentive to negotiate.

In Colombia, I think the success of the last fifteen years of both the military and political action by the government has steadily worn down the FARC and reduced their numbers by two-thirds. The Colombian government is in a better position than the Salvadoran government was because there is no threat of an end to military aid. In Colombia, the decision has more to do with peace on honorable terms, which would be better for the country as a whole.

I think the other change that has allowed the FARC to re-engage in negotiations is the emergence of leftist, populist governments in the region with whom they feel compatible. As the door to armed struggle is closing, the door to electoral power appears to be opening.

Finally, Colombia has a president who is willing to spend his political capital on peace, knowing that it is a difficult process and that he will face a great deal of criticism from all sides.

PP: In El Salvador, the military remained resistant to the idea of the peace accords which was pushed upon them by political leaders. Are you seeing the same situation in Colombia? Is the Colombian government still resistant to granting some legitimacy to the FARC, which the U.S. State Department has declared a terrorist group?

BA: I think the military has been very supportive of president Santos, to its great credit. Colombia has a long history of civilian control of the military and is not a country that has seen coups or even threats of coups. It has a very professional military and they have added enormously to the peace process. Several active duty and retired generals are in Havana helping to negotiate the accords, and in particular, the terms of the ceasefire, security, and disarmament, which helps to build trust as well.

PP: There are some very difficult topics on the table in Havana--political participation, representation of the FARC, land reforms, cessation of drug trafficking, accountability for crimes, etc.

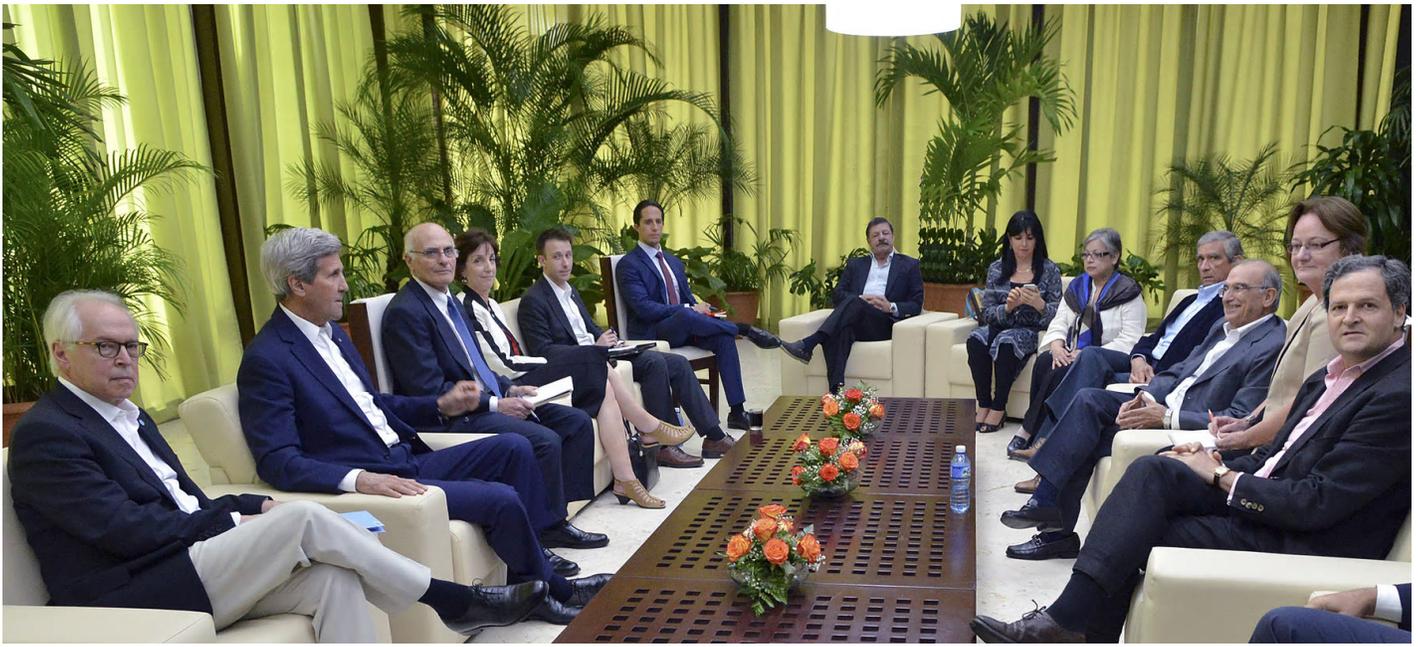


Photo caption: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry speaks with Colombian government representatives in Havana, Cuba. U.S. Special Envoy Bernie Aronson sits immediately to the right of Secretary Kerry. Photo credit: Guardian Newspaper and Associated Press.

Which has been the toughest to negotiate?

BA: I think the issue of transitional justice was the most difficult, and both sides worked very hard to come up with a process of accountability that was centered on victims and met international and inter-American standards, but was also doable.

It would have been easy to create a “perfect” system of justice and tell the parties to simply sign the agreement, but that was not going to happen. The FARC said from the beginning that they were not going to be the first guerrilla group to negotiate themselves into prison. However, that does not mean that they will not be subject to strong sanctions and not have an obligation to make reparations.

It is a compromise like everything else in the peace agreement, but arriving at that point was a long and complicated process because so many different constituencies had to be taken into consideration, including international law and the Rome Convention, Inter-American Court jurisprudence, as well as Colombia’s legal system, constitution, and the political realities of the country.

PP: At the Perry Center, we study these transitional justice and conflict resolution issues quite extensively and we know that Colombia has had a long, successful history of demobilizing other groups. From your experience, does the government bring a lot of that experience to the table? Are they able to navigate these tricky issues because of what they have done with the M19 or the paramilitaries in the past?

BA: I think that their past experience definitely gives them a level of sophistication in their process of demobilization. Colombia has demobilized more guerrillas and paramilitaries through a legitimate process in the last 25 years than any other country that I can think of, with about 52,000 individuals having gone through their demobilization process. Certainly, the lessons learned by the government from their experiences with M19 are applicable to the negotiations with the FARC in some places, and that history definitely helps to inform the process.

PP: Drawing on your experiences in El Salvador, is there anything in particular that you have been able to bring to the table in Havana and use throughout the process? Is there anything in par-

icular you would note for the conflict resolution specialists who might be watching?

BA: You need, if possible, to erect structural deadlines beyond just setting a date by which you hope to have everything finished. In El Salvador, for instance, in order to enact constitutional amendments related to the peace accords, we needed the vote of two successive national assemblies. During the negotiations, the national assembly at the time was going out of office. If they had not passed the constitutional amendments in that assembly, we would have had to propose the amendments for the first time in the next assembly and then would have had to wait four years for the approval of the second assembly. That would have been impossible to sustain. I was in favor of leveraging the deadline to pass the first constitutional amendment in the eleventh hour, so to speak, which is what they did.

However, there have not been such structural deadlines in Colombia, which has made negotiations more difficult at times because it is human nature to leave the most challenging issues until the end.

I will often say that in El Salvador, if you had shown the government and the guerrillas the peace treaty that they eventually signed at the beginning of the process, they never would have started the process. I think the same is true in Colombia, with both sides eventually agreeing to compromise in ways they would have not thought. That is part of what the process is designed to do. Having deadlines helps people make those very politically difficult choices in a timely manner.

PP: Can you describe the demobilization process? How do you take a FARC militant or insurgent who has known nothing but warfare from a young age, demobilize him or her, and then reintegrate him or her into society?

BA: That is an area in which Colombia, fortunately, has experience. They have demobilized 52,000 combatants from different armies, guerrilla movements, and paramilitaries over the last 15 or 20 years. They

have an institution that provides literacy, job training, help finding alternative work, reunification with families, and other social services that was established for this very purpose.

I have a lot of confidence in Colombia's proven record of reintegration. While it is impossible to guarantee that everybody will follow the same path, the government's effective effort to address the BACRIM and successors to paramilitarism will provide some reassurance to the members of the FARC that want to organize that they will be able to do so without danger to themselves, unlike what occurred in 1985 when the FARC created the *Union Patriótica* and there were a number of assassinations and the like.

PP: The organized crime problem is a serious concern. Just two or three weeks ago, the government announced that it was going to launch airstrikes against BACRIM groups in the northwest of the country, which indicates that it is a serious problem. (Note: BACRIM or "bandas criminales" in Spanish are organized crime groups that often consist of guerrillas or paramilitaries that have continued illicit activities after being demobilized).

BA: It is also a fairly serious issue at the bartering table as well. The FARC see these groups as a threat to them, and they want reassurance that there is a serious effort to demobilize them. I believe the President has proven his will on this issue, and it is good that they discovered these BACRIM groups and are working to address the matter, given that they are corrupt and dangerous actors.

PP: The cocaine industry in Colombia is also a very serious matter. According to U.N. statistics, from 2014 to 2015, there was an increase in coca cultivation by 40 percent. It remains a very lucrative and seductive industry for individuals who have been involved in drug trafficking for a long time. Can you talk about what that problem is and how we can draw criminals away from lucrative industries like cocaine trafficking?

BA: I would agree that it is a huge problem. All of the money related to drug trafficking is a huge source of violence in Colombian history and must be dealt with. The fact that production is up is of great concern to the Santos government and to the United States government. However, I would note that although production has increased, seizures of cocaine are also at a record high.

Under the peace agreement, the FARC will have to sever its ties with all illicit activity and cooperate with manual eradication and crop substitution. The United States has been very supportive and has helped to put together a plan with five pilot programs of eradication. This will serve as a test of the post-conflict implementation of the agreement as the government will demonstrate whether it can effectively go after this new production while continuing to go through the process of interdiction.

PP: In an irregular army like the FARC, do the members of the Secretariat have enough control of the lower echelon officials to ensure successful implementation of the accord? If they agree to a peace accord at the highest levels, can they implement it effectively through the ranks?

BA: The FARC say they can and they say their troops are highly disciplined. They practice a kind of democratic essentialism -- when a decision is taken by the senior leadership, the ranks implement it. In order to try to build support, the leaders are going to their cadres and their fronts to try to educate them about the peace process. While it is impossible to guarantee that some elements of the FARC will not connect with traffickers, I believe there will be a window that the government can occupy in order to prevent these actors from becoming involved in trafficking and production.

The government needs to move in, not just with an antinarcotics program, but with a program of government services that are nonexistent in these rural interior areas. There is presently no security, no schools, no transportation, land titling is imprecise, and there

are no roads that can be used to transport alternative crops. There needs to be a comprehensive rural economic development effort as part of the accords.

PP: We have a question from a member of our audience about the wealth that FARC has likely accumulated from drug traffickers over time. In the news, the FARC has denied having large amounts of money, but it seems clear to anyone who has followed Colombian history that they must have an immense amount of wealth reserved somewhere, perhaps overseas. Has that been an issue that has been discussed in Havana?

BA: The issue has been on the table between the parties, but I have not been involved in those discussions directly. However, any funds or assets that the FARC has under the agreement would have to be available for reparations. The challenge will be locating the funds, especially because there is a level of denial around the matter.

PP: We have a question about the level of skepticism within Colombian society. The talks have now been ongoing for three and a half years. Initially, the government announced that it would be done in about a year. We were supposed to reach a potential accord in March of this year. As the negotiations continue, is there a growing level of doubt in Colombian society? How does that impact the talks? Is there a sense of urgency amongst the members in Havana?

BA: There are a couple of dynamics at work. Large parts of the country are no longer affected by the war, and in areas where there is a sense of security, people sometimes wonder why we are negotiating with the FARC. Interestingly, the greatest support among the Colombians for the peace accords comes from the people who live in the affected areas and have suffered the most in the war, which is almost surprising because one might think they would want vengeance.

I think that we have paid a price for how long these negotiations have taken. If you count the preparatory

discussions needed to create the framework for the formal talks, the discussions have been ongoing for over four years now. It's difficult for people to invest in the process at times because their hopes are raised and then do not see the outcome they were expecting.

However, having said that, I think it is to the credit of President Santos that he is going to put this entire agreement to a vote to let the Colombian people make the ultimate decision, which highlights his commitment to the democratic process. The agreement is not without controversy—there are political figures in Colombia who are using opposition to the agreement as their political platform. However, while individual Colombians might say they do not like certain parts of the agreement, when they vote up or down for an accord that will end the war with the FARC after 51 years, I think it will be an overwhelming vote for peace.

PP: What is the relationship between the government representatives and the FARC members at the negotiations in Havana? I imagine they came into this kind of negotiation very distrustful. Is there a level of civility and cordiality as they are working toward the same issues now?

BA: There is definitely a level of civility. Both sides treat each other with respect, and in some of these subcommittees where people have worked together very intensely on an issue like a ceasefire or security for demobilized combatants for several months, there is a kind of respect and a level of trust that has grown.

The talks are a roller coaster at times, but the two sides have learned to work with each other through a variety of channels that have proven effective. The Cubans and Norwegians have also been helpful, and the negotiators have come to know how to talk to each other in a way that eventually leads to results. Ultimately, the process is working the way it should.

PP: Can you tell us about the role the guarantor and accompanying countries play and how they are involved in the negotiations?

BA: Cuba and Norway are the host countries. The first set of talks started in Norway, but for logistical reasons, the talks take place in Havana. Havana provides all the facilities and the FARC has houses in an area of diplomatic residences that the government owns and provides to them. The logistics of the discussions are handled by the Cubans, and the Norwegians have been very involved with the de-mining effort. Chile and Venezuela are much less formally involved, as they do not have representatives at the table, but they weigh in sometimes when there is a need to speak as a common voice. For example, at times when talks have broken down, the four of guarantor and accompanying countries can issue a joint communique asking the parties to come back to the table, which creates a way for parties to return to the conversation.

PP: In some sectors of Colombian society, there are a lot of questions and doubts about the role Cuba is playing as a long-time sponsor of Communism and social movements in the region. There are questions of whether or not Cuba is advising the FARC just to continue trying to accomplish politically what they have failed to do militarily. Has that been an obstacle?

BA: To the extent to which that may be going on, it is not visible. The FARC wants to be integrated in politics as a legal political party. The point of the negotiations is to have them submit their weapons and to accept earning power through ballots. Therefore, I do not think that is a great worry. We have seen in other countries some movements come to office through legitimate electoral means and then compromise the checks and balances in place to rule in an authoritarian fashion. However, I am sure that Colombians will be vigilant and will not allow that to happen.

PP: In the 1980s, the FARC tried to demobilize and organize politically into the *Union Patriótica*. Many members were assassinated by paramilitary groups. The FARC have mentioned what happened in the 1980s as a concern in Havana a number of times. How are these groups who have

fought for so long able to have a sense of peaceful coexistence as they are reintegrated into society after the peace accord is signed?

BA: This subject is an important topic in the negotiations, and the Colombian government and the FARC set up a separate subcommission headed by General Naranjo, who used to be the commander of the police, and Carlos Lazada, a member of the FARC's Secretariat, on this issue. They have come to an agreement on a number of elements which have not yet been discussed publicly, but which the government and FARC will announce when they make a statement on security. The government has also taken concrete steps in creating new mechanisms to go after successors to paramilitarism such as the BACRIM and, as part of the peace accord, there is going to be a personal security component for the top FARC commanders. I think the Colombian forces are going to be part of the solution as far as security is concerned, whereas the challenges will most likely come from the BACRIM, the successors to paramilitarism, and the corrupt elements in Colombian society.

PP: In December 2014, the FARC representatives in Havana apologized to some of the survivor groups that came forward to testify in front of them. Humberto De La Calle, who is the senior negotiator from the Colombian government, called this "enormously significant." Is there a sense of remorse toward or responsibility for the civilians that have been killed in the conflict, 80 percent of which have been civilians? Or are the groups in Havana more interested in furthering their own interests?

BA: You can only judge people by what they do. In addition to the apologies mentioned, one of the senior members of the Secretariat went up to an area where there was an indigenous community that had been caught in the middle of a fight between the FARC and a paramilitary groups years ago. The FARC had rocketed the area with mortars, which killed a number of civilians, and this commander had gone and personally apologized to the community. However,

the FARC does not apologize for having waged a revolution. They believe that the revolution was just and needed, and they are not going to say that what they did for fifty-one years was a mistake.

Built into the structure of the transitional adjustment is a truth commission in which both sides will be obligated to confess any crimes against humanity or violations of International Human Rights Law. Reparations to the victims of the conflict will be a fundamental part of the peace agreement.

PP: Can you tell us about the United Nations peacekeeping force that is going to command and oversee the process of disarmament?

BA: Technically, it will not be a peacekeeping force on the usual U.N. terms. It is a civilian mission though many of its members will be former military or active duty military. The group was set up under the auspices of the Security Council, which voted unanimously to establish what is called a "monitoring and verification mechanism." The U.N. Secretary General appointed a very skillful diplomat who set up the peacekeeping process in Guatemala to oversee the group. He is hoping to recruit about 400 members, and they will have hub offices in nine cities in Colombia, although they will be in the field, monitoring and overseeing the concentration of FARC members, traffic in and out of concentration zones, and ultimately, the handing over of weapons under disarmament.

PP: An estimated 30 to 40 percent of FARC members are female. Has their role in particular been discussed in the demobilization process?

BA: I think that any specifics pertaining to the role of female combatants will be built into the demobilization process since there are extra concerns that need to be dealt with, such as family reunification. However, Colombia already has experience with demobilization, given that they have already demobilized 52,000 combatants, including female combatants.



Photo caption: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry speaks with leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) during a visit to Havana Cuba in March 2016. U.S. Special Envoy Bernie Aronson sits immediately to the right of Secretary Kerry. Photo credit: Guardian Newspaper and Carlos Barria of Reuters.

PP: With the price of oil dropping, the Colombian budget has been having some trouble. Have the FARC or the Colombian government talked about the potential complications associated with a low economy?

BA: Both sides are very aware of the issue, and it does put some extra pressure on the Colombian government as far as resources for and implementation of the peace accords are concerned.

The United States under President Obama has asked for the Congress to appropriate \$450 million in fiscal year 2017 to assist with some of the funding. Additionally, my counterpart from the European Union just announced in Bogota two days ago that they are going to contribute 540 million euros. The U.S. and Norway have also put together a group of twenty-two countries called the Global Initiative for De-Mining in Colombia, which will bring in experts from all of the member countries to help with the de-mining effort. We are hoping that there will be a separate channel of support for that effort. Colombia says it needs about \$340 million to de-mine and the U.S. has committed \$50 million so far.

Resources are important, and it is particularly important for the Congress in the U.S. to recognize that Colombia has the potential to be a great success story. At a time when conventional wisdom says that we cannot accomplish anything on a bipartisan basis, Colombia has shown itself to be a bipartisan success. The process toward peace began under a Democratic president and a Republican Congress, and has been sustained over fifteen years through successive administrations. It would be a tragic mistake to walk away just when the possibility for peace is most imminent, and I think our Congress and hopefully other countries will step up to this challenge.

PP: Colombia has had a policy of extradition to the United States for over 25 years that has now been taken off the table. Has the Colombian government agreed to that as part of the negotiations?

BA: There is an extremely close, cooperative relationship between our judicial and criminal justice systems with their Colombian counterparts, and we value that relationship very much. However, just as the FARC said they were not going to negotiate themselves into Colombian jails, they will not negotiate themselves into U.S. jails. While most of the FARC

membership is facing indictments from the U.S., as part of the transitional justice agreement, the government has agreed that the FARC will not be extradited to the United States for crimes for which they have been indicted up to the time of signing. Rather, they will go through the process of transitional or criminal justice. While the U.S. would prefer extradition, it recognizes that Colombia is a sovereign government that has every right to decide who will be extradited and we will respect the decisions they make.

PP: In your opinion, what is going to be the toughest element of the peace accords to implement?

BA: As soon as the peace accords are signed, the entire program of rural development, land titling, substitution of crops and roads, de-mining, reparations to victims, etc. will have to be actualized. The negotiations have raised expectations in Colombia. At the same time, there are limited resources, particularly because of the issues with oil prices. I think, therefore, it is very important that the international community stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Colombia over the next few years to support the implementation of commitments that have been made in every way possible.

One last point to make about this issue is that the commitments that have been made as part of the peace accords are not just the price of peace. They are good for the country as a whole. There is a divide in Colombia, which exists in many Latin American countries, between the interior and remote parts of the country and the cities and government. A major commitment of the accords is to bridge that gap. Approving this peace accord is part of uniting Colombia and contributing to its development to make it more attractive to investors. However, this will require commitment, energy, money, time, and must, therefore, be a global effort.

PP: Rural development, in particular, is one challenge that seems to get a lot of attention. The Colombian government has had to develop a presence in remote areas in the past. Is that something

that will be a significant challenge for them in the future as well?

BA: Rural development will absolutely be a challenge, particularly because it is part of the roots of the war. Colombia is a huge country with a very complicated topography. In regions that are not easily accessible, it is hard to have security, rule of law, development, education, etc. In these areas, there is a vacuum that groups like the FARC and ELN can then fill. Therefore, it is important for the government to bring services that the citizens need and deserve to these regions in order to prevent groups like the BACRIM from occupying that role.

PP: What lessons can be taken from Colombia's peace efforts that can be applied to other countries who are going through the same process? Every case is unique, but is there any advice in particular that you might pass to other groups engaging in a similar process?

BA: The one lesson is the obvious one—namely, that the relationship between the forces on the battlefield must change if negotiations are to be possible. At some point, you have to accept that people and movements can change, and you cannot sit down and negotiate if you do not think your enemy is capable of change. In my experience, people who have been involved in wars like the one in Colombia or El Salvador become, as a guerrilla fighter in El Salvador said to me, “sick of death.” It is in those situations that there is a possibility for change.

Notes

1. “U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, “Remarks Announcing the New Special Envoy for the Colombian Peace Process Bernie Aronson,” *U.S. Department of State*, Washington DC, February 20, 2015. Link: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/02/237688.htm>.

William J. Perry Center
for Hemispheric Defense Studies
260 5th Ave., Bldg. 64
Abraham Lincoln Hall, Fort McNair
Washington, DC 20319-5066

chds.dodlive.mil

Editor in Chief: Professor Pat Paterson
Layout Design: Viviana Edwards