

“My personal, longstanding commitment to Colombia and the bilateral alliance is as strong as ever. I will continue to work tirelessly to further strengthen our relationship in the years to come.”

ADRIENNE ARSHT

Executive Vice Chair, Atlantic Council;
 Founder, Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center and Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center



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ALLIES: TWENTY-SEVEN BOLD IDEAS TO REIMAGINE THE US-COLOMBIA RELATIONSHIP

ALLIES

TWENTY-SEVEN BOLD
 IDEAS TO REIMAGINE
 THE US-COLOMBIA
 RELATIONSHIP

About the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center

Driven by our mission of “shaping the global future together,” the Atlantic Council is a nonpartisan organization that galvanizes US leadership and engagement in the world, in partnership with allies and partners, to shape solutions to global challenges. The Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center (AALAC) broadens understanding of regional transformations and illustrates why Latin America and the Caribbean matter for the world, proposing constructive, results-oriented solutions to inform public and private sector action based on a shared vision for a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future. The center focuses on Latin America and the Caribbean’s strategic role amid global developments with a priority on pressing political, economic, and social issues that will define the trajectory of the region. AALAC builds consensus for action in advancing innovative policy perspectives within its select lines of programming: Colombia’s future; Venezuela’s multidimensional crisis; Central American prosperity; US-Mexico ties; China in Latin America; a changing Brazil; Caribbean development; shifts in commerce; energy resource use; and post-COVID prosperity. For more information, please visit www.AtlanticCouncil.org.

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ALLIES

**TWENTY-SEVEN BOLD
IDEAS TO REIMAGINE
THE US-COLOMBIA
RELATIONSHIP**

***Allies: Twenty-Seven Bold Ideas to Reimagine
the US-Colombia Relationship***

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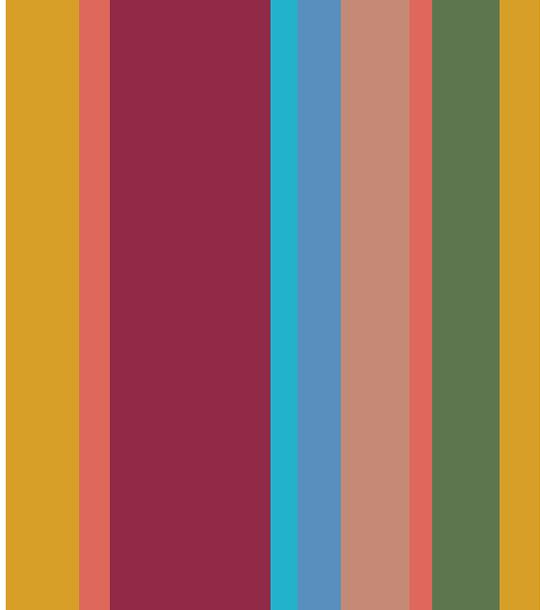
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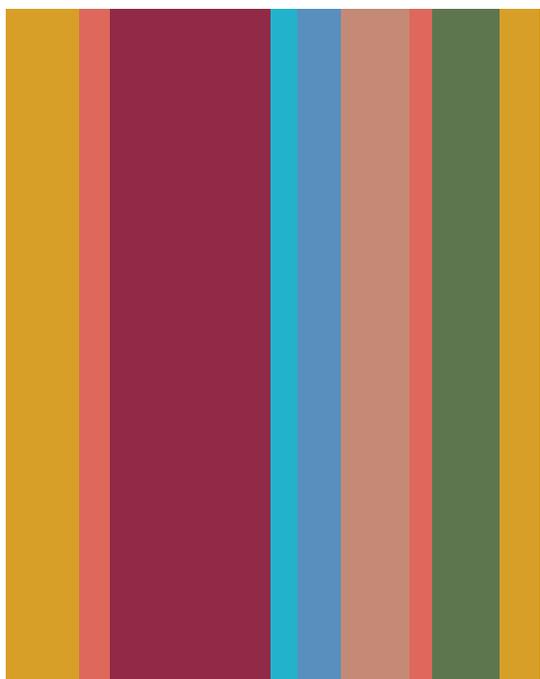
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THE US-COLOMBIA
RELATIONSHIP**





CONTENTS

FOREWORD	7
FREDERICK KEMPE <i>President and CEO, Atlantic Council</i>	
JASON MARCZAK <i>Senior Director, Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, Atlantic Council</i>	
INTRODUCTION	10
CAMILA HERNÁNDEZ <i>Associate Director, Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, Atlantic Council</i>	
 THE ROAD AHEAD FOR US-COLOMBIA RELATIONS	
1 Embrace Our Shared Future	16
BILL CLINTON <i>Former President, United States of America</i>	
2 Construct The Road Ahead Together	20
BEN CARDIN <i>Senator (D-MD), US Senate; Co-Chair, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council</i>	
3 Counter New Strategic Challenges	26
ROY BLUNT <i>Senator (R-MO), US Senate; Co-Chair, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council</i>	
4 Build on Shared Global Priorities	32
CAROLINA BARCO <i>Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Colombia; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council</i>	
5 Look to the New Colombia	39
P. MICHAEL MCKINLEY <i>Former US Ambassador to Colombia; Senior Adviser (Non-resident), Americas Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council</i>	



CONTENTS

ENHANCING SHARED SECURITY

6 Prioritize Comprehensive Security Assistance 50

DAVID H. PETRAEUS

*Former Director, US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA);
Director, Board of Directors, Atlantic Council*

7 Invest in Our Military Relationship 57

CRAIG FALLER

*Former Commander, United States Southern Command;
Distinguished Fellow, Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center,
Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, Atlantic Council*

8 Ensure a Whole-of-Government Approach 64

REBECCA BILL CHAVEZ

*President and CEO, Inter-American Dialogue;
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western
Hemisphere Affairs, US Department of Defense*

9 Think Broader to Advance Security 70

JUAN CARLOS PINZÓN

*Ambassador of Colombia to the United States;
Former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia*

10 Adapt Intelligence Capabilities for New Threats 77

KIRON K. SKINNER

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Lifetime Director, Board of Directors, Atlantic Council; Visiting
Fellow, Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy,
The Heritage Foundation*

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Former Visiting Fellow, Davis Institute for National
Security and Foreign Policy, The Heritage Foundation*

Video 84

MARÍA VICTORIA LLORENTE

*Executive Director, Fundación Ideas para la Paz;
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CONTENTS

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW

- 11 Recognize the High Stakes** **90**
MICHAEL T. MCCAUL
Representative (R-TX, 10th District); Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee, US House of Representatives
- 12 Invest in Diversity and Inclusion** **94**
GREGORY W. MEEKS
Representative (D-NY, 5th District); Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee, US House of Representatives; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council
- 13 Commit to Democracy** **100**
PAULA J. DOBRIANSKY
Former US Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs; Senior Fellow, Harvard University Belfer Center; Vice Chair, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, Atlantic Council
- 14 Learn from a Democratic Culture** **107**
KEVIN WHITAKER
Former US Ambassador to Colombia; Non-resident Senior Fellow, Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council
- 15 Forge a Strong Democracy** **113**
ALEJANDRO EDER
Former Presidential High Counselor for Reintegration; Former Government Negotiator in Peace Process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Republic of Colombia

PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

- 16 Improve Productivity** **124**
ROSARIO CÓRDOBA
President, Board of Directors, Argos Group; Former President, Consejo Privado de Competitividad; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council
- 17 Invest in Peace** **130**
HOWARD G. BUFFETT
Chairman and CEO, The Howard G. Buffett Foundation



CONTENTS

18 Make Bold Bets 134

LUIS ALBERTO MORENO

Managing Director, Allen & Co LLC; Former President, Inter-American Development Bank; Member, Advisory Board, Latin American Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

19 Advance Energy Transformation 141

THOMAS F. “MACK” MCLARTY, III

Former Chief of Staff, The White House; Chairman and Co-Founder, McLarty Associates; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council

20 Diversify the Bilateral Agenda 149

MARIA CLAUDIA LACOUTURE

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Special Investment Case Study 154

VICKI HOLLUB

President and CEO, Occidental Petroleum Corporation; Former Chair, US-Colombia Business Council

Videos

157

ECOPETROL AND ISA

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE

21 Partner for Sustainable Pathways 164

PAULA CABALLERO

Regional Managing Director, Latin America, The Nature Conservancy

SARAH GAMMAGE

Director of Public Policy and Government Relations for Latin America, The Nature Conservancy

22 Deepen Conservation Partnerships 171

JOHN B. GANTT

President, International Conservation Caucus Foundation



CONTENTS

- 23 Innovate to Protect Our Ecosystems** 177
SANDRA VALENZUELA
Chief Executive Officer, WWF Colombia

- Video** 183
MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG
*Founder, Bloomberg LP & Bloomberg Philanthropies;
Chair, Climate Finance Leadership Initiative (CFLI)*

ADDRESSING INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION

- 24 Prioritize Internally Displaced People** 187
ELIZABETH FERRIS
*Research Professor, Institute for the Study of International
Migration, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University*

- 25 Support a Holistic Migration Strategy** 195
ANDREW SELEE
President, Migration Policy Institute

DIEGO CHAVES-GONZÁLEZ
*Senior Manager, Latin America and Caribbean Initiative,
Migration Policy Institute*

ADVANCING STEM* AND THE ARTS

*SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATHEMATICS

- 26 Recognize the Power of Music** 206
LEILA COBO
*Vice President, Latin Industry Lead, Billboard;
Author, Novelist*

- 27 Share the Colombian American Dream** 212
JOHN LEGUIZAMO
Actor, Comedian, Producer, Director, and Writer

- Videos** 216
CARLOS VIVES
*Singer-songwriter; Actor; Businessman; Member, Advisory
Council, Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, Atlantic Council*

- ANA MARÍA PORRAS** 217
Biomedical Engineer, University of Florida



CONTENTS

AFTERWORD	222
MARK A. GREEN <i>President and CEO, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars</i>	
CYNTHIA J. ARNSON <i>Distinguished Fellow; Former Director, Latin American Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars</i>	
CONTRIBUTORS	225
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	234

FOREWORD

Working with Partners and Allies

ON JUNE 19, 1822, the United States and Colombia formally established diplomatic relations. On that day, President James Monroe accredited Colombia’s Manuel Torres as the first Charge d’Affaires from a Latin American country to the United States, assuring him of US support for the “welfare and success of his country.” Today—two hundred years later—Colombia remains one of our closest allies.

To this day, we share a common purpose in the power of our democracies, although imperfect, to find answers to the most challenging issues of our time. Our deep partnership goes far beyond bilateral issues and extends to commercial, security, social, environmental, and humanitarian fronts.

Underpinning this partnership has been consistent, bipartisan US support for Colombia across recent administrations. In 2000, President Bill Clinton signed Plan Colombia into law, a strategic framework designed to help Colombia counter drug trafficking and improve security. For the next sixteen years, and with \$12 billion in funding, Republican and Democratic presidents alike advanced Plan Colombia with bipartisan congressional backing. Plan Colombia provided financial support, but its most important contribution was the technical assistance that further united our two societies. Today, Plan Colombia is widely regarded as one of the most consequential foreign policy initiatives in modern US history, which explains the ongoing support for its successor project, Peace Colombia.

At the turn of the 21st century, it was nearly impossible to imagine the broader importance or possibility of a prosperous Colombia. US attention was focused on the threats posed by a country where insurgency groups, fueled by the drug trade, controlled 40 percent of its territory, approximately

the size of Tennessee or Louisiana. Bombings and kidnappings regularly featured in its daily news.

Fast forward to 2022. Colombia celebrates five years as a Global Partner of NATO, and upon the Russian invasion of Ukraine, stepped up to offer diplomatic and humanitarian assistance. Colombia was recently designated as a Major non-NATO ally—the eighteenth country globally with this status—and the US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement marks ten years since ratification. Once a source of migrants itself, Colombia has welcomed nearly two million Venezuelan migrants and refugees, providing them with protection, legal documentation, and access to employment and social services.

Twenty years ago, many worried about the survival of the Colombian state. But sustained US-Colombia collaboration helped transform Colombia from a nation on the brink of decline to a robust economy and prosperous democracy. Now, the question is what would come of US interests in Latin America without the support and leadership of Colombia, often referred to as the “keystone” of US foreign policy in the region. Alternatively, how can we build on this partnership to answer the challenges we will face in the decades to come?

In March 2021, when announcing his intention to designate Colombia as a Major non-NATO Ally, President Joseph R. Biden said, “We will only succeed in advancing American interests and upholding our universal values by working in common cause with our closest allies and partners, and by renewing our own enduring sources of national strength.”

At the Atlantic Council, we believe this moment opens the door for a reimagined US partnership with Colombia to shape the global future together. It is why we first launched our US-Colombia Task Force in 2017, co-chaired by Senators Ben Cardin and Roy Blunt, and why its work prioritizes innovative solutions to accelerate the opportunities and address the irritants in the relationship.

This book is intended to advance the next phase of the US-Colombia relationship. In a rapidly changing world, the following chapters present a roadmap for a new type of engagement that challenges our ambitions and extends the ties that bind our countries. Regard the ideas in this commemorative book as a new beginning.

The importance of the US-Colombia relationship is reflected by the caliber and diverse perspectives of the featured authors. From President Bill Clinton to Howard Buffet to John Leguizamo, the voice of Bruno in the 2021 hit film *Encanto*, set in Colombia. The authors also reflect the continued bipartisan nature of our relationship with essays from our US-Colombia Task Force co-chairs and the Chairman and Ranking Member—Representatives Gregory Meeks and Michael McCaul, respectively—of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Prominent Colombian policymakers, businesspeople, and academics add their perspectives throughout these pages.

The essays in this volume are a jumping-off point to stimulate new thinking for our next century together. We hope this book will help us not only recognize what we have accomplished but also what we can do together in the future to achieve the joint success first laid out by Monroe.

FREDERICK KEMPE

President and Chief Executive Officer, Atlantic Council

JASON MARCZAK

Senior Director, Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, Atlantic Council

INTRODUCTION

IN THE SUMMER OF 2014, my plane from Bogotá, Colombia, landed in Washington DC, and by 2019, I joined the Atlantic Council. In the three years since, I have been fortunate to work alongside many of the visionaries that have helped build the US-Colombia relationship. And if something is clear, it is this: our shared future is brighter and more hopeful than ever before.

As we celebrate the bicentennial of US-Colombia relations, we should recognize how far we have come, the new challenges we face, and the immense potential that remains. This book is a collective effort to do just that. Its twenty-seven essays by business leaders, politicians, philanthropists, artists, and academics invite us to think boldly and creatively about the future of the relationship, building on an impressive track record of adaptation and achievement.

We assembled a roster of nearly forty contributors, all well-established voices in their fields, to represent the many thought leaders who play a role in strengthening US-Colombia ties. Our hope is for this effort to serve as a launching pad for new thinking, dialogue, and a renewed commitment to our shared future.

This book is also an appeal to seize emerging opportunities for US-Colombia engagement in seven overarching areas reflected in the book's chapters. These include and go beyond traditional areas of collaboration, setting the foundation for a revitalized US partnership with Colombia.

The first chapter looks at the US-Colombia relationship in a global context, showing how a stronger and more resilient alliance will pay dividends far beyond our borders. Chapter two explores strategies to enhance our mutual security, building on our history of successful intelligence sharing and military-to-military cooperation while recognizing new threats and realities.

In chapter three, the authors offer innovative approaches to strengthen democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights protections, and peace process implementation. Chapter four explores how to advance inclusive and sustainable economic growth by improving productivity, increasing trade and investment, and promoting energy transformation.

Chapter five proposes ideas for collaborative engagement in addressing environmental challenges and protecting natural ecosystems in Colombia—the second-most biodiverse country in the world. Chapter six explores ways to support further Colombia’s eight-million internally displaced people and the nearly two million Venezuelan migrants and refugees welcomed within its borders.

The book’s final chapter includes stories of the many Colombians and Colombian Americans in the arts and sciences who have contributed to the US economy and society. Even the design of this book celebrates such contributions—the text font was made by a Colombian type designer, and the paintings of Fernando Botero inspired the color palette.

Throughout these pages, QR codes are linked to corresponding online videos of US and Colombian thought leaders. Incorporating new technological capabilities into this volume was another way to recognize our world’s ever-changing nature and to remind us, as we move forward, that the US-Colombia relationship should remain adaptive, resilient, and creative.

CAMILA HERNÁNDEZ

Associate Director, Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, Atlantic Council

“Today, Colombia stands out as one of the United States’ strongest allies, not just in the Western Hemisphere, but in the world. Together, we have dismantled transnational criminal organizations, defended democratic values, and advanced economic prosperity for the citizens of both nations. I am proud to have led the effort to formally recognize Colombia as a United States ally. As we celebrate the bicentennial of our diplomatic relations, I look forward to charting the path toward another prosperous two-hundred years of strategic partnership.”

ROBERT MENENDEZ

US Senator (D-NJ); Chairman, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, US Senate



“I witnessed two episodes of intense collaboration between US and Colombian officials: the final negotiations of the US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) and the accession of Colombia to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For both, commitment at the highest levels of government had to be accompanied by the practical details to execute the vision. US government officials were tough counterparts but always constructive and professional. The TPA and OECD membership were structural advances for Colombian institutions; we will see their fruits for decades to come. Neither would have transpired without the strong bonds our countries cemented over two centuries.”

CATALINA CRANE

Former Presidential Advisor for Economic Affairs, Republic of Colombia



ALLIES:

TWENTY-SEVEN BOLD IDEAS TO REIMAGINE THE US-COLOMBIA RELATIONSHIP

THE ROAD AHEAD FOR US-COLOMBIA RELATIONS

ESSAYS 1-5

“As a longtime supporter of the US-Colombia alliance, I am proud of what our two countries have accomplished over the last two-hundred years and look forward to the next two-hundred. As a key pillar of security, stability, and democratic leadership in the Western Hemisphere, Colombia serves as force multiplier for our shared interests. It is imperative we continue to deepen our bilateral relationship to confront regional challenges and capitalize on opportunities.”

MARK E. GREEN

Representative (R-TN, 7th District); Ranking Member, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International Economic Policy, House Foreign Affairs Committee, US House of Representatives



ESSAYS

1

Embrace Our Shared Future *page 16*

BILL CLINTON

Former President, United States of America

2

Construct the Road Ahead Together *page 20*

BEN CARDIN

*Senator (D-MD), US Senate; Co-Chair,
US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council*

3

Counter New Strategic Challenges *page 26*

ROY BLUNT

*Senator (R-MO), US Senate; Co-Chair,
US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council*

4

Build on Shared Global Priorities *page 32*

CAROLINA BARCO

*Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Colombia;
Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council*

5

Look to the New Colombia *page 39*

P. MICHAEL MCKINLEY

*Former US Ambassador to Colombia; Senior
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for Strategic and International Studies; Member,
US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council*

1
ESSAY

EMBRACE OUR SHARED FUTURE

Colombians have come too far to give up on better tomorrows and brighter futures for their children. The United States must stand with them.

BILL CLINTON

Former President, United States of America

AS THE UNITED STATES AND COLOMBIA celebrate two hundred years of bilateral relations, the foundations of our friendship are strong, and the prospects for greater cooperation that benefits our people, our region, and our world are bright. It has been an honor to support Colombia over the last 20-plus years, see our strong bonds grow even stronger—even in hard times, and witness Colombia’s emergence as a leader in our hemisphere.

I fell in love with Colombia when I read *100 Years of Solitude* as a law student. I was so captivated that I read it right through my tax law class. My professor abruptly asked me after class what was so much more interesting than his lecture. I showed him the novel and said I thought it was the greatest written in any language since William Faulkner died. My later friendship with Gabo, which began in 1994 and endured until he passed away, was a great gift in my life, as have been the relationships I’ve formed with Colombian presidents and other elected leaders, great musicians, business and philanthropic leaders, and the citizens I’ve met all over the country who have contributed in their own way to give Colombia’s children a future of peace, prosperity, and security.

As president, I was proud to launch Plan Colombia with President Andrés Pastrana at a time when drug cartels and their armed supporters

controlled about a third of the country. It was renewed several times by leaders of both countries, regardless of party—a commitment to give Colombia back to the people that has endured despite the massive migration from Venezuela, the COVID-19 pandemic, the resurgence of violence, and increased drug production.

In the face of these challenges and the worldwide assault on inclusive, cooperating democracies, it is important never to forget that Colombia is a country rich in history, culture, natural resources, environmental treasures, and wonderful, hardworking people. Colombians have come too far to give up on better tomorrows and brighter futures for their children. And the United States must stand with the Colombian people.

There are several areas where further progress can be made. Colombia is especially well-positioned to transition to clean, renewable, more affordable energy systems. The World Economic Forum has rated Colombia third in South America in its Energy Transition Index,¹ with significant potential for developing solar, wind, and biomass sources. Already, the renewable energy sector employs about two million people throughout Latin America,² with significant room for growth. This is especially important as so much of Colombia's clean energy potential—especially for wind—is located near the Venezuelan border, where Colombians and displaced Venezuelans alike are yearning for new job sources.

Another huge opportunity to put people to work while strengthening the natural environment is agroforestry. Colombia's location makes it suitable for at least ten forest species, and the government offers strong incentives for reforestation projects. Colombia and its people also have the climate, farming knowledge, and skills to grow almost any crop, including high-level exports like its wonderful coffee, essential oils, and spices, which can support development in many rural and often underserved communities.

Colombia also boasts a growing and innovative tech sector. President Iván Duque and his government have demonstrated strong support for the tech sector, including establishing new governmental entities that offer grants, mentoring, networking, and other services to support innovation and entrepreneurship in this critical field.

I've been to Colombia many times over the last twenty-two years. Each visit holds vivid memories. In 2000, while I was still president, President Andrés Pastrana took my daughter Chelsea and me on an evening walk

through the historic district of Cartagena, where we met and danced with Los Niños del Vallenato. Their wonderful voices and costumes, making their music a powerful message of peace and resilience, moved me so much that I invited them to perform at the White House and again four years later at the dedication of my Presidential Center. When I returned to Colombia in 2002, during the transition to President Álvaro Uribe, the children greeted me as I stepped off the plane, and a representative of Colombia's Indigenous people presented me with a traditional woven bracelet. I followed tradition and never took it off. Finally, the worn, faded strands fell apart after nineteen years.

In 2017, at the invitation of President Juan Manuel Santos, I went to Medellín, which was hosting the first World Coffee Producers Forum, bringing together coffee growers' associations from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to unite the entire coffee value chain worldwide to promote sustainability and economic fairness for those who harvest the beans. Medellín—with its famous escalators up the mountain of Comuna 13, once the hotbed of narco-trafficking, was the perfect place to gather attendees representing more than forty coffee-producing countries, including roasters, traders, and retailers; financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, and government representatives. It symbolized the country's rebirth, the peace dividend of an emerging regional and global leader.

It is imperative that the United States and Colombia, the two oldest democracies in the Western Hemisphere, keep strengthening our relationship—as we did most recently when US President Joe Biden announced his intention to designate Colombia as a Major US non-NATO Ally. I am proud to have played a role in building that friendship, both in public office and as a private citizen.

People who visit my New York offices, the old farmhouse Hillary and I call home, or my Presidential Library all see evidence of how much Colombia means to me. In my Harlem office, there's a medal that the widow of a police officer killed in the drug wars gave me, saying she wanted me to show it to others because it told Colombia's story, and she didn't need it to remember who he was. In my Midtown office, I keep a first English printing of *100 Years of Solitude*. In my home office, there's a photo of the late Culture Minister Consuelo Araújo, the patron of Los Niños del Vallenato, slain for championing the crusade of the children. There's a photo of Chelsea and

me dancing with them in Cartagena in my home and a beautiful craft work commemorating their visit to the White House in my library. There are Colombian spices that remind me of my foundation's work for small farmers and fishers who support their families by providing restaurants with locally-sourced products.

Memories of yesterdays like these are most important when they drive us to make tomorrow better, so our children can make their own memories without the burden of our nightmares.

I believe our best days together are still to come, and I will continue to do whatever I can to make it so.



Endnotes

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ESSAY **2**

CONSTRUCT THE ROAD AHEAD TOGETHER

The US alliance with Colombia is rooted in our shared values of democracy, transparency, and accountability. We can celebrate this year's bicentennial by reinvigorating bilateral, bipartisan, and bicameral support for the US-Colombia partnership to ensure our region's stability and continued prosperity.

BEN CARDIN

Senator (D-MD), US Senate; Co-Chair, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council

FOR TWO CENTURIES, the United States and Colombia have maintained a robust and productive diplomatic relationship that has withstood economic fluctuations, internal and external conflicts, global crises, and political transitions in both countries. Today, the US-Colombia relationship is a key pillar of stability in the Western Hemisphere, requiring continued and unwavering multiparty support in our congresses and the sustained attention of policymakers, scholars, the private sector, and the people of both countries.

As a primary strategic partner in Latin America and the Caribbean, Colombia will undoubtedly remain an indispensable ally for the United States in addressing regional and global needs. Our historical record of success demonstrates how US-Colombia collaboration could help usher in a new era, bringing important and tangible benefits for our nations.

As we contemplate new directions for the US-Colombia partnership, our two countries have the opportunity to renew our joint efforts and strive for a healthier future post COVID-19—bringing inclusive economic growth, increased security, more robust solutions to climate and environmental challenges, and a greater commitment to democracy, rule of law, peace, and human rights.

A healthier future post-COVID-19

The last two years are a testament to the importance of close coordination with allies in addressing transnational health challenges. US support for Colombia's efforts to recover from COVID-19 contributed to a healthier future in the Americas and provided a blueprint to prepare our hemisphere for other health crises.

The Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Task Force, which I co-chair alongside my friend and colleague Senator Roy Blunt of Missouri, laid out a four-pillar strategy in December 2021 for further policy actions the US-Colombia partnership could take to accelerate inclusive and sustainable COVID-19 recovery in Colombia.¹ That strategy includes not only accelerating vaccine rollout but also promoting investment and job creation, strengthening Colombia's social compact, and enhancing the rule of law, peace-agreement implementation, good governance, and human rights protections.

Our support for Colombia's fight against COVID-19 has not only benefited Colombians, but may also help the United States usher in solutions for bolstering supply chain resilience, addressing information gaps to enhance vaccine confidence, and learning lessons that will help us all prepare for future crises—all priorities discussed at the US Department of State's February 2022 COVID-19 Global Action Meeting.² We will continue the fight against this pandemic to secure a healthier future for our citizens and the hemisphere.

Inclusive, sustainable economic growth

The COVID-19 pandemic showed us the power of innovation and resilience in the face of economic downturns, leading to major changes in how we work and live, including the emergence of a more digital-

ly-engaged workforce. The United States, working with Colombia, could be at the forefront of ushering in economic prosperity driven by values of transparency, accountability, and inclusion.

Our countries have a rich history of economic cooperation, and 2022 marks the tenth anniversary of the US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. This agreement has helped generate thousands of US jobs, expand US access to markets, and enhance US competitiveness on the world stage. The agreement eliminated tariffs and various barriers to US exports, promoting greater trade and economic growth in both countries. It also opened up a new world for US service providers looking to do business in Colombia. The agreement is expected to continue to provide positive advantages for US businesses and consumers.

Colombia has leveraged its excellent trade partnership with the United States to secure Free Trade Agreements with the European Union, Canada, and twenty-six nations in Latin America and the Caribbean.³ In addition, as nearshoring manufacturing becomes a possible alternative to trade with Asia in the wake of the pandemic, US-Colombian trade could expand further.

As China increases its engagement with Latin America, US-Colombia collaboration could help bolster a rules-based economic environment in the Americas. Colombia remains one of the few countries in the region that trades more with the United States than China; 26 percent of its total trade is with the United States. Through its commitment to improving transparency, anti-corruption, financial sustainability, labor protections, and environmental preservation standards, Colombia could set the tone for the wider region.

Regional security and Peace Colombia

Few countries in the Western Hemisphere have faced the array of security challenges Colombia has encountered, including illegal armed groups financially sustained by illicit economies, internal insecurity, and an influx of two million migrants and refugees from Venezuela. Under Plan Colombia and Peace Colombia, our nations have forged a steadfast partnership that is a force-multiplier for promoting accountability, combating drug trafficking and organized crime, and supporting human rights across the hemisphere.

President Joseph R. Biden announced in March 2022 that the United States intends to designate Colombia as a Major non-NATO Ally: “In recognition of our uniquely close cooperation in the hemisphere, Colombia’s significant contributions as a NATO Global Partner, its commitment to NATO’s mission to promote democratic values and commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes, and its rejection of Russia’s unprovoked and unjustifiable aggression against Ukraine.”⁴ This is a move that I anticipate a broad bipartisan consensus in Congress will support. Colombia continues to aid in the global fight against terrorism, cybersecurity threats, corruption, and other global security challenges. Colombia’s strong, albeit complex, history in combating armed groups and insurgencies within its borders uniquely positions it as a critical ally in training police, military, and prosecutors via the US-Colombia Action Plan and other mechanisms for joint operations.

Robust solutions to climate and environmental challenges

Dealing with climate change is a national security priority for the United States, and Colombia has been an exemplary partner in this effort. Environmental degradation does not stop at a country’s border, and neither should the fight to preserve our world’s clean air and water and natural resources.

Colombia has made bold strides to address climate change. The country’s Paris Agreement commitments include a 51 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and net-zero deforestation by 2030, and carbon neutrality by 2050. These go hand in hand with shorter-term goals, such as Colombia’s implementation of legislation regulating methane emissions from oil and gas. The country has also vowed to plant 180 million trees and secure a 30 percent reduction in total deforestation by the end of 2022.

Protecting environmental assets, tropical forests, carbon sinks, and biodiversity is crucial not just for Colombians but for the United States, our hemisphere, and the world. Greater US support for this joint effort remains vital to ensure future generations do not experience climate devastation.

An ongoing commitment to democracy, the rule of law, peace, and human rights

There is no area more important to the US-Colombia relationship and our world today than preserving democracy worldwide. As Freedom House recently reported,⁵ 2021 was the sixteenth year in which declines in democratic performance have outpaced democratic strengthening—meaning the world is deep into a global democratic recession. An ongoing commitment to democracy, peace, and human rights is not only a cornerstone of foreign policy but also an essential US national security interest.

Authoritarian actors such as Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela have contributed to the demise of democracy and one of the biggest humanitarian crises in the world today. For the past decade, countries across the Americas have risen to help address mass migration from Venezuela. In this effort, Colombia has been a model for our global community.

With US support, Colombia has taken in and assisted nearly two million Venezuelan migrants and refugees, approximately 33 percent of the estimated 6 million people who have fled Venezuela.⁶ By January 2022, almost 1.7 million Venezuelans had begun the registration process for Colombia's Temporary Protected Status program, with nearly half a million fully enrolled, giving them access to health care, work permits, and other social services for the next decade.⁷

Corruption undermines faith in democracy and strengthens autocratic regimes by exacerbating existing repression and allowing violations of civil rights and liberties. Corruption is a fundamental obstacle to peace, prosperity, and human rights. We know this, and so does Colombia. The United States and Colombia should build on joint work to fight corruption in Colombia and globally and continue to partner to defend democracy and counter extremism. Initiatives to increase transparency and accountability that leverage new technologies and involve civilians could help pave the road to a more free, safe, and democratic world.

Conclusion

The US alliance with Colombia is rooted in our commitment to collaboration and the shared values of democracy, transparency, and accountability. The partnership is strong precisely because it is as wide as it is long, encompassing a range of priorities that affect every one of our citizens. Future US bipartisan and democratic engagement with Colombia in strategic areas will strengthen the entire Western Hemisphere. As our two nations cooperate on immediate parallel challenges posed by COVID-19 and other health issues, democratic backsliding and hyper-polarization, and the Venezuelan political, economic, and human rights crisis, we must prepare for future challenges. We can celebrate this year's bicentennial by reinvigorating bilateral, bipartisan, and bicameral support for the US-Colombia partnership to ensure our region's stability and continued prosperity.



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ESSAY **3**

COUNTER NEW STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

As the US faces significant global challenges and an era of great power competition, our alliance with Colombia has become increasingly important for safeguarding democratic values and regional stability.

ROY BLUNT

Senator (R-MO), US Senate; Co-Chair, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council

THE YEAR 2022 IS AN IMPORTANT ONE for the United States and Colombia: the 200th anniversary of formal diplomatic relations between our countries. Beyond simply marking the rich history of two centuries, this is an excellent time to examine our relationship in the context of current global affairs and look for ways to further strengthen it.

In my time in Congress and as co-chair of the Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Task Force, I have been proud to lead and support many of the initiatives that have strengthened US relations with Colombia. Our joint efforts have boosted our economies and helped lay the groundwork for institutional growth, security, and peace-building in Colombia.

This has made a real difference for Colombia. Since 2000, Congress has directed roughly \$12 billion in bilateral aid to support the country's economic development, conflict resolution, and counter-narcotics efforts.¹ As a result, Colombia's economy began to evolve into what it is today: an open and growing market-based economy ripe with opportunity.

Colombia's progress will help unlock an even stronger relationship between our countries. We look to this increased stability and economic growth to serve as a bulwark against emerging threats to democratic values. As the oldest democracy in Latin America, Colombia will be an excellent partner in countering the influence of our competitors.

Chief among these competitors is China, which has used its economic strength for coercion and to strengthen its military power. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), initially targeting the Indo-Pacific region, has now expanded to reach more than 130 countries, amounting to 40 percent of global GDP and more than 63 percent of the world's population.² In 2017, four years after the program was launched, China announced that Latin America was a "natural extension" of the BRI and would facilitate "a community of shared future for China and Latin America."³ Panama became the first Latin American country to join, and more than twenty of the region's thirty-three countries have followed.⁴

The expansion of the BRI into Latin America is typical of a larger trend of increasing connection between China and the Western Hemisphere. Total trade between China and Latin America increased from \$18 billion in 2002 to \$318 billion in 2020. China is now the largest trading partner of Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay and the second largest for many other countries, including Colombia, where trade with China fell short of US trade in goods by only \$109 million in 2020.^{5,6}

China has displayed the ability and the intent to use its economic power to expand its influence, broaden its military footprint, and attempt to coerce its "partners" to fall in line on issues like human rights abuses, isolating Taiwan, and China's antagonistic activity on the world stage.

According to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, while economic interests remain the primary driver of China's engagement in Latin America, its standing as a top trading partner, lender, and investor gives it a great deal of power over other governments. The commission reports that China "[encourages] Latin American and Caribbean governments to make domestic and foreign policy decisions that favor China while undermining democracies and free and open markets."⁷ The United States must remain mindful of the consequences of China acquiring this much political and economic leverage in Latin America.

While Colombia has remained outside the BRI, Chinese investment in Colombia has increased. State-owned firms have inked deals to construct and operate Bogotá's first metro system and hydroelectric power plants and purchased a large gold mine.⁸ Notably, no US firms placed bids on the metro system project or on any of Colombia's large road projects in the past six years.⁹ Given China's propensity to use these types of investments for its objectives, the United States should strengthen economic ties with Colombia, increase investment in the country's future, and help it resist any attempts to undermine its democratic values.

The United States should continue to deepen bilateral trade with Colombia via the existing US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA). As a member of Republican leadership in the US House of Representatives during the George W. Bush administration, I helped start the trade agreement negotiations. As a senator, I helped give it the final push into law. When the agreement entered into force in May 2012, it immediately lifted tariffs on more than 80 percent of US exports of consumer and industrial products to Colombia, with the remainder lifted over ten years. On the tenth anniversary of this landmark agreement, the United States should reinvigorate its trade relationship with Colombia to ensure we remain the country's top partner and that the agreement continues to create jobs and economic opportunities in both countries. In addition, the TPA could be better leveraged to advance nearshoring opportunities as it provides US companies with a stable and predictable trade and investment environment. US companies seeking to relocate their supply chains closer to their main markets should take advantage of the agreement's friendly investment chapter and rules of origin provision as well as Colombia's geographic proximity to the United States. Another way the United States could deepen our economic ties and reduce dependence on China is through nearshoring. The COVID-19 pandemic and China's destabilizing maritime activities in the Indo-Pacific have raised alarms about supply chain resiliency and the risks of heavily relying on China for key exports. A 2020 survey by financial services firm UBS found that 71 percent of manufacturers planned to move some of their production out of China.¹⁰ Moving US supply chains from China to regional partners like Colombia would diminish this reliance while boosting jobs and business opportunities.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has begun taking steps to finance and otherwise encourage nearshoring to Latin America. In 2021, the IDB worked with sixteen Latin American countries to identify critical export and supply-chain advantages of nearshoring.¹¹ ProColombia, the government agency tasked with promoting Colombian exports, tourism, and investments, maintains a website identifying key sectors with investment opportunities, including agricultural products, energy, manufacturing, health care services, and information technology.¹²

These are critical steps in jumpstarting investment, but there is room for additional US support for nearshoring and investment. The US government should facilitate public-private collaboration and work with both the private sector and the Colombian government to identify and overcome barriers to investing and nearshoring. We should reevaluate the tools at our disposal, such as the International Development Finance Corporation, and find more ways to support these opportunities in countries like Colombia that support our national security and foreign policy priorities.

The expansion of competition in the Western Hemisphere also presents opportunities for US-Colombia relations to preserve security and stability. In addition to its economic influence, China collaborates with repressive authoritarians, such as the Nicolás Maduro regime in Venezuela, and enables anti-democratic behavior in other countries. Of particular concern is China's exportation of digital and surveillance technologies, which allow more regimes to surveil and repress critics and minority populations.¹³

In 2021, we saw widespread democratic backsliding in Latin America. Authoritarians consolidated their power, and more Latin Americans became indifferent or disillusioned with democracy. Colombia saw its own mass protests in 2021, with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating longstanding societal tensions. Colombia needs US partnership now more than ever to support effective governance and institutional capacity and to prevent Colombia from falling victim to the political turmoil taking place throughout the region.

International enablers of the Maduro regime have exacerbated the crisis in Venezuela, generating a mass exodus. Colombia's acceptance of nearly two million migrants and refugees has been a stabilizing force in this crisis, but the government needs more support given the challenges it already faces.¹⁴

Colombia needs more resources to support the initiative launched last year that will provide temporary protective status to Venezuelan migrants, allowing them to access healthcare and other essential services. The COVID-19 pandemic added another layer of complexity, necessitating a vaccination campaign for Colombian citizens and Venezuelans to reduce the virus's spread.

The United States should also build upon existing cooperation with Colombia on security, safety, and countering illicit activity. It's no coincidence that Colombia's economic growth accompanied a reduction in violence. We should continue strong support for Colombia's coca eradication and counter-narcotics efforts, including building state capacity in isolated regions and facilitating crop substitution. These programs help stem the production of drugs and associated violence, and they also help underserved communities gain access to state services to begin building economic prosperity. For the United States, these programs target supply sources of the drug crisis that brings despair to our communities.

A lot has changed in Colombia since I worked to pass the legislation for Plan Colombia and since Senator Ben Cardin and I became co-chairs of the Atlantic Council's Colombia Task Force. What has not changed is the critical role that Colombia plays in the Western Hemisphere and worldwide as a symbol of democratic persistence and economic openness. I look forward to Colombia's continued growth. I believe that more cooperation between our countries makes us both stronger, more prosperous, and more secure as we start the third century of the formal bond between our countries.



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ESSAY **4**

BUILD ON SHARED GLOBAL PRIORITIES

As we celebrate the bicentennial of the US-Colombia relationship, we should focus on what lies ahead. Now is the time to develop new approaches and responses that will lead to more just, prosperous, and inclusive societies that can rebuild trust and confidence in our governments, democracies, and the ideals of freedom and the rule of law.

CAROLINA BARCO

*Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Colombia;
Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council*

THE BICENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION of US-Colombia diplomatic relations is a time to celebrate and reflect on our countries' deep, strong relationship, one built on shared values, mutual help, cooperation, and a firm commitment to the ideals of freedom and democracy. Colombia and the United States have historically addressed their differences with respect and pragmatism and worked together to advance bilateral, regional, and international priorities.

Simón Bolívar and the founders of *Gran Colombia*—Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela—looked to the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Men as guiding principles for the new nation. They studied how the United States defined and structured its new government with its division of powers. Bolívar sent Manuel Torres to Washington to learn firsthand about this inspiring project and seek support and diplomatic

recognition. Two years after its independence from Spain, Gran Colombia became the United States' first diplomatic partner in Latin America, and Torres, the first diplomatic attaché. Colombia remains the longest-standing democracy in Latin America, and its constitution was inspired by the democratic principles of the US Constitution.

Our two countries continue to work side-by-side to defend civil rights, freedom, and democratic governance. Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine is a reminder that we must not take our political freedom or responsibilities for granted. Both our countries understand the importance of defending our democratic system and values. Colombia fought with the United States in the Korean War against the spread of communism. Through Plan Colombia and Peace Colombia, the United States has provided strategic support and more than \$12 billion in assistance to face the threats posed by illicit groups and their criminal activities. Colombia has been an indispensable US partner in training more than 17,000 police and prosecutors in Central America via the US-Colombia Action Plan since 2013.¹

Multilateral institutions and the US-Colombia relationship

Central to our relationship has been our mutual commitment to multilateral and international institutions as an essential means to address regional and global challenges. Our two countries were founding members of the United Nations (UN) and remain actively involved in the UN system. When the UN sought to extend the Millennium Development Goals, Colombia suggested that the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have sustainability and environmental dimensions in addition to economic ones. Colombia then set an example by incorporating the SDGs into the National Development Plan, including commitments at the national, regional, and local levels.² After signing the peace agreement in 2016, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) requested that the UN create a verification mission to monitor the reincorporation process and the safety of former FARC combatants. The mandate has been extended until October 2022.

As founders of the Organization of American States (OAS), Colombia and the United States have helped lay the foundation for programs addressing economic and social needs and defending democratic institu-

tions. An early example was the Alliance for Progress, a far-reaching US program to strengthen hemispheric growth and address Cold War challenges. Developed by Colombian President and Secretary General of the OAS Alberto Lleras Camargo, US President John F. Kennedy, and Brazilian President Juscelino Kubitschek, this ambitious program supported rural reform, expanded housing, and improved public education. In September 2011, with active US and Colombian participation, the OAS approved the Inter-American Democratic Charter, affirming that democracy is and should be a common form of government for all countries of the Americas; it also included objectives to defend human rights, fight poverty, and maintain a democratic culture.

Our global agenda

The United States and Colombia should prioritize cooperation in advancing fundamental areas of the UN's Our Common Agenda and the objectives of the OAS's Ninth Summit of the Americas, including strengthening democracy, the rule of law, and human rights protections, as well as promoting inclusive economic growth, sustainability and climate action, and solutions to migration-related challenges. These issues are linked and should be considered comprehensively.

DEMOCRACY, SECURITY, THE RULE OF LAW, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Public opinion surveys Latinobarómetro and the Edelman Trust Barometer show a growing loss of confidence in democracy and political leadership throughout Latin America. This dissatisfaction was evident during the 2019 violent protests in Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru and the 2021 nationwide demonstrations in Colombia. Many see democracy as working for only a few and not addressing Latin America's income inequality, among the highest in the world. Concern with growing corruption, ineffective judicial systems, and deepening insecurity feed this problem.

As we look at the next two hundred years of US-Colombia relations, our two countries should continue to prioritize initiatives to enhance democracy, the rule of law, security, and human rights protections. Specifically, the United States could support Colombian-led efforts to strengthen the judiciary, increase government transparency, and create more effective struc-

tures for dialogue between the government, civic groups and organizations, youth, minorities, the private sector, and other key stakeholders.

INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

The United States remains one of Latin America's most important commercial partners, a role strengthened by a series of trade agreements: the Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement, the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement, and bilateral agreements with Chile, Colombia, Panama, and Peru. Still, ongoing opportunities and great potential exist to increase commerce by simplifying procedures and providing more technical support to facilitate compliance with US product standards. Another area of opportunity with significant security and commercial implications is nearshoring the production of essential parts of US industry supply chains in Latin America rather than in distant Asian markets. Colombia is uniquely positioned to receive these nearshoring projects, given its geographic proximity to the United States and the stable and predictable commercial environment provided by the US–Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement.

According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Latin America has a significant infrastructure investment gap of approximately \$150 billion per year.³ The region requires roads, ports, airports, and connectivity. With the US Development Finance Corporation's (DFC's) extended authorities to invest in equity, provide technical assistance, and undertake transactions in local currency, the United States is well-positioned to finance infrastructure projects. As recommended by the Atlantic Council's US–Colombia Task Force,⁴ a concerted effort by the DFC to collaborate with the IDB, the IDB Investment Corporation, and the Development Bank of Latin America could create significant resources for financing infrastructure projects in Colombia. In addition, the US Department of the Treasury and the US Trade and Development Agency could work with the US private sector to identify barriers to the investment and financing of infrastructure projects in Colombia. US agencies should then work with Colombia's National Infrastructure Agency to address identified barriers.

Close cooperation in education, science, and technology would impact economic development, create new economic opportunities, improve productivity, and support innovation. Education and training programs could

strengthen science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) skills and develop cyber capabilities and newer technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics. Here, the US-Colombia partnership could create a joint development strategy to fund research centers in Colombia, modeled after those of the US National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health.

Also, research and exchange programs between our two countries would strengthen economic growth, well-being, and binational ties by promoting friendship, trust, and respect among US and Colombia participants. Exchanges among universities, professors, and students lay the foundation for long-term productive relationships, the backbone of economic development.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Latin America is home to the two most biodiverse countries in the world, Brazil and Colombia, and the Amazon Rainforest, the most biodiverse place on Earth. Protecting this unique reserve has lasting implications for global hydrological cycles, oxygen production, and carbon absorption.

For more than thirty years, Colombia has implemented a progressive approach to conserving biodiversity and the rainforest by recognizing the rights of Indigenous communities. These communities' cultures, knowledge, and respect for the rainforest's fragile ecosystem have effectively protected it. To address rising degradation concerns, Colombia proposed the Leticia Pact of 2021, with Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname as partners in monitoring, conserving, and implementing strategies to tackle deforestation.

As signatories of the Paris Accord, the United States and Colombia are working to achieve net-zero emissions, serving as an example to other countries. To do so, the United States has made a significant commitment to reduce 2005 carbon emissions by half by 2030, while Colombia has focused on decreasing deforestation and a 40 percent carbon emission reduction.

MIGRATION

Immigration throughout Latin America is on the rise. Colombia had limited immigration until very recently, but it now faces an overwhelming challenge having received nearly two million migrants from Venezuela. The

country has displayed remarkable solidarity toward incoming Venezuelans, implementing policies to assist and integrate them into the Colombian economy and society, including a ten-year temporary permit that grants them access to employment, education, and healthcare services, including COVID-19 vaccines.⁵ It also gave Colombian nationality to children of Venezuelan mothers born in Colombia.

As the largest donor in response to the Venezuelan regional crisis, the United States should encourage the international community to fully fund their pledges and increase financial support to Colombia as it absorbs 34 percent of the population forced to flee Venezuela. Moving forward, the US-Colombia partnership should also prioritize programs that address the principal drivers of the Venezuelan exodus, namely violence and the lack of economic opportunities. In addressing other migration crises, we should learn from the Colombian experience and respond with efficient, humane, and transparent procedures and programs.

Final thoughts

Our two nations were founded on the ideals of freedom and democracy. As we celebrate the bicentennial of our relationship, we should recognize our progress while acknowledging remaining challenges and working to seize future opportunities. Now is the time to develop new approaches and responses that will lead to more just, prosperous, and inclusive societies that can rebuild trust and confidence in our governments, democracies, and the ideals that we hold dear.



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ESSAY 5

LOOK TO THE NEW COLOMBIA

Revitalizing the US partnership with Colombia based on a shared vision of a more prosperous, equal, and greener future seems like a more solid foundation for building out the next two hundred years of diplomatic ties than simply recycling the past.

P. MICHAEL MCKINLEY

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IN TWENTY YEARS, Colombia became the most strategic and important relationship for the United States in Latin America and the Caribbean. The question is whether the United States fully recognizes what this transformation implies for the future bonds between our countries as we celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of diplomatic ties.

Colombia is not standing still, nor, for that matter, is the wider Latin American region. It is not waiting for direction, engagement, or definition from Washington. As this book goes to publication, fifty million Colombians are set to forge a new paradigm for their country in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period when they vote in its presidential elections.

How the United States responds to the opportunities and challenges of a modernizing, sophisticated, and complex neighbor will determine whether the strategic convergence of interests in the Plan Colombia era was a moment in time or the foundation for a lasting transformational alliance of like-minded nations.

Time to look ahead

The concerns of yesteryear are not those of the future. In Colombia, that future includes, as in other parts of the world, a post-pandemic response that can lead to the necessary economic and social transformation in response to twenty-first century challenges.

In the United States and Colombia, the post-pandemic recovery also requires addressing the changing nature of globalization, the implications of China's rise and Russia's war in Ukraine, climate change, and the disenchantment of large sectors of the population with politicians and democracy itself. In Colombia, more specifically, there is a pressing need to modernize the economy, improve services, and reduce inequalities and social violence.

Washington at times can seem more concerned with the past and transposing its broader geopolitical objectives to the region. It is striking that Colombia is still primarily seen in the United States through the prism of drugs, left-wing insurgencies, aid dependency, and the continental struggle between authoritarian and democratic ideologies.

The US-Colombia Strategic Alliance Act launched by the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March 2022 only underscores the enduring nature of this perspective.¹ The updated language on inclusive growth fails to disguise the US priorities that drive most of the bilateral agenda—security, China, Venezuela, migration, drugs, and terrorism. There is not as much reflection as there should be of modern-day Colombia's changing political and social realities or its national interests or aspirations for the twenty-first century. The text is restrictive about how Colombians should address internal questions.

The US Congress is not alone in its approach. The White House focused on many of the same concerns during the March 2022 visit of President Iván Duque to Washington. To realize President Joseph R. Biden's vision of the US-Colombia relationship as “the foundation ... of regional security and prosperity,” the agenda must be palpably broader and include how Colombians define their challenges, future, and region.²

The new Colombia

There is so much more to Colombia's present-day reality than "cocaine and war," as one of the Colombian creators of the animated film *Encanto* commented after its Oscar award win.³

I thought so when I was the US ambassador in Bogotá between 2010 and 2013. We worked on security and counter-narcotics but we also prioritized finalizing a free trade agreement that transformed our economic ties and included landmark labor and environmental protections. We supported a peace process that ended fifty years of war and is a model of conflict resolution in the post-1989 world, and deepened US engagement with Colombia's vibrant literary, musical, and artistic communities.

I think so now, even in the context of Colombia's still daunting challenges. No one should seek to minimize these. The mass protests and violence of the summer of 2021 indicated the strains caused by social, economic, and racial inequality and unmet expectations. The undercurrents of public discontent remain. There has been an exponential increase in drug production, implementation of the 2016 peace agreement is incomplete, political polarization is increasing, and Venezuela provides safe haven to narco-terrorists who attack Colombian soil.

But contrary to the almost universal dire predictions of 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic was raging and the country underwent its most severe economic downturn in history, Colombia in 2022 is defying the more pessimistic prognoses of where it seemed headed.

Colombia's leaders and people are finding a way to respond to the devastation of the pandemic and economic collapse. Colombia's completed vaccination rate of its population is now higher than in the United States, with far fewer resources and without culture wars. Colombia's equally remarkable economic recovery since 2020 is among the fastest in the Western Hemisphere and has taken place as headlines predicted a lost decade for Colombia and the region.

The ongoing economic recovery, which reflects Colombia's strong macroeconomic management, is only part of the story. In response to the hardships imposed by the pandemic, in which millions of families lost their incomes and education was severely disrupted, a reorientation is underway in the government's priorities—priorities a new government is unlikely to shift. Spending has dramatically increased to address poverty alleviation,

improve health service delivery, and transform education for Colombia's next generation.

Generally, there is greater urgency to the innovations transforming key sectors of the economy, focusing on sustainability and digitalization. Colombia's commitment to training 100,000 programmers and its emergence as a center for fintech and a home for start-up unicorns suggest the scale of what is underway.⁴ The transformation meshes with public policies focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions at one of the fastest rates in the world. Colombia, one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, has scaled-up environmental protections during the pandemic response.

Colombia is also adapting to a changing world landscape in the trade arena and is positioning itself to benefit in the post-pandemic period. Colombia has expressed interest in becoming a member of the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, which includes most of Asia's important economies.⁵ It has trade agreements with the European Union and Canada and is a regional leader in pro-market growth and integration as a member of the Pacific Alliance, which includes Chile, Mexico, and Peru. Contrary to what many in Washington have feared, Colombia is managing economic ties with China without slipping into strategic vulnerability, and is preparing to benefit from the drive to nearshore supply chains in the region.

Colombia's democratic institutions are functioning in a period of great strain. The Justice Ministry is investigating the human rights abuses and killings that accompanied the 2021 protests. The country held successful elections for a new legislature in the most polarized political environment in memory, with all sides accepting the results. In speaking about current political tensions, my Oxford University professor, Malcolm Deas—considered the doyen of living historians on Colombia—recalled an observation he had made about the peace process: “no habrá revolución en Colombia, *pero toca hacer reformas*”[“there will not be a revolution in Colombia but reforms are necessary”].⁶ If he is correct, and I hope he is, it will be the strength of Colombia's democratic traditions and institutions that proved determinant.

Poland's generosity to millions of Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion has justly received massive praise in the West. The same recognition should be extended to Colombia. In early 2019, I witnessed in Cúcuta how Colombians welcomed and assisted families streaming across the border as

the Venezuelan situation deteriorated. With far less money and international attention, as the pandemic plunged millions of Colombians into poverty, Colombia set a standard for how to humanely respond in an orderly fashion to a major migration crisis.

A new relationship

I have suggested why present-day Colombia merits an updated approach from the United States. In looking forward, it should be possible for Washington to provide one in a new spirit of partnership and shared bilateral, regional, and global challenges.

The Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Task Force December 2021 report provides the critical blueprint for doing so without ignoring the concerns that have previously driven our cooperation.⁷ It makes practical programmatic recommendations for achieving the objectives of inclusive economic growth, a broader social pact, expanded outreach to Colombia's next generation, and further implementing the 2016 peace accords. It is time to use that report to forge our collaborative engagement in the coming years.

A new relationship also means a two-way street of strategic cooperation. Colombia may emerge as a voice bridging ideological differences in a fragmented Latin American political landscape. As a member of global trading organizations, Colombia is well-positioned to work with the United States to combat unfair and predatory competition and address the challenges of a digitalized world economy. As a major producer of hydrocarbons and a green technology innovator, Colombia can promote sustainable development and assist in a difficult moment for the world's energy markets. The United States could use its strong security partnership with Colombia to work more strategically to strengthen the rule of law in Central America.

There is more. As a country which has responded to a major migration crisis of its own, Colombia can help lead the hemispheric search for solutions not conditioned by US concerns with its borders. As a growing center of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), digital, and artistic creativity, Colombia can become a regional driver of innovation. As a democratic nation that has (so far) resisted populism, Colombia can exemplify how governments can meet the needs of their populations without upending representative democracy and its system of checks and balances

I cannot predict how Colombians will vote in future elections, and domestic politics anywhere can turn in ways that alter relations between countries. The promise of this moment, however, is evident. As the United States redefines its engagement with a changing world, a revitalized partnership with Colombia based on a shared vision of a more prosperous, equal, and greener future for our citizens seems like a more solid foundation for building out the next two hundred years of diplomatic ties than simply recycling rationales of the past.



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“One of the great, unheralded contributors to Plan Colombia’s success was the Colombian Prosecutors’ office, the Fiscalía. These prosecutors, at great personal risk, were key to the reduction in violence during the first years of Plan Colombia as they brought charges against violent criminals within the legal system. While the US provided some technical assistance, their bravery and dedication strengthened the rule of law and helped consolidate economic and security gains.”

ANNE W. PATTERSON

Former Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and North African Affairs, US Department of State; former US Ambassador to Colombia; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council



“The history of decisions and actions by both US and Colombian leaders contributing to the success of Plan Colombia in its final form help explain our failures elsewhere and is rich in lessons for future US presidents when they’re being urged to intervene in another country to bring stability, an end to killing, the rule of law, and democracy.”

ROBERT M. GATES

Former US Secretary of Defense; Honorary Director, Board of Directors, Atlantic Council. Excerpt taken from his book, ‘Exercise of Power: American Failures, Successes, and a New Path Forward in the Post-Cold War World,’ June 2020, p.142.



ENHANCING SHARED SECURITY

ESSAYS 6-10

6

Prioritize Comprehensive Security Assistance *page 50*

DAVID H. PETRAEUS

*Former Director, US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA);
Director, Board of Directors, Atlantic Council*

7

Invest in Our Military Relationship *page 57*

CRAIG FALLER

*Former Commander, United States Southern Command;
Distinguished Fellow, Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center,
Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, Atlantic Council*

8

Ensure a Whole-of-Government Approach *page 64*

REBECCA BILL CHAVEZ

*President and CEO, Inter-American Dialogue;
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western
Hemisphere Affairs, US Department of Defense*

9

Think Broader to Advance Security *page 70*

JUAN CARLOS PINZÓN

*Ambassador of Colombia to the United States;
Former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia*

10

Adapt Intelligence Capabilities for New Threats *page 77*

KIRON K. SKINNER

*Former Director of Policy Planning, US Department of State;
Lifetime Director, Board of Directors, Atlantic Council; Visiting Fellow,
Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy,
The Heritage Foundation*

DAVID R. SHEDD

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Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy, The Heritage Foundation*

VIDEO *page 84*

MARÍA VICTORIA LLORENTE

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6

ESSAY

PRIORITIZE COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY ASSISTANCE

There is no country better positioned to stand by Colombia than the United States, just as there is no country in South America whose partnership is more valuable to the United States. It is time for the United States to translate that reality into coherent, comprehensive, and committed action.

DAVID H. PETRAEUS

*Former Director, US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA);
Director, Board of Directors, Atlantic Council*

IN NOVEMBER 2016, Colombia ratified historic peace accords, formalizing an end to Colombia's decades-long conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). I remember that day well; it was a momentous occasion for all of Colombia, particularly for then-President Juan Manuel Santos, who had tirelessly overseen negotiations with the FARC since 2012. I knew how much he had invested in the process. While visiting Colombia as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), I was the first US official he told that he would pursue a peace agreement. I was encouraged for him and the entire country as I realized what a critical turning point it could be for Colombia's future and our bilateral relations.

Colombia has long been a highly valued partner of the United States. Our two countries' bilateral relationship has been characterized by cooperation

across various sectors over many decades. It is undoubtedly the United States' most important security partnership in South America, with the two countries working together tirelessly to address threats to hemispheric security. Since 2000, the United States has provided \$12 billion to Colombia, helping to strengthen its military and police forces and to provide assistance for numerous economic development initiatives.¹ Our long-standing and successful military, police, and intelligence partnerships have been validated most recently by Colombia's nomination as a Major non-NATO Ally.

In President Joseph R. Biden's March 2022 meeting with President Iván Duque, President Biden commemorated the bicentennial of the US-Colombia partnership, highlighting the "uniquely close" relationship between our countries and committing to a "comprehensive approach to ... consolidate and sustain peace implementation and reconciliation programs."² While this is a welcome affirmation of the administration's intent to sustain the bilateral relationship, it is imperative we find additional ways to galvanize it with funding and initiatives because the need for US solidarity with Colombia has never been greater.

A new reality

The 2016 Colombian peace agreement set out to undo many of the structural causes of Colombia's decades-long conflict, an admirable, albeit lofty, task. While the agreement did result in the disarmament of some thirteen thousand FARC members, the road to peace and stability beyond that achievement has proven to be quite rocky.³ At the five-year mark of implementation—one-third of the total timespan designated in the accords—Colombia still had a long way to go. That was not unexpected. Finding peace and security after decades of conflict is a tall order, and, in retrospect, the signing of the peace agreement may prove to have been easier than achieving lasting peace.

The challenges of implementing the agreement have been amplified by the fact that around 6.9 million Colombians—the world's third-largest population of internally displaced people—remain displaced.⁴ Many violent armed groups—guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers—bear responsibility for the displacement crisis: some groups explicitly targeted civilians in a quest for territorial control.⁵

Violent conflict among the various groups forced civilians to flee. The common denominator was the absence of the state in rural areas, which made displacement worse. The vacuum allowed the FARC, for example, to set up de facto governance structures, dislodging state control from certain areas for decades.⁶ When the FARC was at its peak in the late 1990s, it controlled as much as one-quarter of Colombian territory.⁷ While the Colombian government now has greater access to these areas, it still struggles to make inroads with historically under-resourced populations.⁸

The optimistic visions of the peace dividend have been undermined by the pernicious and persistent problem of coca crop cultivation. During my time as CIA director in 2012, coca cultivation was approximately 78,000 hectares (ha). In 2020, coca crops reached 245,000 ha, with 1,228 tons of cocaine produced.^{9,10} New initiatives for partnership in reducing coca cultivation are essential for both the United States and Colombia. Otherwise, remaining guerilla and criminal groups will capitalize on the smuggling of staggering quantities of cocaine out of Colombia, a substantial amount of which finds its way to US soil.

In addition to the challenges of illegal narcotics, Colombia is also grappling with political and economic crises in neighboring Venezuela, resulting in an enormous outflow of refugees. Colombia has been generous in its acceptance of nearly two million Venezuelan refugees. It deserves considerable admiration for what it has done,¹¹ with its welcoming policies an example for the rest of the world, especially as Europe copes with the enormous migration of Ukrainians fleeing the war that has resulted from Russia's unprovoked invasion. The influx of Venezuelan migrants has further challenged the government, both in its allocation of government resources and economic consequences, with no end in sight. A study by Colombia's Central Bank predicts that between three and five million Venezuelans will settle in Colombia by the end of 2022, which will further strain Colombia's limited federal resources.¹²

Securing further international financial assistance to support Venezuelan migrants is vital, particularly given the enormous gap in global funding for the Venezuela crisis compared to past migration situations. Host countries like Colombia have, for example, received only \$256 per capita in inter-

national assistance for each Venezuelan refugee—less than one-tenth of the \$3,150 received by host countries for each Syrian refugee.¹³

The way forward

The United States must build on its decades of partnership with Colombia and use the present moment to lay out a new comprehensive approach to its assistance, updated for present-day challenges and addressing the obstacles to peace. To do so, the US government should look back on the rich shared history of our two countries, evaluate successes and shortcomings, and build on the positive developments enabled by Plan Colombia to establish solutions for a more prosperous future.

Historically, the United States has been the leading provider of aid to Colombia, with most funds—averaging 65 percent annually—going toward military assistance.¹⁴ President Barack Obama’s “Peace Colombia” initiative, however, increased the amount allocated to develop other sectors of Colombia, an approach that Congress has continued to support in ongoing appropriation negotiations.¹⁵ While it is essential for the United States to diversify its investments, it should not be done at the expense of consistent and cost-effective security aid. After all, without security, other progress is not possible.

The United States should recommit itself to professionalizing the Colombian military and police in the post-peace accord era, specifically focusing efforts on achieving institutional control in remote, disenfranchised territories. Before signing the peace agreement, I participated in a Ministry of Defense conference in Bogotá, where I heard an overarching assumption that the peace dividend would reduce the requirement for security force operations. As I cautioned then, Colombia needed to understand that there likely would be no peace dividend; rather, Colombia would actually need more, not less, military and police forces, as they would have to take control of additional rural territories. That would require additional security capabilities and a comprehensive approach that included economic alternatives to coca cultivation, new infrastructure development, expanded educational services, and the provision of other basic services necessary for long-term stability. Events since the conclusion of the peace agreement have validated that assessment.

The United States should also continue making its funding contingent on increased training on human rights and the rule of law, underscoring our commitment to democratic development and economic growth.¹⁶ And clearly, a realistic assessment of drug trafficking activities and guerrilla assets must be undertaken to develop a coherent plan for addressing them.

To facilitate all of this, we should continue to help Colombia rebuild its intelligence agency—previously dismantled due to corruption and involvement in political activities—to better monitor Colombia’s ever-evolving security situation and continue to share information with trusted allies, including the United States.¹⁷ More robust law enforcement and criminal investigation capabilities in Colombia, akin to those of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, alongside two-way intelligence sharing and enhanced training in surveillance and reconnaissance strategies, would likely open the door to other areas of cooperation. The reestablishment of the Colombian intelligence community—done correctly and transparently—could serve as an example of how Colombia acknowledges its past missteps, learns from them, and strengthens its commitment to democratic values, thereby building further confidence in its governing capacity.

This military support will only succeed if coupled with sustainable, long-term investment in other sectors, notably infrastructure and trade. Colombia has tried multiple initiatives to build up its rural areas and expand governmental reach. Clearly, the understanding for this need is there, but so too must be the long-term commitment and funding. The United States has a unique ability to assist Colombia and fund projects that can support Colombian farmers in their bid to find economic outlets beyond coca cultivation while also providing education in rural communities, helping ex-combatants find jobs, encouraging foreign investment—particularly in infrastructure projects—and seeking to build dialogue among a citizenry that has been divided for far too long.

For the United States to demonstrate commitment to its pledge of support for Colombia, it should accept that results cannot and will not come overnight. Rebuilding a conflict-affected country will require patience, resources, and unwavering commitment. There is no country better positioned to stand by Colombia than the United States, just as there is no country in South America whose partnership is more valuable to the United States. As President Biden recently observed, “Colombia’s security is in the

national security interest of the United States.”¹⁸ It is once again time for the United States to translate that reality into coherent, comprehensive, and committed action.



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ESSAY 7

INVEST IN OUR MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

Hemispheric and global security benefit from the Colombian military's highly skilled forces and the US-Colombia security partnership. We should build on the fundamental strengths of the US-Colombia military relationship and prioritize areas for our militaries to further enhance the relationship in the ever-changing global security environment.

CRAIG FALLER

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DURING MY FINAL TRIP TO COLOMBIA as the Commander of US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) in September 2021, I visited the Colombian Military Inclusive Rehabilitation Center. The facility was built by the Colombian and South Korean governments to commemorate the Colombian troops who sacrificed their lives for freedom on the Korean peninsula. I spoke with soldiers who bravely fought and lost limbs in battles against terrorist organizations like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), FARC dissidents, the National Liberation Army (ELN), and drug trafficking groups such as Clan del Golfo. That visit solidified one profound truth: Colombia is relentlessly committed to playing a key role in regional and international security. It was true when our nations estab-

lished diplomatic relations in 1822, it was true during the Korean War in 1950, and it's as true as ever today.

In 2022, democracy is under assault from multiple threats around the world, including Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) growing global malign ambitions, Iran, North Korea, terrorism, and the increased sophistication of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs).

Like-minded democratic nations must build ironclad security alliances based on trust to counter these threats and protect our populations. In Latin America and the Caribbean—our shared neighborhood—Colombia is one of the United States' most trusted partners. The Colombian military works to enhance professionalism and war-fighting ability through a relentless focus on human rights and the ethical use of force in everything from education to training, exercises, and multinational operations. Hemispheric and global security benefit from the Colombian military's highly skilled forces and the US-Colombia military security partnership. Now is the moment for our two militaries to further enhance the relationship in the ever-changing global security environment.

When I reflect on how far Colombia has come in recent decades, I'm impressed by our partner's progress. As recently as the 1980s and 1990s, Colombia was mired in narcotics wars, Pablo Escobar was a household name, and the central government teetered on collapse. Today, while threats from narco-terrorists remain, Colombia is a key regional leader and security exporter. In its ongoing fight, the military has sustained an exceptionally high tempo while maintaining the trust and confidence of the population. For the past seven years, Colombia has led Operation Orion, a multinational, multi-domain (land, air, sea, and cyber) counter-narcotics operation. In 2021, Orion disrupted more than 200 metric tons of cocaine and captured more than 100 TCO aircraft and vessels, keeping drugs off Colombian and US streets and thus, saving lives. The Colombian Air Force annually participates in the US Air Force Red Flag exercise, and the US Air Force participates in the annual Colombian regional "Relampago-Lightening" and "Angel of the Andes" exercises.

Colombia supports its neighbors by responding to natural disasters caused by climate change. Following the 7.2-magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti in 2021, Colombia sent two Air Force planes transporting an

urban search and rescue team and 12 tons of humanitarian aid, including food, cleaning supplies, and blankets. At the 2021 UN Climate Change COP26 summit in Glasgow, Colombia joined Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Panama to expand their maritime protected areas, partly to deter illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing from PRC-flagged vessels.

Colombia's transformation into a regional leader did not happen overnight. It has taken decades of sustained training, partnership, and collaboration. The US-Colombia Action Plan (USCAP), an outgrowth of the highly successful Plan Colombia launched in 2000, continues today. Through USCAP, Colombian soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen, with modest assistance from the United States, train partners across Central and South America for security missions. Colombia has fully operationalized Spanish-language entry-level and advanced helicopter training schools for forces around the world. The US army once ran this training at Fort Rucker, Alabama, but Colombia has expanded it and made it world class.

I have toured Colombian facilities where helicopter pilot and maintenance training are conducted to NATO standards, emphasizing professionalism and self-sustainment at a fraction of what it would cost elsewhere. Colombia also inaugurated a NATO-certified demining course and deploys United Nations peacekeeping forces worldwide, demonstrating its commitment to global stability and humanitarian causes. As a result, the administration of President Joseph R. Biden has nominated Colombia to become a full Major non-NATO Ally.¹

The key to the Colombian military's success boils down to one word: professionalism. Global military professionals recognize the Colombian Armed Forces (CAF) for their fighting ability and ethical use of force. The CAF understands the importance of professionalism in their ranks, from the commander-in-chief (the president) to the newest conscript. The Colombian military works hard every day to educate and train to the highest human rights standards, reinforcing professional behavior by awarding and promoting officers who uphold these standards and taking legal action against officers who violate them.

Colombian military officials understand that strong, professional, corruption-free institutions are the best bulwark against insecurity and instability. Among professional militaries, trust is the foundation to build the ethically-based military skills necessary to deter and defeat threats. Nations

must invest sufficient resources in people, processes, and programs to build trusted security relationships.

I have met with all levels of Colombian officers and enlisted soldiers and found no nation more committed to education and professional development for its military personnel than the CAF. It often commits its funds to send commissioned and non-commissioned officers to attend US military academies, participates in SOUTHCOM's Women, Peace, and Security Program, and engages in numerous regional military exercises. But today's progress does not guarantee future success. Improvements in all militaries and alliances require a sustained commitment in resources and time, underpinned by relentless self-assessment and investments in education, training, doctrine, exercises, and equipment to keep pace with evolving and growing threats. Military success also requires institutional professionalism with trusted processes that produce corruption-free procurement, budgets matched to strategic needs, and a balance between modernization and sustainment (keeping existing equipment ready to use).

To continue enhancing and accelerating the US-Colombia military relationship, we should:

- **Reinvigorate the existing regional security architecture, put real substance into what it means to be a Major non-NATO ally, and develop new multinational security mechanisms.** Considering global trends, are existing bilateral and multilateral exercises, programs, and security mechanisms enough? For example, NATO partner-militaries annually participate in bilateral exercises and military-to-military programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. Why not combine efforts within a more robust policy framework? In 2021, SOUTHCOM sponsored a NATO conference to explore first steps in enhancing Western Hemisphere security. Policy makers should seize on these first steps and expand historical NATO global partnerships and other partnerships, such as the Inter-American Defense Board of the Organization of American States, to build professional armed forces and enhance mutual defense.
- **Overhaul the US system of foreign military sales, financing, and US Department of Defense (DoD) security cooperation.** Cur-

rent systems and processes are inadequate for the tempo of conflict and competition the world now faces. They are under-resourced and often held hostage to annual budgeting exercises. When I was SOUTHCOM commander, I would often say, “why are we blocking our own field goals with respect to many of our security assistance programs?” To win in conflict and competition, we must be consistent, agile, and have an adequate level of investment. We must be on the field globally to compete and win; presence matters. We should not hold partner-nation militaries to higher standards than our own. The US Department of State (DOS) must lead for foreign assistance, but DoD security cooperation programs have a role alongside DOS. Programs should include sufficient flexibility to respond to the rapidly changing security environment. Develop multi-year security cooperation programs with a designated floor that is not subject to annual reprogramming or the debilitating impacts of continuing resolutions. Congress plays a critical role and should develop oversight mechanisms that are not subject to yearly change and beholden to narrow political interests.

- **Increase investment in Colombian and Latin America and Caribbean security cooperation programs.** Consistent, long-term efforts are necessary. A strong and professional Colombian military is not enough. Given geographic proximity to the United States, security in Latin American and the Caribbean is intertwined with US national security, yet we severely underinvest in security assistance in our hemisphere. The Colombian military is in urgent need of modernization to upgrade its equipment. The best way to ensure stability in a rough neighborhood and push back on the malign influence of Russia, the PRC, and Iran is to focus on building our friends’ capacity to deal with conflict and crises.
- **Significantly improve intelligence sharing; call it “Compar-tir Americas.”** In the world of professional militaries, intelligence drives everything. Intel-sharing is built on trusted people, institutions, processes, and systems. While the US and Colombian militaries have made significant strides in sharing intel, we should ensure

that our intelligence sharing equals that of our closest NATO partners. Anyone who claims what we do now is adequate has not operated in the byzantine, arcane, slow, technologically-backward world of bilateral and multilateral intel-sharing. The crisis in Ukraine illustrates the importance of vigorous intelligence sharing.

- **Keep pace with emerging threats.** Develop a US approach for foreign cyber assistance that brings together US and partner nation interagency teams and is strong and flexible enough to respond to emergent needs. Only recently has cybersecurity assistance been recognized as a valid area for security cooperation. The Colombian military and SOUTHCOM are working together to combat malign cyber activity and disinformation campaigns from Russia and Venezuela. Such cybersecurity collaboration is a good start, but the additional authority and capacity to conduct bilateral training, subject matter expert exchanges, information sharing, and operations, all at the speed of relevance, is needed.

- **Double the US global international military education and training and exercise budget and authorize human rights training billets at all US combatant commands.** Now is the time to increase investments in professionalism as the bedrock of our global partnerships.

These ideas would benefit Colombia, the United States, and the world. We must put tangible action behind our stated goal of strengthening partnerships. We must learn lessons from Putin’s war in Ukraine and apply those lessons globally, including in our Western Hemisphere neighborhood, putting programs and processes in place that contribute to regional stability and security.

During my final trip to Colombia, I visited the Colombian Army Military Academy. The academy’s front entrance had three words: “Patria, Honor, y Lealtad”—homeland, honor, and loyalty. For 200 years, Colombia and the United States have developed professional militaries and institutions that are now the bulwark of our stable democracies. Devoting adequate and consistent investment in time, people, and resources to deter and defeat today’s threats will ensure our democracies endure for another two centu-

ries. Democracy must deliver to all people. Professional militaries are a fundamental part of this.



Endnotes

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ESSAY 8

ENSURE A WHOLE-OF- GOVERNMENT APPROACH

Despite the great potential to achieve long-term peace throughout Colombia, without a well-funded whole-of-government approach focused on social recovery of territory, these efforts run the risk of not living up to their promise and that of the 2016 peace accord.

REBECCA BILL CHAVEZ

President and CEO, Inter-American Dialogue; Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western Hemisphere Affairs, US Department of Defense

I WAS FIRST EXPOSED TO the whole-of-government approach to securing long-term peace in Colombia, formerly called “consolidation” or “integrated action”—and more recently known as “stabilization”—during a 2008 trip to Cartagena with Admiral James Stavridis, former commander of US Southern Command. It has continued to shape my thinking, including during my time as deputy assistant secretary of defense for Western Hemisphere Affairs (2013-2016).

The logic behind stabilization is simple and makes sense, but the approach requires tremendous resources and political will. Although the armed forces are critical to the physical recovery of territory, they cannot guarantee lasting peace. After the military secures an area, civilian agencies

must follow through with basic services like building and staffing schools and hospitals, improving infrastructure, stimulating economic development, and enhancing the rule of law. As Colombia seeks to implement the 2016 peace accord, the complete execution of this strategy is more urgent than ever.

As a former US Department of Defense official, I can say with certainty that no matter how capable the armed forces are, Colombia will not be able to leave the cycle of violence behind without the robust presence of non-military agencies in remote areas. Although the Colombian government has tasked soldiers with leading development efforts in much of the country, militarization is not the solution. It will take the sustained action of civilian ministries to prove that renewed state presence in rural areas is beneficial and permanent.

Decades of state absence in rural regions has become one of Colombia's most significant modern-day challenges. Civil rule quickly eroded in the 1960s after guerrilla groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) took up arms against the Colombian government and established operations in remote areas. Rural Colombian residents were forced to abandon their land, while those who remained faced widespread violence and injustice. Over the next decades, state absence in many rural areas created growing space for the illegal drug trade, exacerbated widespread violence, and led to a greater consolidation of guerrilla powers.

In the post-COVID-19 era, addressing historical governance, security, and state presence deficiencies is critical. Despite an initial reduction in violence after signing the peace accord, new forms of conflict-related violence have increased at alarming rates, particularly against social leaders and human rights defenders.¹ Now is the time for Colombia to double down on the whole-of-government approach and for the United States to commit to supporting its partner. While observers point to Plan Colombia as a success, we risk jeopardizing sustainable peace and stability in the region without first acknowledging its gaps and our plans to fill them. We've seen the results of successful security cooperation, and there is no reason for stabilization to fail if it is prioritized and properly funded.

A brief history of stabilization

Colombia and the United States have long recognized the critical role of non-military actors in long-term peace-building. In fact, the United States has supported Colombia's whole-of-government approach since its inception, following the creation of the Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral (CCAI) in 2007. The first CCAI conference I attended during my 2008 visit to Cartagena left me full of hope for Colombia's future. Both the Colombian and US participants demonstrated a commitment to an interagency strategy. Given that President Juan Manuel Santos, then-Defense Minister, was one of CCAI's leading advocates, I wasn't too worried about the fact that the military outnumbered the civilian attendees. I was optimistic about increased civilian participation in the effort due to the active participation of President Álvaro Uribe and non-military agencies, including the Ministry of Agriculture and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which suggested that stabilization would truly be an interagency endeavor, living up to the "integrated action" label.

CCAI's first foray into social recovery and integrated action was in the Macarena region, a coca production hotbed under FARC control that I visited during my first months as deputy assistant secretary of defense. I could see why Macarena had become a recipient of US assistance. The Colombian Army Commander, who coordinated and led the visit, had reason to be proud. I found it remarkable that the armed forces had secured the area after it had been a FARC stronghold for decades without any real state presence. Unfortunately, a robust civilian surge did not follow the armed forces into the Macarena region. Soldiers, not civilians, were leading development projects and interacting with the local population. Today, fifteen years after the creation of CCAI and despite the government's best intentions, work remains in pursuit of this critical mission.

In the years since the creation of CCAI, the Colombian government introduced the Territorially Focused Development Program (PDETs in Spanish) to implement the Comprehensive Rural Reform chapter under the 2016 peace accord. PDETs cover 36 percent of Colombia's territory and stand at the center of the government's strategy for the comprehensive development of the 170 municipalities most affected by conflict, the absence or weakness of the state, and illicit activities.

The US government provides significant support to this approach, particularly through USAID. The agency's Country Development Strategy for Colombia prioritizes PDET municipalities, estimating that approximately 75 percent of aid will be directed to these areas through 2025.² The PDETs have also attracted investment from US philanthropists and donors such as Howard Buffett. Still, they remain largely under-resourced. Further US-Colombia cooperation to enhance transportation, healthcare, education, and economic development in PDETs will be critical for their success and fulfilling the peace accords' promise of ending Colombia's cycles of violence.

The way forward

Social recovery is possible. Although program names have changed, Colombia's leadership continues to advocate for stabilization as the main strategy to mitigate violence, strengthen state presence, and consolidate peace.

This whole-of-government approach should continue to inform US assistance to Colombia, which has increased 152 percent since 2016.³ More specifically, aid geared toward governance has more than doubled to \$410 million since the signing of the peace accord, with a greater focus on civil society, economic development, and peacebuilding than in-country narcotics control and traditional security cooperation.⁴ However, the multidimensional Venezuelan refugee crisis, coupled with the lingering socioeconomic effects caused by COVID-19, has left Colombia in a precarious fiscal situation. The country has been generous in accepting nearly two million Venezuelan migrants, granting them access to employment, education, healthcare, and other social services, and offering a ten-year temporary protected status. Recommitting to support Colombia as it absorbs this population is more critical than ever.

Future US stabilization resources should build on more than two decades of strategic US-Colombia partnership for social recovery. The administration of President Barack Obama supported CCAI through its Colombia Strategic Development Initiative, and the Biden administration remains a key partner of the Colombian government and could do even more in implementing the PDETs. For instance, PDET zones in Catatumbo that specialize in producing cacao, papaya, and palm oil, directly benefiting more than

20,000 agricultural families, would benefit from greater attention from the international donor community.⁵

To inform future assistance, subsequent US administrations should look at the 2018 Framework for US Stabilization developed by the US Department of State, US Department of Defense, and USAID.⁶ The United States could work with Colombia to scale up existing interagency initiatives such as the *Misión para la Transformación del Campo* (Mission to Transform the Countryside),⁷ designed to narrow gaps between urban and rural Colombia and accelerate rural development—a prerequisite to achieving lasting peace.

Beyond agriculture, investments in health and education coverage, rural entrepreneurship programs, primary and tertiary roads, eco-tourism, and other development programs should be prioritized. These programs will require close interagency coordination, particularly among Colombia's agriculture, education, transportation, commerce, health, and defense ministries.

In addition, the United States could offer a wealth of experience and technical knowledge to non-military government agencies in Colombia. For example, the US Department of Agriculture could provide expertise in crop control, yield prediction, and pest control to Colombia's Ministry of Agriculture to better use Colombia's fertile lands, particularly in PDET regions. Such agency-to-agency knowledge-sharing could be an extra incentive for other Colombian agencies and civil society groups to establish a presence in rural regions.

The US and Colombian private sectors can also play a critical role in supporting rural regions. Companies can provide technical expertise to farmers looking to sell their products in urban areas by teaching them best practices to transport their crops or how to better market their products to bigger stores. The existing US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement could also be leveraged to create a market in the United States for agricultural products produced in conflict-affected territories.

Despite the great potential that PDETs and similar stabilization programs have to achieve long-term peace in Colombia, without a greater commitment from a diverse group of government agencies coupled with US and international support, these efforts run the risk of not living up to their promise and that of the 2016 peace accord. Now is the time to ensure the

sustainability of interagency coordination models by opening the discussion on their progress, benefits, and the needed adjustments to consolidate state presence and governance.



Endnotes

- 1 *World Report 2022*, Human Rights Watch, March 08, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/colombia#>.
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- 7 La Misión para la Transformación del Campo (Mission to Transform the Countryside or MTC) is a national government initiative with a technical secretariat from the National Planning Department and the support of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Social Prosperity. Its objective is to elaborate a robust and broad portfolio of instruments and public policies to develop the Colombian countryside over the next twenty years. The MTC differs from other government initiatives insofar as it contemplates a comprehensive and long-term vision in which productivity and competitiveness go hand-in-hand with the well-being of rural residents.

ESSAY **9**

THINK BROADER TO ADVANCE SECURITY

Advancing the US-Colombia security relationship through innovation is in the best interest of both countries.

A stronger Colombia can spur democracy and freedom in the Western Hemisphere, while a weaker Colombia opens the door to regional violence and instability. Colombia cannot fall or fail.

JUAN CARLOS PINZÓN

Ambassador of Colombia to the United States; Former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia

THE BICENTENNIAL OF US-COLOMBIA diplomatic relations is an opportunity to reflect on an historic and enduring relationship. Our shared history is rooted in common values, a commitment to defending democracy, protecting human rights, and promoting shared prosperity. While the relationship continues to flourish on many fronts—from trade and investment to the deployment of advanced technologies and a green economy—the security partnership is especially vital for our nations’ future.

The security partnership has personally impacted me. It brought me to the United States as a child in the 1980s, when my father participated in a military education program. Years later, while visiting NATO headquarters, I met a US colonel who I would later learn advised the Colombian military and was a friend to my father. His support and care for Colombia was

a real push for Colombia's military agenda for years to come. The positive influence the security partnership has had on my own life reflects how it has charted a brighter future for both our countries. Personal connections and friendships matter.

From a special relationship to strategic allies

Simón Bolívar was inspired by the ideals that led to the creation of the United States; a free republic as envisioned by the United States' founding fathers was the same vision patriots had for Colombia. Both countries also share a strong commitment to multilateral and international institutions, participating in the creation of the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the Organization of American States. In 1951, Colombia became the only Latin American country that responded to the UN call for troops in the Korean peninsula. Our sacrifice of close to eight hundred Colombian soldiers resulted in a stronger military-to-military relationship with the United States.

The relationship grew even closer during the Cold War, with the United States providing support to enhance Colombian military equipment, education, doctrine, and training programs on counterinsurgency. The formation of the *lanceros* school, modeled on the US Army Ranger School, was a highlight. Colombia participated in UN peacekeeping operations in the Suez Canal in 1956 and the Sinai Peninsula, starting in 1981. During the 1970s through the 1990s, the security relationship focused more on counter-narcotics and law and order activities. By the 1990s, Marxist guerrillas and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia funded their activities through the drug business, which was rapidly growing and expanding. By the end of the twentieth century, violence was at its peak, and Colombia was close to failure.

In response to these threats, Plan Colombia, which was initially conceived by Colombia, became a US foreign policy initiative in the late 1990s to provide invaluable support to Colombia. It acknowledged that, as the largest consumer of cocaine globally, the United States shared responsibility in addressing the illicit drug trade. Conceived by Colombian President Andrés Pastrana and crafted by President William J. Clinton, binational and bipartisan support for Plan Colombia has endured for more than twenty years; it is arguably the most successful US bipartisan foreign policy in decades. As

evidence, consider that Colombia reduced all violence indicators, cocaine production decreased until 2013, the Colombian economy grew faster than those of other Latin American countries, poverty was cut by more than half in less than twenty years, and the country has become the largest security exporter in the region.

With support from Colombian taxpayers, US-enhanced Colombian military and police capabilities—including mobility, intelligence, special operations, and professional standards—have strengthened the Colombian Armed Forces, which allowed it to wage a campaign of successful and sustained blows against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country’s largest guerilla group. President Álvaro Uribe’s leadership on security and policy also contributed decisively to the campaign’s success. The security policy of the first five years of the Santos administration further weakened the FARC. These efforts allowed the Colombian government to negotiate peace from a position of strength.

Where are we today?

Colombia faces a complex scenario and four main challenges that could imply a downturn after years of advancement. First, the 2016 Havana Agreements have not brought peace as envisioned. While they have resulted in significant FARC demobilization and disarmament and provided a development program for marginal areas, the agreements also led to renewed unrest and political division. They have implied impunity for war crimes, higher benefits for perpetrators than victims, the weakening of a successful security strategy, and a national consensus for security.

The worst development has been the increase of cocaine and illicit mining enterprises, which illegal groups have diligently exploited. This has created renewed risks for stability and territorial control, contributing to human rights violations, crimes against social leaders, political corruption, and the destruction of the tropical forests and contamination of rivers. The strengthening of the National Liberation Army (ELN), FARC surrogates and dissidents, and other criminal actors have kept real peace out of reach for Colombians.

Second, as in all countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has had steep economic and social consequences in addition to the loss of lives. Despite the Colombian government’s well-regarded performance in enhancing the

healthcare system's response capabilities and an accelerated vaccination process, dramatic unemployment exacerbated historical inequality and poverty, contributing to societal instability, potentially threatening security.

Third, the Nicolás Maduro regime in Venezuela and Daniel Ortega's regime in Nicaragua are sources of human rights violations, threats to freedom and democracy, and instability for Latin America and the Caribbean. In Venezuela, poor economic management has created the greatest ever refugee and migration crisis in the Western Hemisphere, with nearly two million Venezuelans already living in Colombia.

In addition, Venezuela is a safe haven for terrorist groups that plan and operate against Colombia and US interests, including a June 2021 attempt against President Iván Duque's life. This safe heaven provides a favorable business environment for criminals, allowing them to smuggle drugs to the United States and other countries, and permitting the illegal mining of gold and other minerals in Colombia and Venezuela. Venezuela and Nicaragua have become footholds of aggressive extra-regional powers like Russia, allowing for foreign military presence and intelligence capabilities in their territories.

Fourth, global issues have worsened or emerged in recent years, including cyber threats, disinformation, climate change, pandemics, and war. These are poised to create a more unstable environment for democratic institutions and societies. We must not underestimate the risk of intervention and biased results in democratic elections. Undermining a country's elections is, at its core, a grievous assault on the sovereignty of any nation and one with dire security consequences.

What comes next?

A stronger Colombia can spur democracy and freedom in the Western Hemisphere, while a weaker one opens the door to regional security threats and instability. To ensure Colombia does not fall or fail, and remains an indispensable security partner to the United States, the US-Colombia partnership should focus on the following areas of cooperation:

- **Reconciliation and justice.** Consolidating peace and stability in Colombia requires national reconciliation and providing development and market opportunities for the country's most isolated areas.

This would entail a long-term plan that includes rebalancing the current peace agreement framework with a higher focus on victims. Modernization of our justice system is also necessary and will contribute to enhanced state credibility in a country with high levels of impunity.

- **Economic and social prosperity.** The bilateral agenda should focus on reducing inequality, promoting employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, and defeating extreme poverty. Economic and social prosperity is the best tool to undermine populism, authoritarianism, and the illicit economies that threaten our shared security.

- **Education, development, and technology.** Although not traditionally associated with enhancing the security paradigm, new and expanded efforts focused on education, export promotion, energy development, and digital infrastructure would contribute to countering today's security challenges. A joint program to dramatically increase student exchanges and higher-quality education for Colombians, especially in the digital and programming fields and English-language instruction, would contribute to a more skilled and competitive labor force. Expanding and enabling faster access of Colombian agro-industrial products to US markets is crucial to unleash Colombia's potential as a major food and input producer. Mining development as part of the supply chain for new clean energy technologies and semiconductors in the digital realm presents opportunities for both countries. Investment in infrastructure and 5G and 6G connectivity is essential for Colombia's competitiveness and attracting industries seeking nearshoring options.

- **A “cancel culture” for illegal drugs.** An unavoidable subject is the need to develop a strategy to end the international illegal drug trade permanently. Colombia must continue to fight criminal organizations that profit from cocaine. Given its shared responsibility, the United States should continue to support Colombia with proven efforts against narco-trafficking. We are hopeful our US partners will join us in exploring new techniques and data analytics to make

progress on eradication, alternative crop cultivation, and countering money laundering. Beyond that, the demand for cocaine should be addressed with different approaches, including new technologies to undermine cultivation. Consumption is the real problem and treating it as a public health concern is insufficient. We need to create a “cancel culture” around the use of cocaine based on the destruction it causes to lives and the environment while funding crime and rogue regimes.

- **Even stronger security ties.** The potential to expand the US-Colombia security partnership is exponential. The years of strong military-to-military operational coordination and the framework for designation as a Major non-NATO Ally, as President Joseph R. Biden recently stated his intent to do,¹ present an opportunity to deepen ties in doctrine, interoperability, and training. Cooperation in intelligence, cyber technology, and equipment for conventional military operations can transform Colombia’s traditional counterinsurgency capabilities into a broader spectrum of military operations. Multiple missions could be developed for humanitarian assistance, natural disaster relief, and security and stabilization operations. Finally, the opportunity for advanced technology sharing, pre-positioned stockpiles, lend and lease programs, and preferred status for excess defense articles from the United States should boost Colombia’s contribution to regional and global peace and stability.

In sum, the US-Colombia relationship has a bright future. One of its greatest strengths is its people-to-people connections. Colombian Americans are making contributions everywhere: academia, politics, business, military, science, sports and communities across the United States. In a bilateral meeting on March 10, 2022, with President Duque, President Biden reinforced the strength of our special relationship, stating: “Colombia is the lynchpin, in my view, to the whole hemisphere—north and south... The US-Colombia relationship is the foundation ... of regional security and prosperity, and it’s only going to grow more important in the years ahead.” During that meeting, President Duque, remarking on President Biden’s

stated intent to designate Colombia a strategic Major non-NATO Ally, said that “we are taking the bilateral relationship to the highest peak ever.”²



Endnotes

- 1 Statement by Joseph R. Biden of the United States and President Iván Duque Márquez of the Republic of Colombia, US-Colombia Bicentennial Partnership, White House, March 10, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/10/joint-statement-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-of-the-united-states-and-president-ivan-duque-marquez-of-the-republic-of-colombia-u-s-colombia-bicentennial-partnership/>.
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ESSAY 10

ADAPT INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES FOR NEW THREATS

Colombia continues to grapple with internal security challenges years after the peace agreement. The United States should continue to work with Colombia to address evolving security threats.

KIRON K. SKINNER

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DAVID R. SHEDD

Former Acting Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; Former Visiting Fellow, Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy, The Heritage Foundation

COLOMBIA'S SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY are at a crossroads. Nearly six years after the Colombian government under then-President Juan Manuel Santos signed a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country's armed conflict remains a reality. Violence is escalating in critical rural and border areas, while urban

centers report a deterioration in citizen security. The gains of two decades of sustained US security and intelligence cooperation are increasingly at risk.

A model for bilateral cooperation

Colombia offers a template for a lasting mutually-beneficial security and intelligence partnership with the United States. Through Plan Colombia, the United States provided Colombia, nearing the brink of failed state status in 2000, with security, intelligence, and economic development aid to battle the FARC and other criminal groups. The multi-billion-dollar US program supported Colombia's efforts to counter narcotics trafficking, train and equip law enforcement and the military, and promote economic growth in areas lacking state presence.¹ This supported an unprecedented whole-of-government approach by then-President Álvaro Uribe, including the "Democratic Security" policy and the multi-year counterterrorism "Patriot Plan."

Two elements were unique to Plan Colombia. The first was well-coordinated and equipped joint operations between the different branches of Colombia's armed forces (including shifts in military doctrine). The second was its focus on revamping intelligence capabilities. A combination of US equipment and training assistance gave Colombia's military renewed confidence.

Colombian security forces—the National Police and military—developed human intelligence, signals intercept capabilities, imagery exploitation, and rapid battlefield damage assessment collection. Superior aerial capabilities allowed security forces to develop operationally actionable intelligence. Military intelligence personnel expanded and intelligence was integrated into military operations.

The United States also worked with civilian intelligence—the Colombian National Intelligence Directorate (DNI)—to incorporate sound intelligence practices with improved oversight of the Colombian National Police and military. This contributed to cutting homicides in Colombia by half and a 90 percent decline in kidnappings and terrorist attacks.²

However, while military intelligence improved, not enough attention was given to enhancing civilian and military intelligence coordination. Future cooperation to strengthen Colombia's security forces should address this

shortcoming, while also focusing on addressing corruption, increasing transparency, and preventing excessive use of force and human rights violations.

A crisis unraveling

Colombia continues to grapple with security and defense challenges, despite the 2016 peace agreement with the FARC. In 2021, the country reached the highest homicide rate since 2014. From January to March 2022, there were twenty-three recorded massacres with sixty-one victims, adding to ninety-six massacres with 338 victims in 2021.³ There was also a four-year increase in victims of improvised explosive devices between 2017 and 2021.⁴

With the FARC's disarmament, conflict centers mainly around the National Liberation Army (ELN), FARC dissidents have sprung up. These include Segunda Marquetalia and FARC-EP, and *bandas criminales* (BACRIM), including the Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces (also known as the "Gulf Clan") and the "Border Commands," previously known as "the Mafia." By 2021, there were reported to be at least 36 FARC dissident groups with more than 5,200 combatants.⁵

The situation along the porous 1,378-mile Colombia-Venezuela border is particularly tense and often overlooked. Colombia's Arauca State and Venezuela's Apure State have become a war zone between FARC dissidents, the ELN, and the Venezuelan military. Violence escalated in 2022 with at least eighty-seven homicides in Arauca by March.⁶

Competition to control the lucrative illicit activities market—primarily narco-trafficking, but also illegal mining, counterfeiting, and contraband smuggling—remains the main driver of violence.⁷ While the government took important steps to reduce coca cultivation and cocaine production in 2021, a 2015 ban on aerial fumigation with glyphosate maintained by Colombia's Supreme Court has contributed to all-time highs in coca crops and total cocaine production.⁸

Colombia's Unified Risk Monitoring Mechanism, a conflict-monitoring instrument of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP),⁹ identified the twelve areas most afflicted by violence.¹⁰ These regions correlate almost perfectly with areas that report the highest rates of illicit coca production or illicit mining, including the border areas with Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela, which provide trafficking routes.¹¹ There is also a close correlation between

the assassination of social leaders and FARC ex-combatants and regions with high narco-trafficking.¹² This demonstrates the state's failure to recover FARC-era strongholds, with military and institutional presence seen only in sporadic raids.¹³ Citizen insecurity in major urban centers is also rising, including acts of terrorism.¹⁴

Opportunities ahead

The tactics used in today's conflicts are sophisticated. Intelligence is the first line of defense. Unfortunately, early investments in military intelligence and much-needed civilian intelligence reforms did not focus adequately on creating a Colombian intelligence community. Intelligence cooperation must now focus on building this community, fostering sharing intelligence, and countering the threats posed by criminal actors operating with smaller cells, sophisticated courier networks, and a growing dark web footprint.¹⁵

The DNI, Colombia's primary civilian intelligence organization, must be strengthened to coordinate more closely with military intelligence. While the DNI produces analysis and is responsible for counterintelligence activities, it operates in silos from the intelligence organizations of the National Police, Air Force, Army, and Navy. Fusing intelligence—taking disparate types of intelligence collection and combining them to provide more operationally relevant information—should be a priority moving forward. Ensuring national-level civilian combat support agencies supplement the military is also crucial.

How could the United States support these improvements?

First, the United States should support the creation of joint committees and civilian combat support units to improve US-Colombia intelligence collaboration. These efforts should build on successful experiences and incorporate technical support from the United States and other allies across the world like Israel and the United Kingdom.

Second, the United States should work with Colombia to update the strategy and equipment used to target border violence, conflict hotspots, and the financial operations of criminal actors. Colombia could better staff the DNI and commit to evaluating how bureaucratic and administrative hurdles limit efficacy and contribute to corruption. With US support, Colombia should also enhance efforts to improve human rights and professional standards.

Third, the whole-of-government approach that recovered territorial control in certain areas during Plan Colombia should be restored. The Colombian government should focus on setting measurable objectives to reduce the size of the BACRIM and remaining FARC disenfranchised personnel, while reevaluating the more traditional warfare approach it adopted following the peace agreement. An incoming government should prioritize a strategy that synchronizes security, intelligence, economic development, and human rights objectives in high-risk territories.

Finally, the United States and Colombia should prioritize bilateral strategic security dialogues that build on the framework provided by the US-Colombia High Level Dialogue. Future dialogues should incorporate interagency participation and focus on combating armed non-state actors, strengthening US support for Colombia's whole-of-government approach to the conflict.

Both the United States and Colombia must recognize the gravity of large swathes of Colombian territory in the hands of new criminal actors. In March 2022, President Joseph R. Biden announced his intention to designate Colombia as a Major non-NATO ally, signaling the importance of the bilateral security partnership and granting Colombia preferential access to trade and security cooperation.¹⁶ Colombia stands as the only country in Latin America designated as a NATO Global Partner.

Colombia: A vital partner in the hemisphere

The United States and the Western Hemisphere benefit from a strong partnership with Colombia. Its security gains in the last two decades have positioned it as Latin America's third-largest economy and an indispensable security partner to the US, training police and prosecutors in Latin America and other regions. With a new yet focused strategy in place, Colombia is well-positioned to reverse the tide of transnational organized crime afflicting our hemisphere.

US intelligence and security cooperation with Colombia bore positive results for both countries over the past two decades. It would be unwise to overlook a partner with a demonstrated record of results and a willingness to learn from past mistakes. With current and looming internal and external threats to Colombia's democratic future, too much is at stake to disregard

the lessons learned of a fruitful partnership and apply those lessons to this vital relationship in the Americas.



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VIDEO

MARÍA VICTORIA LLORENTE

*Executive Director, Fundación Ideas para la Paz; Member,
US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council*

Use your phone to scan the QR code and access the video.



*This chapter is dedicated to the life and work of **Secretary Madeleine Albright**, a groundbreaking advocate for strengthening democracy worldwide and a longtime champion of the Colombia-US partnership.*



“One of the world’s greatest novels...is entitled “One Hundred Years of Solitude.” Today, as the new century begins, Colombia does not stand alone. The United States and the international community recognize the courageous struggle of the Colombian people and we are determined to help you overcome the evils brought about by the drug trade. I vow...to seek one hundred years of peace, democracy and rising prosperity for both our nations.”

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT

*Former Secretary of State, US Department of State
Former International Advisory Board member, Atlantic Council*

*Statement from a joint press release with
Colombian President Andrés Pastrana in January, 2000.*



STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW

ESSAYS 11–15

11

Recognize the High Stakes *page 90*

MICHAEL T. MCCAUL

Representative (R-TX, 10th District); Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee, US House of Representatives

12

Invest in Diversity and Inclusion *page 94*

GREGORY W. MEEKS

Representative (D-NY, 5th District); Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee, US House of Representatives; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council

13

Commit to Democracy *page 100*

PAULA J. DOBRIANSKY

Former US Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs; Senior Fellow, Harvard University Belfer Center; Vice Chair, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, Atlantic Council

14

Learn from a Democratic Culture *page 107*

KEVIN WHITAKER

Former US Ambassador to Colombia; Non-resident Senior Fellow, Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council

15

Forge a Strong Democracy *page 113*

ALEJANDRO EDER

Former Presidential High Counselor for Reintegration; Former Government Negotiator in Peace Process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Republic of Colombia

ESSAY **11**

RECOGNIZE THE HIGH STAKES

The achievements of the US-Colombia relationship have laid the foundation for what must be a new era of increased, deepened collaboration to confront new and emerging threats.

MICHAEL T. MCCAUL

Representative (D-NY, 5th District); Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee, US House of Representatives; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council

AS WE MARK THE BICENTENNIAL of bilateral relations, we should be proud of the many successes. Our mutually beneficial alliance has been a force multiplier for hemispheric security, prosperity, and democratic governance. It is a testament to our shared democratic values and commitment to human rights. From my perspective as the lead Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the United States has no closer ally in Latin America than Colombia.

Over the last few decades, our countries confronted the scourge of narcotics trafficking and terrorism. As a result of Colombia's political will and sustained US commitment, Colombia transformed itself into the primary pillar of Latin America's security and stability. This success story is largely rooted in the sustained bipartisan consensus that has driven policy making from Washington and the leadership and commitment in Bogotá. It is also a testament to Colombia's stability and prosperity as a force multiplier for US national security.

When I was first elected to Congress, conversations circled around the threats to Colombia's existence. Violence and terrorism from the hemi-

sphere's longest-running conflict destabilized the region. Yet, thanks to the sacrifice of countless Colombians and staunch support from the United States, the Western Hemisphere has a strong, thriving, and prosperous democracy—and the United States has an unwavering ally. Colombia is now a hub for regional security, training, and equipping military and police personnel. Its transformation and robust democratic institutions should serve as a model for much of the region.

Progress in the security and rule of law context paved the way for the 2012 US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement that accelerated the economic relationship into the twenty-first century. These growing commercial ties have acted as a much-needed bulwark against China's corrosive and growing influence in the region. Increased market access has created higher-quality investments and jobs in both the United States and Colombia. And thanks to Colombia's growing technology sector and other entrepreneurs, it is home to Latin America's highest fintech adoption rate. Yet, while the citizen security and financial situations have improved, the country still faces considerable challenges.

As I look at the next era of the bilateral relationship, I see our ally at a critical juncture. Colombia has not been immune from the regional wave of citizen dissatisfaction with government and democracy. The slow implementation of the 2016 peace agreement has meant that marginalized and violence-ridden areas of the country remain without a proper state presence. This is compounded by a growing regional influence of malign foreign actors promoting a departure from free markets and democratic principles.

Against this backdrop, the United States must demonstrate to our allies that we are the partner of choice. This means Colombia's priorities and needs should inform foreign policy and security objectives. For starters, we should streamline our foreign development and assistance to critical areas with the greatest potential impact. The US International Development Finance Corporation can best leverage private sector capabilities and innovative development tools to boost Colombia's economic potential.

Often, our assistance is not competitive, arrives too late, or is poorly designed for the local context. We must rectify these shortcomings. Like many of its Pacific neighbors, Colombia is also confronting the challenge of Chinese fishing fleets conducting illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. These fleets threaten environmentally sensitive zones and

bully local patrol vessels and aircraft.¹ Colombia's affinity and commitment to the environment are incompatible with China's poor environmental track record. While Colombia is not a signatory to China's Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese commercial ties and investments through state-owned enterprises have grown significantly in recent years. Reversing this requires that we position ourselves as an even stronger economic partner to Colombia. Ongoing projects to nearshore parts of US supply chains closer to home provide an opportunity to do so.

Drug trafficking and organized crime remain enduring challenges for Colombia and the United States. Despite significant efforts and improvements, Colombia remains the world's biggest producer of cocaine, with most of it ending up in the United States, where overdose rates are rising steadily. Our countries cannot afford to discontinue cocaine interdiction and coca eradication programs. As a key market for Colombian narcotics, the United States has a special responsibility to address its role in the drug trade—including the demand side of the challenge. Public health officials must take innovative steps to tackle our addiction crisis.

While we must use every proven tool to address the cocaine challenge, including exploring the possibility of aerial eradication, we cannot solely rely on eradication mechanisms. Crop substitution programs and land formalization efforts will offer legal alternatives to coca cultivation, preventing vulnerable Colombians from contributing to the narcotics trade. To ensure the sustainability of these programs, we must work to provide state presence and fill security vacuums in conflict-riddled zones.

There is no question that efforts to address the lingering narcotics issue are hampered by the Nicolás Maduro regime in Venezuela. No country suffers the brunt of the Venezuela crisis more than Colombia. Trafficking routes have proliferated along the Venezuela-Colombia border, a safe haven for terrorist groups and drug traffickers. The presence and operations of these groups from Venezuela, along with the country's willing relationship with pariahs like Russia, China, and Cuba, has long amplified Maduro's ability to destabilize the region.

Close to two million Venezuelan refugees and migrants have permanently resettled in Colombia and millions more throughout the hemisphere. During my last trip to Colombia, I was awestruck by the Colombian government's generous efforts to support these vulnerable populations.

While I am proud the United States remains the largest donor for displaced Venezuelans, we should continue encouraging our international partners to fully fund their pledges and increase their contributions. With the growing migrant crisis in the region, Colombia's efforts—and those of regional partners like Costa Rica, Mexico, and Panama—to absorb displaced Venezuelans are helping to prevent migration to the United States and the spread of instability across the region.

With Venezuela's dire security and humanitarian crisis, restoring the country's democracy should remain a key priority for our two countries. The Maduro regime's destructive ideology has permeated the Americas, empowering and legitimizing authoritarians and populists. As long as criminal organizations and terrorist groups remain active in Venezuela, instability will continue plaguing the Western Hemisphere. Colombia, the United States, and like-minded partners must remain resolute on this matter.

Colombia's half-century-long conflict has left eight million Colombians displaced within its borders, including women and children. Their reintegration is an essential part of responsibly implementing the peace agreement. Women's empowerment must also extend to the national security space. Understanding the unique value and contribution of women and promoting women's empowerment and participation in national security must influence our engagement moving forward.

As we mark this bicentennial, we are reminded of the high stakes in Colombia and the region. Our countries must evolve the bilateral relationship to address remaining challenges and seize future opportunities. Colombia is a model and critical player in the region; it is a democratic leader, regional security trainer, and economic power. The like-mindedness and a shared sense of purpose between our countries will continue advancing the bilateral relationship for many years to come.



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ESSAY 12

INVEST IN DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Without the participation of Afro-Colombians, Indigenous communities, and women, it is unlikely we will achieve lasting peace and stability in Colombia and meet our global climate goals. Those in power—including Congress—must make the systemic change needed for these groups to be part of the solution.

GREGORY W. MEEKS

Representative (D-NY, 5th District); Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee, US House of Representatives; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council

THE YEAR 2022 MARKS A REMARKABLE two hundred years of US-Colombia diplomatic relations. Through heartrending struggles and historic advances, Colombia remains one of our top strategic partners in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

I have worked for more than twenty years to shape US policy to deepen our relationship with Colombia and LAC, taking on tough issues like violence, drug trafficking, human rights, and the rule of law while championing trade and peaceful solutions to economic stagnation, persistent inequality, and a lack of access to opportunities. Colombia has overcome tremendous obstacles, emerging from several domestic crises to become a country that now provides refuge to nearly two million Venezuelans fleeing declining economic conditions and political instability. Colombia holds a special place in my policy agenda—so too have the Colombian people and the country's

Caribbean and Pacific communities. In my role on the bipartisan, bicameral Atlantic Council US–Colombia Task Force, I will continue to put forward policy that supports the growth and prosperity of Colombians and LAC.

Despite notable progress in the past two decades, I am concerned about Colombia’s remaining challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare deep economic, educational, and health disparities in Colombia, as it has in the United States. It has exposed the persistent inequities faced by those who have experienced centuries of racial and ethnic discrimination and structural inequalities. That is why, as Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I continue to advocate tirelessly for increased COVID-19 vaccine accessibility and US support for global recovery efforts.

Ignoring opportunities to address root causes and propose constructive solutions to unrest in our countries hinders our ability to open pathways to prosperity and improved quality of life for more people. While I am proud of what we have accomplished together, I place a premium on peace for a sustainable future. We will not achieve lasting peace or any great endeavor without the participation of Black and Indigenous communities and women in Colombia and the Western Hemisphere.

Despite making up nearly 33 percent of the population in LAC, people of African descent too often remain “invisible” and underrepresented in places of decision making, influence, and mainstream leadership. Although people of African descent and Indigenous peoples in Colombia have been resilient throughout history, these communities have been some of those most impacted by internal conflict, structural inequality, and all forms of discrimination.

Colombia has the second largest population of people of African descent in Latin America, making up nearly 11 percent of the populace. Yet, according to the United Nations Development Programme, Afro-Colombians experience higher rates of poverty (54 percent) and illiteracy (11 percent), have less access to basic services (42 percent), and face greater food insecurity (59 percent) than the rest of the population.^{1,2} Of the 3.4 percent of Colombians who identify as Indigenous, 63 percent live in persistent forms of structural inequality.³

Despite the resilience and potential of these significant Colombian communities on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, the Guajira, and the Amazon, these data sound an alarm. Regardless of the optimism by many in the international community who were hopeful that the 2016 peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) would bring peace,

decrease violence, and open opportunities, challenges persist. Despite leading to the demobilization and disarmament of the FARC, full implementation of the peace agreement—particularly the ethnic chapter—remains woefully incomplete.

This piece of the puzzle is significant because peaceful and inclusive policies and practices are necessary conditions for attracting investment, creating new jobs, and strengthening supply chains. Most investors “recognize that the viability of business itself depends on the resources of healthy ecosystems—fresh water, clean air, robust biodiversity, productive land—and on the stability of just societies.”⁴ They value societies that prioritize the critical roles youth, women, and ethnic minorities play in shaping a country’s future. As one of those main investors, the United States and I, as Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, will continue to work with Colombia to ensure full implementation of the ethnic chapter in the agreement.

Sustainable peace in Colombia requires robust economic development that encompasses an intelligent trade policy and provides necessary assistance to affected communities, especially youth, Afro-Colombian, and Indigenous peoples. Economic empowerment, whether through access to viable employment or entrepreneurship, is key; it requires investment, access to resources, contacts, and capacity.

Many young people are working to change the existing narratives that place people of their communities at the bottom of the pyramid. Young entrepreneurs drive and shape innovation; they speed up structural changes in the economy and introduce new competition, thereby contributing to productivity. US–Colombia cooperation should invest in programs that can leapfrog them into new markets, leadership, and success in areas so often denied them. For this reason, I have been a strong advocate of programs that prepare Afro-Colombian and Indigenous youth for world-class education and global leadership opportunities with programs focused on fostering untapped talent.

While women in Colombia have become increasingly active in paid work and elected offices, closing the gender gap at an impressive rate, Afro-Colombian women are neither experiencing similar growth nor present in positions of traditional decision making. Instead, women of African descent encounter higher levels of social and economic vulnerability, extreme poverty, and limited access to education and quality health services.⁵ Most enter the labor market at an early age in low-income, unskilled jobs, many experi-

ence early motherhood, and others are subjected to racial and gender-based violence. Our partnerships with Colombia can and should exchange good practices and identify ways to provide targeted support for women, especially women in rural areas and ethnic communities. African descendants and Indigenous women should have access to the resources they need to build businesses, expand cooperative economic empowerment initiatives, and innovate using new and ancestral technologies. I have supported programs—funded through the Inter-American Foundation—that strengthen existing grassroots and community efforts by investing in locally-led initiatives and exchange programs, targeting resources, and providing needed support for these communities beyond workshops. These efforts can and should be enhanced using public-private partnerships.

I am also committed to supporting the 2010 US-Colombian Action Plan on Racial and Ethnic Equality, an important policy complement to development assistance programs and the work and mandate of the Race, Ethnicity, and Social Inclusion Unit at the US Department of State. I am dedicated to increasing funding for State Department and US Agency for International Development (USAID) diversity hiring, retention, and promotion initiatives, and expanding opportunities for minority-owned businesses, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and other minority-serving institutions to compete for State Department contracts and grants. I support US government efforts to hire from and build relationships with local communities, including Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, and women-led organizations and businesses.

In addition to these efforts, I have advocated for and supported USAID funding for the Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Peoples package, totaling nearly \$92 million from 2011 to 2021, and the program's successor, the Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Colombian Empowerment Activity 2021-2026, focused on the Caribbean, Pacific, and Amazon regions. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle in the US Congress to prioritize these efforts and provide the necessary support to ensure targeted objectives are achieved to strengthen further the foundations of inclusive and equitable development efforts in Colombia.

Despite the many concerns facing us worldwide, the Western Hemisphere remains a central priority for the Biden Administration and Congress. We are leading through diplomacy, promoting democracy, ensuring inclusive, sus-

tainable development, and reaffirming our firm commitment to diversity as a valuable and undeniable asset of our foreign and civil service. Democracy is precious and fragile. If it is not inclusive and we do not consider the challenges facing those at the margins, growth and prosperity for the whole are fleeting.

Throughout my career in Congress, I have encouraged an open space for new voices where regional and global power meet. In 2021, I was inspired by the launch of the Afro-Interamerican Forum on Climate Change during COP26, with leaders and scientists of African descent from twelve countries in the Western Hemisphere. The forum introduced the concept of an Afro-Descendant Natural Belt of the Americas and developed a Strategy for Environmental Equity and Racial Justice in the Amazon, inclusive of the unique perspectives and culturally-sourced solutions from African descendant communities and advocates.

In Glasgow, it became clear that without the participatory contributions of the African descendant, Indigenous communities, and women in Colombia and throughout LAC, it is unlikely we will meet our global climate goals.⁶ While the people who have historically inhabited the Western Hemisphere and native communities worldwide are among the most vulnerable to the climate crisis, they are also the key to our planet's survival. It is the responsibility of those in power—including those in Congress—to make the systemic change needed to empower those most affected by climate change to be at the core of its solution.⁷

I believe in the tremendous potential of Colombia and the powerful ties between our nations. Colombia, its institutions, and its people are stronger when we work together to prioritize inclusive and sustainable economic development, respect for human rights, and the democratic values we cherish and aspire to uphold. I am critically optimistic about the future of Colombia because Colombia, like the United States, can elevate and leverage the talent of our diverse populations and build relationships that tap into the cultural bonds that exist in so many communities across our nations—bonds that extend beyond borders.



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ESSAY **13**

COMMIT TO DEMOCRACY

Through our security cooperation, counter-narcotics efforts, promotion of civil society, and environmental initiatives, we are supporting a strong foundation for democracy and the rule of law to flourish in Colombia.

PAULA J. DOBRIANSKY

Former US Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs; Senior Fellow, Harvard University Belfer Center; Vice Chair, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, Atlantic Council

AS ONE OF THE LONGEST-STANDING democracies and the first constitutional government in South America, Colombia has remained a steadfast ally of the United States, committed to democracy, the rule of law, and free enterprise. Our shared values and vision for the future have only strengthened the bonds of our two-hundred-year diplomatic relations and friendship. However, as in any relationship, challenges have arisen, such as Colombia's armed conflict, narcotics trafficking, and the production of illicit substances like cocaine.

Serving in President George W. Bush's administration as under secretary of state for global affairs, I worked closely with Colombian officials, including President Álvaro Uribe and Vice President Francisco Santos, on a wide range of issues dominant in the Washington-Bogotá relationship. As the State Department's lead in assisting countries to build more democratic, secure, stable, and just societies, I found it imperative to engage Colombia.

In his first presidential inaugural address, Bush said, "Our democratic faith is more than the creed of our country, it is the inborn hope of our humanity, an ideal we carry but do not own, a trust we bear and pass

along.”¹ As we celebrate the bicentennial of our extraordinary bond, let us continue working together on four key areas: security cooperation, counter-narcotics strategies, rule of law initiatives, and environmental stewardship. Advancement and progress in these critical domains can solidify Colombia’s democratic foundation and provide a valuable model for other countries.

Security cooperation

US-Colombia security cooperation is deep and significant. Colombia was the only Latin American country to participate in the Korean War as a military ally of the United States. It was also the only South American nation to support the US-led Iraq war of 2003. Colombia also sent soldiers to Afghanistan to assist the International Security Assistance Force in its fight against the Taliban.

During President Iván Duque’s March 2022 visit to Washington DC, President Joseph R. Biden announced his intention to designate Colombia a “Major non-NATO Ally.”² This would provide a long-term framework for our security and defense cooperation. It would also reinforce our solid bilateral defense relationship by helping support aligned defense planning, procurement, and training. Advantages of Major non-NATO Ally status include eligibility for collaboration on the development of defense technologies, access to the US defense industry, special access to military equipment financing, and joint military exchanges, exercises, and training.

The US-Colombia Strategic Alliance Act of 2022, a new legislative initiative advanced by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez, seeks to codify into law Colombia’s status as a “Major non-NATO Ally.”³ It also lays out a forward-leaning agenda for US-Colombia relations focused on expanding engagement on economic growth, international security, refugees, human rights, the rule of law, and migration. The Chairman asserted that it will “set out a bold new chapter in US-Colombia relations.”⁴

Investments aimed at increased security and defense cooperation should remain strong and sustained. The US-Colombia Defense Bilateral Working Group, established in 1999, is a useful forum to discuss strategic-level defense issues and chart future cooperative actions protecting the community of democracies.

Counter-narcotics efforts

Initially conceived in 1999, with bipartisan support, Plan Colombia targeted drug cartels, sought to eradicate coca cultivation, bolster law enforcement, and end the armed conflict. The Bush administration expanded it to support “eradication, interdiction and alternative development of coca fields,” and assistance to rural areas.⁵ These strict measures were essential to counter the negative impact of drug trafficking on Colombia’s democracy and the rule of law.

Uribe was a tough counter-narcotics partner and enforced strong policies, including aerial eradication efforts on coca plantations. Bush cooperated with Uribe and advanced his tripartite strategy of “waging a global war on terror, supporting democracy, and reducing the flow of illicit drugs into the United States.”

At the State Department, I had oversight of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL). I frequently traveled to Colombia to see firsthand its eradication attempts and law enforcement efforts, which had a real impact. In fact, a few years later, we urged Colombian officials to share their successful counter-narcotics strategies and experiences with Afghan officials.

Under the leadership of Duque, Colombia has remained a regional leader in counter-narcotic efforts but must do more to eradicate coca cultivation. The State Department’s INL Bureau’s 2022 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report describes how at least 95 percent of the cocaine samples seized in the United States in 2020 subjected to laboratory analysis were of Colombian origin.⁶ Coca cultivation in Colombia remains at “record” levels in 2022, as cited by the White House Office of Drug Policy Control.⁷ It brings Colombian farmers less than \$1 billion in revenue per year while the United States and Colombia spend billions of taxpayer money in drug control efforts.

In August 2020, the US-Colombia Growth Initiative (USGI), a bilateral strategy, was unveiled, focusing on drug eradication and sustainable investment in rural Colombia.⁸ The program is built on traditional drug interdiction, security, and assistance with a private sector-led sustainable economic growth model and alternative development programs. It addresses the urgent need to stem the cultivation and flow of illicit drugs into the United States. Creative and innovative partnerships like the USGI are needed to

succeed against this longstanding challenge. We must work jointly to ensure that Colombia's democratic institutions and the rule of law are not weakened by narcotics trafficking.

Democracy and the rule of law

Decades of corruption and lawlessness by drug cartels and illegal armed groups have severely harmed Colombia's democracy. Until November 2021, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia was on the State Department's list of designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations. The National Liberation Army remains on the list. These groups are responsible for decades of misery and violence that embroiled the country, took a massive human toll, and generated an economic downturn. Over the years, however, our governments have shared a strong interest in collaborating and fostering change by fighting corruption and lawlessness. We know that effective and sustainable democracy requires the rule of law.

At the State Department, I worked with Roy Godson, a Georgetown University professor emeritus. Along with a team at the National Strategy Information Center, he advanced the Culture of Lawfulness Project in Colombia, including in Medellín. This initiative used public and private funding and the participation of school systems and civil society leaders to improve public knowledge and attitudes about the rule of law. The goal of lawfulness education is to reach the next generation of students and, through them, their parents and communities. As I noted in a 2004 speech, "a culture of lawfulness changes the dynamics of law enforcement—and builds the rule of law—by marginalizing lawless behavior." I added, "a culture of lawfulness makes two major contributions to society: it fundamentally changes the dynamics of law enforcement, and it empowers individuals."⁹ Through this creative citizen-oriented initiative, there were improvements in civic consciousness and a decline in crime and violence. Colombian law enforcement efforts against the drug cartels also contributed to reducing crime.

During this period, I also worked closely with Vice President Francisco Santos on human rights, meeting regularly to discuss cases and abuses and provide solutions. Our collaborative efforts were direct, transparent, and constructive. In turn, concrete steps were taken to investigate, prosecute,

and punish those officials and others who committed human rights violations.

To protect human rights and human dignity, Colombia must further strengthen those mechanisms to safeguard the rule of law and human rights and enforce security. Forward-looking initiatives, like the Culture of Lawfulness Project, focused on educating the next generation on the importance of the rule of law, are paramount in fostering a more peaceful, vibrant Colombia.

Environmental stewardship

One of the most innovative initiatives enacted by Congress in 1998 was the Tropical Forest Conservation Act, which has enabled eligible developing countries to reduce their debts to the United States and undertake action to protect their tropical forests.

In 2004, the United States, Colombia, and three environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and the World Wildlife Fund—signed agreements to reduce Colombia's debt to the United States by more than \$10 million. In return, Colombia promised to use those funds toward conservation efforts in several important tropical forest areas, including Tropical Andes, the Llanos region in the Orinoco Basin, and the Caribbean. The program became known as the Debt-for-Nature agreement. Colombia became the fifth country in Latin America to benefit from this program; the others were Belize, El Salvador, Panama, and Peru.¹⁰ It created a permanent endowment for preserving Colombia's tropical forests while advancing its economy. Since signing these agreements, communities have safeguarded more than 700,000 hectares of forest, reduced deforestation by more than 15,000 hectares of mega-diverse forest, and protected more than 70 species, according to the US embassy in Bogotá.¹¹

This creative program should continue and expand with sustained US funding. It has had multiple positive impacts in Colombia, including protecting and conserving tropical forest areas and enhancing local civic involvement and community action to support the environment and economic growth. New NGOs have been created and will further strengthen Colombia's civil society.

Moving forward

We have learned a great deal from our challenges and experiences. As we look forward to our next bicentennial, we must continue to bolster US-Colombia ties. Through our security cooperation, counter-narcotics efforts, promotion of civil society, and environmental initiatives, we are collaborating to support a strong foundation for democracy and the rule of law to flourish in Colombia. As Simón Bolívar once said, “A people that loves freedom will in the end be free.”¹² This is the very spirit that pervades Colombia.



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ESSAY **14****LEARN FROM A
DEMOCRATIC
CULTURE**

For decades, Colombia, through adversity and prosperity, has counted on one undeniable truth: the strength of its democracy.

KEVIN WHITAKER

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IN 2008, DURING MY FIRST-EVER visit to Colombia, I watched aerial coca eradication operations in the conflict-ridden Meta Department, then flew to San Vicente del Caguán to catch a flight to Bogotá. On the ramp at San Vicente were two squads of Colombian army troops. Having just arrived at the base after a month of patrolling in search of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) units, they slumped, exhausted and muddy, their packs and weapons stacked neatly, awaiting airlift back to their base. The contrast between these warfighters and the comfortable, twenty-first-century Bogotá I had left that morning could not have been starker. That juxtaposition was the beginning of my understanding that two Colombias—one modern, connected, and progressing, the other disconnected, geographically remote, and stuck in an endless loop of exclusion and violence—existed side by side. Colombian democracy and its leaders have been tested for decades as they try to end these recycled conflicts by institutionally, economically, and physically joining the Colombia of exclusion and criminality together with its modern half.

An adapting, imaginative, courageous Colombia

Colombia's political system has strained to meet that challenge. For decades, the country has been plagued by insurgencies. Groups as diverse as Pablo Escobar's Medellín Cartel to drug-dealing paramilitary groups like the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) to terrorist organizations like the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the FARC (both deeply corrupted by narcotics) have serially sought to upend democratic processes. Colombian administrations for nearly forty years have sought to break the cycle of conflict. And as Colombia has sought to confront these challenges, it must be noted that some state actors at times engaged in terrible criminal abuses, from allying with paramilitary groups to the disgraceful "false positive"¹ killings of innocents to unlawful interceptions of individuals' communications.

But let's fully appreciate what Colombian democracy has achieved, and how. Over the past four decades, Colombia's democratic leaders have responded with innovation and courage to address seemingly intractable problems. They wrote a new constitution with the participation of a demobilized, terrorist group; reformed security, intelligence, and judicial entities (with the longtime partnership of the United States); and undertook nearly a dozen serious negotiation efforts. These leaders negotiated the demobilization of whole rebel structures, notably the 19th of April Movement (M-19) leftist guerrillas and the right-wing paramilitary AUC. Colombian administrations built on the experiences of their predecessors as they conceived new approaches. The culmination was the landmark 2016 Peace Accord with the FARC, a comprehensive and internationally-praised effort achieved after an arduous six-year negotiation. The accord remains controversial, but it took the FARC off the battlefield and into the halls of congress. It was a triumph of Colombian democratic institutions and leaders, even if it remains a work in progress.

Examples of the innovation and courage of Colombian democracy abound. In the 1950s, Colombia established an enforced bipartisanship to lower the political costs of being the out-party. The presidency passed from Liberal to Conservative hands, knowing that the constitution required "adequate and equitable participation" for the party that did not control that office. When the threat of violence from that quarter receded, Colombia confronted new and even more devastating challenges. From the 1970s through

the 1990s, extrajudicial actors convulsed the nation with violence to seek the government's capitulation. Pablo Escobar ordered car bombs, destroyed an airliner in flight, directed the murders of hundreds of police officers, and was behind the assassinations of government ministers and two candidates for president in his battle against the state and justice. Four major and several minor terrorist insurgencies, including the FARC, M-19, and ELN, sought the violent overthrow of the state. The AUC engaged in narco-trafficking, displaced thousands to steal their property, and committed horrific human rights abuses.

While the Colombian state battled these groups with arms, every Colombian administration since the 1980s also sought to negotiate the demobilization and integration of the rebel groups into institutional democratic life. Even after a catastrophic wave of attacks and death in the mid-1980s, including the bloody takeover and destruction of the Supreme Court building in downtown Bogotá by the M-19, the aspiration to achieve a negotiated settlement was never extinguished.

By the end of that decade, then-President Virgilio Barco and his team had drafted an Initiative for Peace and were negotiating directly with a "guerrilla coordinating group" that included all major insurgent groups. The initiative did not achieve all of its ambitious goals, but it resulted in the demobilization of the M-19, members of which were central players in drafting the 1991 constitution. Moreover, the initiative established starting points for President Juan Manuel Santos' ultimate successful negotiation of the Peace Accord with the FARC, the most important of these being a government commitment to integrate the rural, disconnected Colombia with the rest of the nation and provisions to address political participation and justice concerns.

By the late 1990s, Colombia was again in crisis. The FARC moved into the space occupied by the dismantled Medellín and Cali cartels to become the country's most significant drug trafficking organization and used its wealth to finance fighters and materiel to topple the state. In another example of Colombian imagination and daring, then-President Andrés Pastrana turned over a 16,000 square mile tract in central Colombia to the FARC to create momentum for negotiation. This step is seen as either painfully naïve or dangerously counterproductive. Regardless, its real importance was that

the FARC's bloody criminal reign of terror in the so-called *zona de distensión* showed its true nature.

This exposure of the FARC's brutal criminality was a key factor in the 2002 election of President Álvaro Uribe, whose promise to impose "democratic security" was appealing to Colombian voters. Uribe's tough new approach included continual operations to pressure the FARC militarily, a high-value target strategy to eliminate FARC leadership, and new methods to knock down unprecedented coca cultivation and cocaine production, which funded the FARC's war machine. Uribe enjoyed strong, sustained, bipartisan support from the United States through the new Plan Colombia. Uribe's unprecedented aggressive approach would have lacked justification and support, nationally and internationally, had Pastrana's "*despeje*" (demilitarized zone) not revealed the FARC for what it was.

Other branches of Colombian democracy showed their vitality. In 2010, a very popular Uribe sought to amend the constitution to permit a run for a third term in office. The Constitutional Court determined the proposal for a referendum to allow a congressional vote on the matter to be unconstitutional. Importantly, Uribe—who retained very high popular approval—quickly accepted the ruling, despite his disappointment and disagreement with the decision.

Santos's peace talks with the FARC (2010-16) were the culmination of the decades-long effort by Colombian democratic institutions and leaders to address the root cause of violence and exclusion and incorporate that insurgency into the institutional democratic system. The imagination, rigor, and courage with which the Santos team negotiated the ultimate accord are well known. But it held its own risks. Holding peace talks with the FARC was hardly unprecedented, and the FARC, battered by eight years of military pressure, was ready to come to the table. However, FARC violence had made it profoundly unpopular, so any concessions to it, even in the context of peace talks, were likely to raise popular ire. In 2009, hundreds of thousands of Colombians took to the streets in massive "*No Más FARC*" demonstrations. Finally, the long gestation period of the talks—six years, start to finish—tried the patience and interest of the Colombian people. Santos' iron-willed determination to see these talks to their conclusion in the face of FARC obstructionism and growing concerns about perceived excessive concessions to the FARC can be traced to Santos's obsession with peace, as

well as the long history of courageous Colombian leaders seeking to negotiate an end to the conflict.

Colombia's way ahead

Colombia's democratic institutions and its leaders over the years have proven imaginative and courageous, and the work continues. Three specific observations are salient.

First, Colombians are far too self-critical. The first to complain about the ineffectiveness of Colombian democracy are Colombians, which is understandable, but it's a barrier to searching analysis. Colombia will realize its true democratic potential only when Colombians can assess their weaknesses and *also* appreciate the achievements of their democratic institutions and leaders. The US constitution refers to forming "a more perfect union," implying a continuing need for debate and reform. Discussions that devolve into mere contention with endless reference to past failings are not helpful. Nor is embracing the notions of Nietzsche and (more importantly) Gabriel García Márquez that time is a flat circle, and we are condemned to repeat the past. A Colombia that recognizes the remarkable achievements of its democracy and its innovative, courageous political culture—that progress is not just possible, but has occurred through its own efforts—will be best prepared to face its future trials.

Second, the next challenge is already here. In explaining the fundamental goal of the peace talks with the FARC, Santos spoke of Colombia becoming a "normal country with normal problems." That is happening. Like nations worldwide, Colombia's economy was set back dramatically by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thousands of middle-class families have plummeted into poverty, while low-income families have dropped to extreme poverty. These Colombians are understandably and justifiably demanding that their political and economic systems respond effectively. Such problems are invulnerable to facile populist solutions. Colombian democracy needs to take action quickly, building on the political culture of innovation and courage it showed in confronting twentieth-century challenges.

Finally, a Colombia armed with the self-confidence derived from accepting the significance of its achievements can be an even more influential player regionally and internationally, especially in partnership with the United States. The world is increasingly dividing into two governance

models. The United States and Colombia embrace a liberal democratic system based on individual rights, open markets, and clear, universally applied rules. Its counterpart is the authoritarian vision of China, in which an unelected government grants rights to citizens on condition of behavior, subjectively and impermanently, and the center applies laws and norms variably following its own criteria.

Colombia and the United States are already collaborating on law enforcement and judicial matters in the hemisphere; our work should be broadened and deepened to partner on these governance matters. Given its painful experiences and vibrant democratic culture, Colombian insights can be uniquely useful.

In the summer of 2016, I joined a group observing a demining effort in Caquetá, a rural department long torn by insurgency, coca/cocaine, and disconnection from the rest of Colombia. As we flew that sunny morning in a Colombian army helicopter, I gazed out at a lush piedmont landscape dotted with small farms. The undulating terrain was marked by watercourses and dirt roads, rising into mountains just distinguishable through a blue haze. My reverie was interrupted by a colleague, who showed me a news flash on his phone that the government and FARC had reached a final agreement on the peace accord. There was a completeness to the moment. I looked again at the bucolic scene, and it struck me why it appealed to me so: it strongly resembled the piedmont of my beloved home state of Virginia. A peace and future in which the Caquetá piedmont could be a sister to the Virginia piedmont, with inclusion, education, and opportunities, seemed within reach.



Endnotes

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ESSAY 15

FORGE A STRONG DEMOCRACY

The US-Colombia alliance has achieved seemingly impossible feats over decades of close collaboration. Ensuring Colombia becomes a fully developed liberal democracy is the next step.

ALEJANDRO EDER

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COLOMBIA STANDS AS ONE OF the United States' strongest and closest allies in the Western Hemisphere. With generous US support on multiple fronts and hefty Colombian investment and leadership, within 20 years, Colombia walked itself back from the brink of failed statehood and established itself as a vibrant middle-income liberal democracy.

The US-Colombia relationship is particularly strong from a military and public safety perspective, given the historical mutual focus on the war on drugs and relevant national security issues. The bilateral partnership is also strong in trade, investment, and diplomacy. Still, despite remaining internal security challenges, and even with notable successes over the years, such as destroying the Medellín Cartel and dismantling the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), the potential of a US-Colombia strategic relationship with global reach is unlimited if developed fully.

The bilateral agenda in the next decade should focus on consolidating Colombia as a developed, militarily adept, liberal democracy capable of providing its citizens with a prosperous future and helping safeguard our shared

values in Latin America and beyond. A further developed Colombia would promote economic opportunities and job creation, while strengthening democratic institutions to curtail transnational criminal activities like drug trafficking and illegal mining. Colombia would also be better prepared to absorb migrants and refugees from Venezuela, preventing migration to and instability in other countries. A more prosperous Colombia would become a stronger partner to the United States and the broader region by deepening its already strong security cooperation, investment, and commercial ties with Central America. It would also contribute to holding back and even reversing the rise of authoritarianism in Latin America and could help deter the geopolitical ambitions of Russia and China in our hemisphere.

While fully developing Colombia is an ambitious goal, much progress has already been made. Colombia is a centuries-old democracy that peacefully alternates power at all levels of government with strong institutions and checks and balances that have proven resilient in the face of great challenges. Socially, seven million Colombians—about 14 percent of the population—moved out of poverty into the middle class between 2000 and 2019.¹ Although this progress was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is recoverable. Economically, Colombia boasts the fourth-largest economy in Latin America, and its private sector is among the most sophisticated. Internationally, Colombia is a respected power with the most operationally capable military in the region. It is one of three Latin American members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the only Latin American Global Partner of NATO, and in March 2022, US President Joseph R. Biden announced the United States would designate Colombia as a Major non-NATO Ally.²

Nevertheless, Colombia must overcome three major obstacles to consolidate itself as a developed liberal democracy. The first, and perhaps most challenging, is ensuring that Colombia's democratic, free-market system responds to the needs and wants of all its citizens. Following significant reductions in violence starting about a decade ago, people's expectations of government shifted from simply reestablishing security to improving livelihoods, increasing employment opportunities, providing better-quality healthcare and education, and promoting social equality.

Despite significant socioeconomic advances over the past twenty years, progress has not arrived fast enough. Even before the economic setbacks

caused by COVID-19, more than 35 percent of the population lived in poverty, half the country's economy was informal, the quality of education remained below par, and there were still too many forgotten regions in the hinterlands where criminal activities thrived.³ Furthermore, the significant reduction of terrorist violence made structural problems more visible, particularly public sector corruption at the local and provincial levels.

The government's inability to address these issues has progressively diminished trust in the democratic system and institutions. According to the Universidad de los Andes' *Observatorio de la Democracia*, satisfaction with the functioning of Colombian democracy has fallen yearly from 55 percent in 2012 to 19 percent in 2020.⁴ Other national polls during this period show a grave distrust of institutions in all branches of government. Growing apathy toward the system has translated into electoral abstentionism, allowing corrupt political organizations to consolidate, particularly at the local level, further fueling the prophecy of a failed system. This distrust has contributed to the rise of a breed of populism that is both antidemocratic and anti-free market, which, if allowed to prosper, would render Colombia's full development into a liberal democracy unviable.

The second obstacle to Colombia's development and democracy is transnational criminal activities, including the cocaine trade and illegal mining—and the violence, human rights violations, and ecological devastation that accompany them. Domestic cocaine production hovers close to 1,200 tons per year,⁵ up from 65 tons in 1993,⁶ the year Pablo Escobar was killed.

Some estimate the size of the Colombian cocaine industry to be somewhere between 1 percent and 3 percent of gross domestic product.⁷ ⁸ When adding the revenue of other criminal endeavors such as illegal mining, illegal logging, and contraband, illicit activities could represent double that number.⁹ Add the proceeds from public sector corruption, and the number could be much higher still. In and of itself, this is a stunning threat to democracy as these funds inevitably feed corruption, violence, and human rights violations.

The state's inability to address this issue allows illegal businesses to thrive and corrupt public officials to remain in office, heightening apathy with the democratic system, which could lead to more corruption, further discrediting the state and pushing Colombia toward populism. These threats to democracy need to be addressed more aggressively in innovative ways.

The final obstacle faced by Colombia is geopolitical. State actors such as Cuba, Russia, Venezuela and, to a different extent, China—and even Iran—would benefit strategically from a destabilized or discredited Colombia. Weakening Colombia in any of these ways would be a significant blow to US interests in the Western Hemisphere and those of liberal democracies. Not only would a major ally be put under significant pressure, but it would also send a message to other Latin American nations that being close to the United States one day means nothing the next. Furthermore, a weak or unaligned Colombia could entice major powers such as Russia to act more assertively, perhaps by following through on their reiterated promises to base troops or strategic weapons in Cuba, Nicaragua, or Venezuela.¹⁰ To countries invested in the region, Colombia's success or failure as a liberal democratic and free-market society translates to the success or failure of the US model in Latin America.

When Plan Colombia was first developed twenty years ago, it seemed like an overly ambitious proposition for an almost failed Colombia to recover from narco-fueled violence. It was not. The key to its success was having a set of clear goals coupled with US technical support and financial aid while empowering Colombia to lead the charge and allocate the majority of funds and resources necessary to accomplish the mission. We need to apply this same formula to consolidate Colombia as a developed liberal democracy. A task this grand requires a detailed roadmap but should, in any case, include:

- Security sector reform with the goal of increasing, training, and strengthening Colombia's police force to tend to all public safety and internal security needs (terrorist, criminal, and public safety-related) following the highest international standards, particularly on the human rights front.

Colombia's military should be transformed from an army trained and equipped for counterinsurgency to a force focused on protecting Colombian sovereignty and collaborating with international partners, including the United States and NATO, on defending the rules-based international order.

- Boost economic growth by designing and implementing an export-oriented growth strategy, including identifying and carrying out

reforms, such as tax reform; strengthening the educational system, particularly in technology and bilingualism; increasing access to capital; training Colombian suppliers to serve the US market, and attracting nearshoring projects of US companies that want to be closer to home. Initiatives such as the G7's Build Back Better World and US developmental assistance should prioritize Colombia to help bring its infrastructure up to par.

- The fight against transnational crime and corruption must innovate and evolve. An anti-narcotics policy based on eradication and interdiction alone has proven insufficient. Colombia's hinterlands need to be connected to the rest of Colombia and developed economically. We must more aggressively target the finances of drug cartels, illegal mining outfits, and illicit marketers of precursor chemicals. The US Department of Justice (DOJ) should forcefully prosecute public sector corruption in Colombia using innovative approaches such as those used during FIFA-gate,¹¹ the 2015 corruption scandal of global soccer's governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). The DOJ successfully applied the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, given that many ill-gotten funds go through the international and US banking systems.

The US-Colombia alliance has achieved seemingly impossible feats over many years of close collaboration. Ensuring Colombia becomes a strong, developed liberal democracy will benefit both countries and further consolidate the realm of like-minded nations during uncertain times. We must seize the opportunity.



Endnotes

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“The United States and Colombia have long enjoyed a mutually beneficial economic partnership, anchored since 2012 in the bilateral Trade Promotion Agreement. This partnership continues to hold great promise as we work to build a prosperous future based on shared priorities, including democratic governance, economic openness, and concern for our common environment.”

ROBERT E. RUBIN

Co-Chairman Emeritus, Council on Foreign Relations; Former US Secretary of the Treasury, US Department of Treasury



“The current geopolitical juncture and transition to net zero goals strengthen the opportunities for collaboration between Colombia and the United States. Colombia offers nearshoring opportunities with a clean energy generation grid alongside a large potential for renewable energies but with a need for reskilling and technology transfers. These are some of the areas in which we should work on.”

ANA FERNANDA MAIGUASHCA

Head, Consejo Privado de Competitividad; Former Director, Banco de la República de Colombia



PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

ESSAYS 16–20

ESSAYS

16

Improve Productivity *page 124*

ROSARIO CÓRDOBA

*President, Board of Directors, Argos Group;
Former President, Consejo Privado de Competitividad;
Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council*

17

Invest in Peace *page 130*

HOWARD G. BUFFETT

Chairman and CEO, The Howard G. Buffett Foundation

18

Make Bold Bets *page 134*

LUIS ALBERTO MORENO

*Managing Director, Allen & Co LLC; Former President, Inter-American
Development Bank; Member, Advisory Board, Latin American
Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*

19

Advance Energy Transformation *page 141*

THOMAS F. “MACK” MCLARTY, III

*Former Chief of Staff, The White House; Chairman and Co-Founder,
McLarty Associates; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council*

20

Diversify the Bilateral Agenda *page 149*

MARIA CLAUDIA LACOUTURE

*Executive Director, Colombian-American Chamber of
Commerce; President, Alianza de Asociaciones y Gremios;
Former Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, Republic
of Colombia; Member, US-Colombia Task Force, Atlantic Council*

SPECIAL INVESTMENT CASE STUDY *page 154*

VICKI HOLLUB

*President and CEO, Occidental Petroleum Corporation;
Former Chair, US-Colombia Business Council*

VIDEOS *page 157*

ECOPETROL

ISA

ESSAY 16

IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

Colombia must grow at high and sustained rates to increase economic and social development. Improving productivity would lead to increased growth, sustainability, equality, and inclusion.

ROSARIO CÓRDOBA

*President, Board of Directors, Argos Group;
Former President, Private Council for Competition*

JUAN LIVES IN BOGOTÁ and has been a construction worker for twenty-five years. His brother Pedro, also a construction worker, lives in Los Angeles, California. To Pedro's surprise, when he compared the results of their respective jobs, he realized he produced much more than his brother in Colombia in the same amount of time. In other words, his productivity far outpaced Juan's, and thus, his income was much higher.

This efficiency in using time, characteristic of the United States, is not a product of chance. High labor productivity—five times higher than Colombia's—is the result of technology, training of the labor force, and adequate regulation for business development, among other factors.

This high productivity also explains, in large part, the enormous gap between the per capita income of the United States and Colombia. World Bank estimates¹ show that close to 50 percent of the differences between the countries' per capita incomes can be explained by disparities in productivity. In other words, the main barrier to convergence with developed countries' income levels is lagging productivity.

Colombia urgently needs to grow at high and sustained rates to increase economic and social development and, above all, become a more inclusive society. The current levels of monetary poverty of 42.5 percent and extreme poverty of 15.2 percent, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, are unacceptable, as are the figures for business and labor informality. The latter is close to 63 percent and is mostly concentrated among women.²

Pivotal to achieving this transformation is improving productivity, the most critical determinant of per capita income growth in the long term and, therefore, poverty reduction. Without productivity, there is no growth, no sustainability, no equality, and no inclusion.

A bilateral agenda based on productivity

Undoubtedly, Colombia's primary objective in increasing productivity is to improve the welfare of its population in a sustainable and sustained manner. Achieving this would have very positive external repercussions well worth considering. For example, for the United States, a more efficient and sophisticated Colombian productive apparatus would provide a reliable and long-term commercial partner with high-quality standards and reasonable prices, in addition to the valuable advantage of geographical proximity.

In recognition of the positive impact on both countries, the bilateral agenda should also focus on working together to improve Colombia's productivity. What better occasion to do so than the bicentennial of bilateral relations?

There is no such initiative, but scaling up existing programs such as the Productive Factories Program of *Colombia Productiva* of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism or replicating them in different sectors or regions could provide a solution.

According to international evidence, policies to increase productivity should focus on three fronts: productivity gains within firms, efficient reallocation of resources from low-productivity to high-productivity businesses, and free entry of high-productivity enterprises and the exit of low-productivity ones.³

In Colombia, despite the importance of these three factors, the first—productivity increases within companies—is the most relevant, according to an analysis of the evolution of productivity in several companies.⁴ Around

65 percent of productivity increases are due to improvements in production processes and better product positioning.

Therefore, the most advisable work within companies would be technological extension and technical assistance programs, such as the previously mentioned Productive Factories Program, which has had positive results and became the star program of President Iván Duque's effort to increase productivity at the firm's level. It most definitely is a program that should be continued and strengthened by incoming governments.

Productive factories

The Productive Factories Program is a solid example of cooperation between Colombia and the United States. The Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism united to increase business productivity and competitiveness by applying new technologies. The program was created in 2019, inspired by the technology extension model (Manufacturing Extension Partnership [MEP] and Georgia Tech MEP). It emerged from an initiative involving the public and private sectors in 2017 to transfer methodologies to Colombia and train in technology extension methods. Georgia Tech's EI2 Business Innovation Institute supported its design and implementation.⁵

The program's first phase involved training and certifying 150 Colombian extensionists at Georgia Tech, who then returned to the country to work together with twenty-five Georgia Tech EI2 professionals in a pilot program in forty companies and four cities, transferring their knowledge.

Based on these lessons learned, the program was extended to all regions of the country, with very positive results, precisely because of its ability to reach the heart of companies with specialized services through coordinated work with chambers of commerce and public-private partners.

According to Colombia Productiva, the program has 850 productivity experts in quality management, digital transformation, logistics, energy efficiency, productivity, and commercial management. It has served more than 4,000 companies of all sizes, improving their productivity indicators by more than 31 percent, above the initial 8 percent goal.⁶

In evaluations conducted by Fedesarrollo and UT Econometría-SEI, the program was well-rated, with its high design standards and a positive perception of quality highlighted. However, both evaluations drew attention to

the program's limited scope in terms of economic and human resources to reach the bulk of the business sector.

Scaling up

To visualize the magnitude of the productivity challenge, it is mandatory to characterize the Colombian business world. Unfortunately, limited information is available since an economic and business census has not been conducted since 1991 due to a lack of resources. Contributing resources to carry out this census is fundamental and a possible front for bilateral collaboration.

According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), Colombia has few large companies and many informal micro-businesses (ten million).⁷ These are not very productive and employ almost half of the country's workers, accounting for the high level of labor informality. Medium-sized companies, on the other hand, are practically nonexistent.

According to the Single Business Registry, there were about 1,643,000 registered companies in 2019, of which 20,000 had more than fifty workers. By August 2021, the number of registered companies fell by 18 percent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸

Technology adoption in Colombia, an essential determinant of productivity, lags far behind. Although most companies have computers, internet access, and a webpage, the use given to these tools is basic: sending e-mails, searching for information, or accessing electronic banking.

Perhaps the most critical for business transformation and where the greatest challenge lies is in the quality of management. According to surveys conducted by the Colombian National Planning Department (DNP), the level of management practices in Colombian companies is lower than in developed countries. As seen in the following graph, a company in Colombia obtains half the management practices score as that obtained by a comparable US company. In Colombia, the average is 0.38 percent; in the United States, it is 0.62 percent. This lack of management quality also explains why Colombian companies are less innovative.

Distribution of managerial skills in Colombia and the United States, 2018



Source: DNP, based on DANE (2018) and MOPS⁹ (2018).

Poor training at the managerial level is a major impediment to business transformation since those in charge are unable to ask the right questions regarding human capital requirements, technological change, and innovation, for example. As the President of Georgia Tech, Ángel Cabrera, said at the recent meeting of the Productive Factories Program, “transforming an economy requires business leaders who turn talent into ideas in the twenty-first century.”¹⁰

Thus, to improve the productivity of the Colombian economy for the benefit of both countries, it is necessary to concentrate efforts on developing managerial capabilities through technological extension and technical assistance by scaling up the Productive Factories Program or developing similar programs.

Given that Productive Factories originated in the United States and its design and methodology have proven successful, the best way forward is to scale up this program by accessing financial resources or scholarships for training extension workers on various productivity fronts. This is undoubtedly the most efficient way to address the needs of companies and improve

their capabilities. The training could be done in the United States, as was the case of the extensionists trained at Georgia Tech, or the methodology for training could be transferred to Colombia.

What is clear is that knowledge must be multiplied to transform the country.

The challenge, although ambitious, is well known, and there is a proven way to meet it. Joint work between Colombia and the United States would make it possible to achieve the desired impact—a more developed and inclusive country for the benefit of Colombians, which would also benefit the United States. And more importantly, it would reduce the gap between Pedro's and Juan's income, allowing both brothers to finally enjoy a similar quality of life.



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ESSAY **17**

INVEST IN PEACE

Colombia is poised to prove to the world that it will be known for the peace it has brokered at home rather than the conflict endured for fifty years. This requires an enormous investment in development and close coordination among all stakeholders to ensure these commitments meet the needs of the people most affected.

HOWARD G. BUFFETT

Chairman and CEO, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation

WHEN COLOMBIA SIGNED A PEACE AGREEMENT IN 2016 after fifty years of conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), we knew the real work was just beginning. A peace agreement is just a piece of paper until the commitments written on it become a reality.

As chairman and CEO of the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, a private family foundation with an annual grant-making budget of more than \$200 million, my job is to deploy the most risk-tolerant capital available—philanthropy—to invest in ideas that improve the lives of some of the most impoverished and marginalized people in the world. Our foundation focuses its funding on improving food security through agriculture, mitigating conflict through development, building capacity to combat human trafficking, and securing the safety of as many people as possible. Although we created our foundation in 1999 with an emphasis on conserving wildlife and habitat, we soon shifted our focus to include people because conservation and sustainability become viable when people have choices beyond simple survival.

I can think of no better investment than in people—like the Colombians—who are resilient enough to have survived decades of conflict.

The real question we faced in Colombia was not whether to invest in development but where to start. Colombia's 200-year relationship with the United States provided a framework for answering that question. Philanthropy is, in essence, venture capital that measures the return on investment based on the positive impact on people's lives. Our funding can test new ideas, but we need public sector support to bring those ideas to scale in every part of the country that needs investment. Working with government—locally and nationally—is essential. Colombia's close relationship with the United States gave us a roadmap for working with Colombia's government institutions. Within a few months of our initial outreach to the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos, we made the first commitment that eventually would total nearly \$45 million to support humanitarian demining operations in rural areas. This foundational investment would redeploy the military to focus on development and secure land for further investments in smallholder agriculture, smaller-scale voluntary coca-crop substitution, and land titling projects.

Afterwards, the foundation worked with the administration of President Iván Duque to develop a holistic approach to security and development, focusing investments on Tibú, a municipality in the Catatumbo region that borders Venezuela. Catatumbo is marked by high levels of violence, poverty, and drugs. About a third of the militants in the National Liberation Army continue to operate in the region as they dispute power with other drug trafficking groups and smaller factions of dissidents. The presence of armed groups has fueled the cultivation of illicit crops in Tibú, which produces more coca—the base ingredient of cocaine—than any other Colombian municipality. Why focus investment in the part of Colombia with the most difficult challenges? Because if we can demonstrate success here, we know success is possible everywhere.

Focusing our efforts in Catatumbo also allowed us to complement Colombia's investments. A 2018 government strategy, "Sustainable Catatumbo," has brought more than \$175 million in development investments to the region, but health, education, and policing remain underfunded, and agricultural assistance requires a multi-pronged approach to remove barriers. As an outside funder, we consider every investment through the lens of how

any successes we achieve could be sustained or replicated locally and nationally after our funding is completed. That informed an approach that mixes one-time capital investments and pilot projects, which could attract future funding if we demonstrate success.

Roads are vital to providing rural farmers access to markets for alternative crops to replace coca. They also serve as a deterrent to armed groups and the drug trade because they improve the government's ability to secure those areas. In September 2020, the foundation signed an agreement to build or improve nearly 50 miles of tertiary and 4.5 miles of regional roads in Catatumbo for \$45 million. The National Roads Institute is scheduled to complete the first six regional and tertiary roads by the end of 2022, with follow-on funding for the remainder contingent on performance. These roads will enable market access and security, allowing farmers to get better prices for their production of legal crops, thus reducing the incentive to grow coca.

Land titling is another essential element in providing legal alternatives to coca cultivation for rural farmers. The foundation has provided a \$4.5 million grant to Mercy Corps to assist nine hundred farming families in obtaining land titles in Tibú and one thousand families in reducing food insecurity. A separate, parallel grant to the National Coffee Federation is exploring ways these farming families can voluntarily replace their coca production with alternative crops that are legal and profitable, in partnership with a private-sector buyer committed to purchasing their products at fair prices. The rural farmers we've met want to grow legal crops, but they also need to feed their families. Obtaining land titles allows them to access financing to make this transition and invest in high-value, legal crops like cacao and coffee. Land titles also raise the stakes for growing coca because farmers risk losing their land if they do not make the switch.

Many organizations and donors invest in development only when conflicts end. Often, our foundation's investment decisions are based on the theory that peace cannot be secured and sustained without investing in development first. Communities need to see what life could be like without conflict to fight for that peace. That is why we complement investment in activities like agriculture that will take years to produce tangible results with investments that could improve lives today. That includes limited humanitarian support for internally displaced persons and investments in new health clinics, shelters, schools, and even police stations. These choices are

informed by the needs articulated by local communities and governments in partnership with the national government to ensure that the personnel to support this new infrastructure is included in government budgets.

Finally, no investment in post-conflict development is sustainable without addressing the issue of ex-combatants. They need investment too, so they can have viable livelihoods that do not involve conflict, but this investment must be made in a way that is fair to the individuals who never took up arms against the government. The foundation supports the World Food Programme's work with FARC ex-combatants living in fourteen of the twenty-four reintegration camps across Colombia, including the one in Tibú. The projects provide a way for ex-combatants to gain new skills, earn a living, and make amends with their communities, many of which are victims of the armed conflict.

Over the last six years, our work in Colombia has underscored that history will not judge success based on the signing of the peace accords but rather by Colombia's ability to fulfill its commitments. This requires an enormous investment in development and close coordination among all stakeholders to ensure these commitments meet the needs of the people most affected. The role of outside donors is to listen and support efforts to achieve that objective.

As Colombia and the United States celebrate two hundred years of cooperation, it's important to recognize that Colombia's success or failure affects us here at home. Succeeding in Catatumbo will reduce the coca production that ultimately becomes cocaine in US cities. The stability we create in Colombia helps stem the flow of migrants across our borders. The peace and development we demonstrate in Colombia is the beacon of hope we give people living in Venezuela that there is an alternative to poverty, lawlessness, and autocracy. Colombia is poised to prove to the world that it will be known for the peace it has brokered at home rather than the conflict it has endured for fifty years. That is a future worth investing in.



ESSAY **18**

MAKE BOLD BETS

Colombia and the United States are uniquely positioned to enjoy an exceptional commercial partnership. Achieving this will require a level of ambition, coordination, and commitment comparable to what enabled Plan Colombia.

LUIS ALBERTO MORENO

Managing Director, Allen & Co LLC; Former President, Inter-American Development Bank; Member, Advisory Board, Latin American Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

IN 2018, WHEN AMAZON WEB SERVICES announced it was opening a facility in Bogotá, where 600 customer service associates would answer calls in Spanish, English, and Portuguese, I remember thinking, “They get it.”

For years, people in the US-Colombia business community have known that Colombia is an ideal base for US companies with hemispheric ambitions. Amazon’s decision to launch a data center in Colombia in 2019, leveraging the country’s location and human capital to facilitate growth across the Americas, was a case in point.¹

There have been many other promising advances since the two countries signed a Trade Promotion Agreement in 2012. The United States is now the largest global investor in Colombia. More than 450 US companies are active in Colombia, while some 2,200 Colombian firms do business in the United States. The United States is Colombia’s main bilateral trade partner and the leading destination of Colombian exports, representing almost 30 percent of the total. Colombia is the third-largest trading partner of the United States in Latin America and the twenty-fifth worldwide, with around \$28 billion

worth of goods and services exchanged in 2020. And while much of South America remains a mystery to people in the United States, Colombia is different; US citizens account for nearly one in three foreign visitors to Colombia, vastly more than any other country. And 60 percent of all foreign travel by Colombians is to the United States.

When you consider the history of deep cooperation on security issues and the legacy of Plan Colombia—arguably the most ambitious and successful US government initiative in Latin America—there is no question that both countries are uniquely positioned to enjoy an exceptional commercial partnership.

Yet this relationship is far from reaching its full potential. In recent years, US investment in Colombia has been flat, averaging a modest \$2 billion per year. Trade growth has also been lackluster, and Colombian exports to the United States are still primarily dominated by raw materials and agricultural products. After the setback inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical convulsion prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, how can Colombia and the United States recharge their economic relationship and chart a faster path toward mutually beneficial growth in the future?

This requires action on two broad fronts: constructing a world-class commercial and trade architecture and aggressively promoting investment in a group of emerging business sectors that offer rewards to both countries.

Trade opportunities remain

First, Colombia and the United States should finish the unglamorous but critical work of removing structural obstacles to trade and investment. Many experts have already highlighted the pending tasks of this agenda, which are well-summarized in the Atlantic Council's 2019 report, "The Untapped Potential of the US-Colombia Partnership."²

In broad terms, Colombia can do much more to create an ecosystem that encourages competitiveness, productivity, and innovation domestically. It should continue to reform its tax structure and modernize tax procedures to increase revenue. Stronger incentives for formalization through improved access to credit and other business services are essential if Colombia's resourceful entrepreneurs are to join regional and global value chains. Using US labor regulations as a framework, Colombia could regulate work by hours, thus permitting a substantial number of young workers to work

shorter hours while contributing to the country's social security reserves. This can be done in combination with varying minimum hourly wages for urban and rural areas.

Similarly, Colombia could look to US business-regulation frameworks to facilitate business creation. Reducing unnecessary norms and barriers for firms and making labor regulations more flexible are also crucial. While Colombia's labor action plan has increased avenues for labor association, specific regulations within it have placed strains on payroll costs for companies, creating a rigid labor environment that disincentivizes foreign investment.

Colombia and the United States should further streamline immigration, customs, and inspections procedures. By accelerating the digitalization of processes and sharing real-time information, the two countries could set a new regional benchmark for agility and speed, while simultaneously enhancing the traceability of goods to undermine illicit activities.

Both countries will gain from full implementation of the United States-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA). For Colombia, this means prioritizing protections for intellectual property rights, labor rights, and the environment, while the United States could resolve cumulation provisions for textiles and increased access to biodiesel products. Under the current agreement, textile cumulation provisions only allow the usage of raw materials that originate from either the United States or Colombia, limiting the attractiveness of the TPA for certain products as a result of pandemic-induced supply chain disruptions. The United States could also grant Colombia tariff exemptions on steel and aluminum and further facilitate imports of Colombian crops such as passion fruit, blueberries, dragon fruit, and papayas, as well as bovine and poultry meat. The potential for agricultural trade remains vastly underexploited.

Removing these lingering structural constraints would clear the way for a coordinated push to fully develop sectors that show promise.

Investment potential

Several multinational pharmaceutical companies have made Colombia a hub for regional production and distribution in recent years. Between 2018 and 2020, Colombian pharmaceutical exports grew at an average annual rate of 11.5 percent by volume and now reach more than

fifty countries.³ Colombia's robust domestic consumer market and comprehensive healthcare system make it attractive for medical tourism, clinical research, and medical device testing companies. The number of medical tourists to Colombia quintupled between 2010 and 2019, to more than twenty-one thousand patients.⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic led to a temporary contraction of these flows, but long-term trends in US healthcare and cost structures will make Colombia extremely attractive to service providers. Colombia should lure major US hospital groups to create full-service surgery and rehabilitation facilities to draw patients from across the hemisphere.

Colombia is also well-positioned in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector, where it has world-class capabilities in contact centers, collection, in-house technology provision, marketing, auditing, and consulting. Colombia ranked third in Latin America in the availability of skilled labor in the 2020 International Institute for Management Development World Talent Ranking and accounted for 17 percent of BPO sales in the region.⁵

Colombia's numerous universities and worker-training options could give it a competitive edge in the emerging Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO) industry. With bots and artificial intelligence handling a growing range of basic customer service tasks, companies are looking for workers with higher-value capabilities in paralegal support, health insurance processing, and cybersecurity. Colombia could become a preferred destination for companies needing these next-generation skills. Doing so would require developing the single most promising area for US-Colombia collaboration in the coming decade: building education, science, training, and research clusters based on public-private partnerships between universities and companies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has simultaneously exposed the weaknesses in traditional education and training models and the pent-up demand for new, flexible approaches to continuing education in the digital age. While millions of students in the region would love to attend US universities, the prohibitively high cost means fewer than fifty thousand can do so each year.⁶ For their part, US universities face dramatic drops in enrollment due to long-term domestic demographic trends, combined with declining demand for the traditional four-year degree. Now is the time to foster large-scale joint ventures between leading US and Colombian universities to offer state-of-the-art virtual and hybrid learning models at price points attractive to

college students and people in their prime working years. This market segment (ages twenty to fifty-five) numbers more than 300 million in LAC.

Using Colombia as a base, these partnerships could develop programs in Spanish, English, and Portuguese that range from full academic degrees to continuing-education certificates tailored to meet the needs of specific industries. In addition to the skills demanded by the KPO sector, these programs could focus on areas that Colombia has already identified as strategic, such as energy, infrastructure, construction, the creative industries, information and communications technology services, agribusiness, manufacturing, chemicals, and life sciences.

Both governments could also introduce incentives to develop applied research centers along the lines pursued by the US National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. The United States could share its expertise in strengthening industry-university collaboration and promoting innovation of research centers that respond to the needs of firms. The United States could also support Colombian efforts to provide technical assistance to firms to increase their productivity and enable them to join value chains requiring more sophisticated processes.⁷

In addition to cultivating local human capital, these joint ventures could attract funding for research and development in renewable energy and biotechnology. According to the World Bank, in 2017, total public and private sector spending on research and development in Colombia was only 0.24 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), a level far below the regional average of 0.8 percent of GDP. The joint ventures proposed herein could make Colombia a much more attractive destination for research and innovation.

Moving forward

There is no time for complacency. The war in Ukraine marks the end of an era in global economic and geopolitical relations. For the past thirty years, Colombia and the United States have reaped the fruits of liberalization and economic opening that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. Millions of Colombians emerged from poverty, and the United States enjoyed extraordinary prosperity. This period also marked China's rise as an industrial, commercial, and military superpower. China's push to enter LAC markets is now visible on numerous fronts, from consumer electronics and

automobiles to large infrastructure investments. And like the rest of its neighbors, Colombia's trade strategy must look to Asia and Europe as well as North America.

As Colombia and the United States navigate the unknowns of this new era, their shared values and security priorities will become ever more important—as will the advantages of the enhanced economic partnership proposed herein. In a world where regional ties are becoming more vital than global ones, Colombia and the United States could model a new kind of political and economic synergy in the Americas. I see no reason why US direct investment in Colombia could not quintuple in the coming decade, generating tens of thousands of jobs in both countries. Achieving this will require a level of ambition, coordination, and commitment comparable to what enabled Plan Colombia. This time, the leadership and execution will depend more on the private sector. Old assumptions should be abandoned as a new generation of entrepreneurs and civic leaders forge a vision for a future attuned to an altered set of realities. But as was the case with Plan Colombia, a bold bet today could yield multiple gains and new opportunities well into the twenty-first century.



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ESSAY 19

ADVANCE ENERGY TRANSFORMATION

Colombia and the United States could offer solutions to the world as it seeks to mitigate the effects of climate change.

THOMAS F. “MACK” MCLARTY, III

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1998: A turning point

ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES of my career was heading the US delegation to Colombian President Andrés Pastrana’s 1998 inauguration.

Like everyone there, I was deeply moved by the beauty of Bogotá in full bloom and the spirit of hope and purpose in the air as the new president declared, “Change begins today.”¹ Pastrana’s election marked the beginning of a new era in Colombia’s history and our nations’ long relationship. By the end of Pastrana’s tenure, his hard-won progress toward peace and stability had laid a firm foundation upon which subsequent leaders and the people of Colombia could build.

Yet, 1998 was remarkable for something else as well. Although we didn’t know it at the time, that year would be the warmest year of the twentieth century,² a milestone on our planet’s feverish climate change journey. Since then, we have experienced nineteen of the hottest years in human history.³ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has issued a series of increasingly terrifying assessments, what United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres calls a “code red for humanity.”⁴ And while massive investments are

needed to build a clean, green future, success is only possible if the costs and rewards are broadly shared.

As the United States and Colombia celebrate 200 years of bilateral relations, together, we can—and must—tackle the greatest challenge of our time.

Specifically, the United States should continue to support Colombia’s pioneering efforts in energy transformation and environmental preservation, geared toward stemming, mitigating, and, where possible, reversing the damaging effects of climate change. Doing so would secure the groundwork for sustainable, inclusive economic growth.

Despite our relative difference in size, our countries are natural partners in this endeavor. From the Amazon to the Andes, the Pacific coast to the Caribbean Sea, Colombia has the second-highest level of biodiversity worldwide, featuring a rich endowment of energy sources. Both countries are already feeling the impact of climate change, from drought to forest fires. As US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken has said, our countries know “these consequences are hitting underserved and marginalized communities in our countries the hardest.”⁵

Colombian President Iván Duque, like US President Joseph R. Biden, is deeply committed to regional and global leadership in this area—as recognized by the International Conservation Caucus Foundation in September 2021, which awarded President Duque the Teddy Roosevelt International Conservation Award “for his leadership in establishing significant new and expanded national parks and his efforts to expand renewable energy, promote sustainability, and protect biodiversity in Colombia.”⁶

Advancing energy transformation

US-Colombia cooperation in the energy sector is key to diversifying the country’s energy resources.

In 2016, Colombia launched its *Plan Energético Nacional Colombia: Ideario Energético 2050*, which aims to diversify and make more resilient the country’s energy resources through investments in wind, solar, and geothermal power.⁷ It was one of five Latin American countries featured at the US-organized April 2021 Leaders’ Summit on Climate. At the summit, President Biden announced that US greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced by 50 to 52 percent, relative to 2005 levels, by 2030. For their part, Colom-

bian leaders reiterated their country’s determination to reduce emissions by 51 percent by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

In July 2021, Colombia enacted an energy transition law to promote investment in hydrogen, renewable energy, and sustainable transport.⁸ And at the UN Climate Change Conference, COP26, in November 2021, Colombia put forward an ambitious updated Nationally Determined Contributions goal reinforcing its commitment to urgent climate action.

Under the US Build Back Better World agenda, Colombia aspires to develop sustainability technology such as carbon capture and storage and wind and solar farms.⁹ The Ministry of Energy and Mines recently published the National Hydrogen Strategy and Road Map to continue the de-carbonization of the energy sector by promoting investment in renewables.¹⁰

Recognizing that private investment is often the most significant barrier to developing renewable energy infrastructure, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has been helping Colombia establish renewable energy auctions.¹¹ Colombia’s third renewable energy auction was completed in October 2021, with power purchase agreements going to eleven solar projects, representing 796 megawatts of combined capacity.¹² This signifies an extraordinary opportunity for US companies to compete and develop transparent, sustainable projects in Colombia.

USAID has also been helping strengthen human capital for a clean energy future through efforts such as the USAID-National Renewable Energy Laboratory partnership, which provides comprehensive workforce training to Colombia’s energy sector.¹³ One specific aim of the collaboration is to help Colombia ensure its energy transformation is gender inclusive.

These initiatives with holistic approaches to community engagement indicate opportunities for further investments. Training Colombians to build and integrate clean energy technology into their grid advances gender parity, infrastructure, and sustainability, among other goals.

Speaking for the trees

Colombia has set an impressive example for combating climate change and deforestation—something other Latin American and Caribbean countries could learn from and replicate.

One signature endeavor is Operation Artemisa, a joint effort launched in 2019 between the Ministries of Environment and Defense to crack down on illegal deforestation and the trafficking of plants and animals inside Colombia's national parks. As Bogotá's *City Paper* journalist Richard Emblin said, "Since launching in 2019, Artemisa's 22,000-strong jungle guardians have managed to recover more than 146,000 hectares of tropical forest belonging to Chiribiquete National Natural Park and the Llanos de Yarí watershed. Hundreds of military sorties have resulted in arrests of persons charged with environmental crimes, including setting fires in protected parkland, toxic chemical dumping, illegal mining, and animal trafficking."¹⁴

In January 2022, the Colombian government expanded Operation Artemisa to patrol the seas, with a goal of protecting coral reefs, atolls, marine wildlife, and the fundamental right to water.¹⁵

Back in 2013, the United States and Colombia advanced mutual progress on environmental protection with the US-Colombia Environmental Cooperation Agreement, which established the Environmental Cooperation Commission to spearhead joint activities to promote conservation and sustainability.¹⁶ Additionally, the Environment Chapter of the US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement requires both countries to maintain current levels of domestic environmental protection and strive for higher environmental standards. The United States has been a strong ally of Colombia's efforts to protect its natural heritage, helping conserve more than four million hectares of land and sea through various projects in the last twenty years.¹⁷

During his October 2021 visit to Colombia—his first trip to South America as a Biden administration cabinet member—Blinken described USAID's Páramos program, which, in his words, is "working with nineteen Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities to protect 500,000 hectares of Colombia's forests."¹⁸ According to Blinken, the collaboration has "already generated 6.2 million tons of carbon offsets."¹⁹

Another USAID program, Amazon Alive, is helping the Colombian government prevent and prosecute environmental crime. According to a USAID fact sheet, expected results include reducing, sequestering, and avoiding the emission of 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, improving natural resource management on 1.3 million hectares of biologically significant lands, increasing the number of formal charges against environmen-

tal crime offenders by 30 percent, and training 10,000 people in sustainable natural resources management, biodiversity conservation, and natural climate solutions.²⁰

The signature outcome of Blinken’s visit, as part of the US-Colombia high-level dialogue, was a joint declaration committing to renew and advance the strategic alliance.²¹ As part of that announcement, the United States pledged \$50 million to support Colombian efforts to combat deforestation in the Amazon, conserve biodiversity, and increase environmental security.

A climate of security

Addressing climate change and energy transformation also impacts other areas of bilateral importance, including combating illegal mining, coca cultivation, and other security challenges that have regional spillover effects.

In 2018, the United States signed a memorandum of understanding with Colombia to expand bilateral cooperation to combat illegal mining and minimize its negative impacts on governance, the economy, and the environment.²² In addition to the clear-cutting²³ of virgin Amazon basin jungle areas to grow coca,²⁴ there is tremendous environmental deterioration in places where narcotraffickers set up field coca processing plants²⁵ and poured leftover precursor chemicals into the ground and waterways. The holistic US-Colombia counternarcotics strategy, launched in October 2021, prioritizes countering environmental crimes that sustain and fuel narcotrafficking groups.²⁶ Efforts include reforestation and building resilience through a robust monitoring and security patrol element.

The recently proposed United States-Colombia Strategic Alliance Act of 2022 by US Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) aims to expand engagement on inclusive economic growth and environmental protection, along with other objectives.²⁷ This would boost the successful track record on bilateral climate action and biodiversity conservation.

Challenge = opportunity

As much as US-Colombian cooperation in these areas is about combatting threats, it also presents tremendous opportunities for the US private sector. Investments bolstering climate resilience and renewable energy sources can expand the economy, create jobs, and promote equity in Colombia, the United States, and worldwide.²⁸

At a time when the global public expects more of the private sector than ever, environmental, social, and governance standards are not a sidebar but a mainstay of successful businesses. Colombia ranks among the top ten developing economies as a foreign direct investment destination. Green growth initiatives in the sustainable ranching and timber sectors are promising collaboration targets as companies seek to boost their environmental scorecards. The US private sector leads in raising standards for investments that protect and support employees, local communities, and the environment. There are several companies installing mining or agricultural projects fueled by wind and solar power generation; this model can and should be replicated.

Moreover, Colombia's strategic location as a link between Central and South America serves as a regional transportation, distribution, and trade hub for which energy innovation can be spread across the hemisphere. And as an active member of regional and international organizations, including the Pacific Alliance, Organization of American States, and UN, Colombia can use its platform to promote mutual aspirations for environmental protection and energy transformation.

For these reasons, continuing and fortifying US-Colombia cooperation on energy transformation and climate change mitigation is in our mutual—and the world's—interest.



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ESSAY 20

DIVERSIFY THE BILATERAL AGENDA

Overcoming Colombia's security challenges will require investment, job creation, and a strong social agenda. The United States should play a key role in this endeavor.

MARIA CLAUDIA LACOUTURE

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TO COMMEMORATE THE BICENTENNIAL of US-Colombia diplomatic relations, we should prioritize areas of cooperation beyond hemispheric security, the fight against transnational organized crime, and drug trafficking—topics that have historically governed our agenda. It is in our countries' best interest to diversify our bilateral strategy, dedicating more attention to sustainable development objectives. This will consolidate decades of economic and security gains in Colombia, positioning the country as a stronger and more strategic partner to the United States.

Strengthening the relationship and deepening trade, investment, and tourism is key to achieving shared economic objectives. It will capitalize on the unlimited opportunities to enhance US-Colombia cooperation in agriculture, agribusiness, clothing, metalworking, and knowledge-based services.

As we work to diversify our agenda, it will be imperative to expand spaces for bilateral dialogue, promote education and job creation, advance Colom-

bia's digital transformation, and support technology transfers and investment in large-scale projects. Such prioritization can help boost development, particularly in Colombia's most vulnerable regions.

With critical US support, Colombia has strengthened the rule of law and increased state presence in remote, conflict-affected territories over the past two decades. Now is the time to build on Plan Colombia and its successor programs by investing in a social agenda that prioritizes education, employment, and well-being in territories historically disenfranchised, where crime continues to prevail.

The time is right

During the UN General Assembly in September 2010, the administrations of President Barack Obama and President Juan Manuel Santos laid the groundwork to expand US-Colombia cooperation beyond security issues to include social development, economic growth, the environment, education, energy, and human rights.

To further advance this agenda, the United States and Colombia should leverage existing mechanisms for bilateral dialogue and engagement, like the US-Colombia High-Level Dialogue (HLD). The HLD should periodically evaluate progress and ensure that counter-narcotics and law enforcement cooperation is complemented with efforts to positively transform territories, including programs to improve public goods provision, roads, land titling, and economic opportunities.

According to local media, the February 2022 bilateral meeting with US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland focused on US-Colombia collaboration in addressing violence and potential security threats, including cybercrime. Certainly, the scope of high-level bilateral meetings should be broader. Moving forward, we should focus on job creation, entrepreneurship opportunities, and export diversification. This will benefit Colombia's most vulnerable regions, particularly if we create a market in the United States for licit agricultural goods produced as part of crop substitution programs, including avocados, cacao, and mangoes.

Future iterations of the HLD and other bilateral meetings should include participation from the private sector. Public-private collaboration is fundamental for the US-Colombia alliance and the success of development programs and efforts to strengthen institutions across the country. Private

sector participation should be intentional and substantive, with participants joining as observers in thematic and preparatory roundtables and offering issue-specific recommendations.

Education and employment

There is no question that reducing corruption, illegality, and violence requires efforts to improve peoples' livelihoods, enhance skills and knowledge, and advance local leadership. This happens by investing in schools, universities, and technical training programs while promoting innovation and economic opportunities through entrepreneurship and employment.

Advancing education, training, and entrepreneurship programs based on labor market needs, particularly in municipalities with fewer possibilities, would generate more economic opportunities and contribute to reducing historic inequalities. These efforts would be particularly impactful if complemented with long-term consulting from specialized US centers and investments in English training, bilingualism, and bilateral exchange programs.

We are a country of micro and small businesses. According to the Ministry of Labor, these represent more than 90 percent of Colombia's productive sector and 80 percent of total employment.¹ These businesses need to be strengthened via training, technology transfer, digital transformation programs, and increased financing and technical advice to meet the needs of new industries. While efforts to support small and medium enterprises in Colombia are considerable, they are limited in scope and budget and would benefit from a stronger partnership with the United States.

More investment and trade

The United States is Colombia's leading trading partner, receiving 27 percent of Colombia's exports in 2021.² The United States is also Colombia's principal foreign investor, accounting for 19 percent of total foreign direct investment between January and September 2021.³ Moreover, the United States is the foremost supplier of foreign travelers, accounting for 24 percent of international tourists in 2021.⁴

Colombia must continue to attract US investment for extensive infrastructure and development projects, including secondary roads and 5G proj-

ects, and the modernization of ports and airports. As Colombia's principal investor, the United States should not lose ground, since China would pick up the slack, as evidenced by its participation in the Bogotá metro system, mining projects in the Department of Antioquia, and increased trade. Recognizing that no US firm placed bids on the Bogotá metro or on any of Colombia's large road projects in the past six years,⁵ the United States should strive to position itself as Colombia's partner of choice. This would help to counter China's growing economic influence in the region.

To secure more US investment in infrastructure, it is essential to make progress on issues such as the double taxation agreement between the United States and Colombia. The approximately 450 US companies doing business in Colombia in 2022 generate more than 100,000 direct and indirect jobs.⁶ Colombia could maximize this positive impact by providing more legal certainty, which allows for long-term planning and investments aligned with social development objectives.

In addition, we must accelerate full implementation of the US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) so that competitive Colombian products reap the benefits of entry into the United States. Here, the United States could speed up and harmonize the approval process for Colombian agricultural and livestock products pre-approved under the TPA, including passionflowers, yellow dragon fruits, blueberries, poultry, and bovine meat.

Likewise, actions must be prioritized to allow greater trade accumulation between the two countries and with the Pacific Alliance to realize emerging opportunities in value chains. We should also encourage TPA administrators to update the agreement using available tools and mechanisms under the established free trade commission. Implementing technology transfer programs to improve product development and competitiveness and enhancing access to public procurement are also critical areas for future bilateral engagement.

Looking Forward

Continued bipartisan support in the United States and renewed commitment from all sectors to the US-Colombia partnership are key for the future of our alliance. To move the relationship forward, alignment of interests and close coordination between the public and private

sectors in both countries is essential, complimented by strong support from civil society.

The time is right to diversify and expand the bilateral agenda, for diplomacy and the public sector to work side-by-side with business to expand trade, investment, and tourism, prioritizing a vision of social development that strengthens Colombia and its democratic institutions. This would position Colombia as an even stronger US partner in promoting stability and prosperity across the region.

Our US partners are aware this is not the time for loose ends. The priority must be our shared hemisphere, especially when other powers are eager to occupy economic, political, and geostrategic spaces.

Although there are two parties in this relationship, the push for diversification should come from us Colombians. To negotiate more effectively, we should understand how valuable we are as a partner to the United States. Modern diplomacy should be based on shared interests and continued respect for democratic principles and sovereignty, with a clear purpose and feasible objectives, while remaining assertive when faced with challenges.



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SPECIAL INVESTMENT CASE STUDY

VICKI HOLLUB

*President and CEO, Occidental Petroleum Corporation;
Former Chair, US-Colombia Business Council*

WHEN I WAS ASKED TO BECOME the inaugural chair of the US-Colombia Business Council in 2017, I agreed without hesitation. My work in supporting two different administrations to help broaden and deepen bilateral social and economic ties is rooted in the extensive history of Occidental Petroleum (“Oxy”) in Colombia.

Almost forty years have passed since a mid-April morning in 1983 when Oxy began to drill a well in the Cano Limon field in a remote part of Colombia’s Arauca Department along the Venezuelan border. Oxy’s geologists believed that a major discovery was possible even though other companies had explored the area without promising results.

The first traces of hydrocarbons were found in a matter of weeks. Increasing evidence showed that a major oil field existed. Roughly two years later, commercial production had begun with an average yield of 8,000 light crude barrels per day (bpd). It would eventually reach a peak of 300,000 bpd. That these geologists were proven correct not only helped change the course of Oxy’s history but also helped propel Colombia from a major importer of crude oil to a substantial exporter. It also spurred significant new investment in Colombia’s resource-rich hydrocarbons sector.

Oxy’s discovery occurred during a particularly challenging time for Colombia. While the first positive assessments of the Cano Limon field were being recorded, Time magazine devoted its cover to the spiraling debt in Latin America that would envelop the region for many years. The inability of several countries in the region to honor their obligations helped foster an international financial crisis that led many governments to adopt severe austerity measures. The social cost was immense: a decline in income per capita, a rise in unemployment, and general economic malaise. Yet, Colombia weathered the storm and consistently met its debt commitments, leading Euromoney magazine to label Colombia as “the golden exception.”

As in prior decades, responsible fiscal management undergirded the ability of Colombian authorities to manage a complex set of economic challenges. The discovery of massive new oil reserves played an important role in supporting fiscal stability. According to an analysis by the US consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, between 1985 and 1993, Colombia's GDP growth increased by 1.5 percent annually due to the development of hydrocarbons stemming from the Cano Limon discovery. By 2022, the field had yielded 1.5 billion barrels of oil and generated more than \$20 billion in total revenue.

The robust partnership between Colombia and Oxy launched over four decades ago continues to this day. We have taken great pride in being part of Colombia's past and remain very optimistic about its future. I have seen first-hand the tremendous resilience of the Colombian people and the extraordinary talent and determination of its workforce, which is among the best. We have also expanded our partnership with Colombia's state oil company, Ecopetrol, to include operations in the prolific Permian Basin in Texas.

Since the beginning of Oxy's engagement with Colombia, we have not only sought to be a partner of choice but also to help address some of the more pressing economic challenges facing the country. One such challenge is confronting the realities of a changing climate and fostering an energy transition that can help protect and sustain future generations. Colombia has shown extraordinary leadership and commitment to a sustainable energy transition. It has established ambitious goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including setting targets fully in line with the Paris Agreement: e.g., lowering emissions by 51 percent by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. Colombia has made impressive investments in alternative energy sources in recent years, and according to a recent report issued by the Ministry of Mines and Energy, significantly more are on the horizon.

Like Colombia, Oxy is taking bold steps to innovate for a low carbon future. We are reducing greenhouse gas emissions across our oil and gas, midstream, and chemical operations while providing products and services to help others do the same, all to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Adopting innovative technologies can accelerate Colombia's ability to achieve its ambitious climate goals. The installation of carbon capture equipment in

power plants and manufacturing facilities can also help since captured CO₂ can be stored safely and permanently deep underground. With more than 60 million hectares of natural forests, Colombia also has enormous potential to sell carbon credits while protecting its forest, mangroves, and other natural solutions for storing carbon.

I am genuinely excited about what the future holds for Colombia and the historic partnership between our countries, especially in areas that support an energy transition so critical to the safety and security of our respective peoples and the planet. In fifty years, when the moment arrives to celebrate the 250th anniversary of US-Colombia relations, this unique partnership will be even stronger. Generations of Colombians and Americans will be the better for it.



VIDEOS

ECOPETROL AND ISA

Sustainability and energy transition: A bet on Colombia's comprehensive development and growth

THE WAY WE RELATE to one another and do business in the world has changed. Beyond delivering results or profits for shareholders, companies are expected to be key players in countries' development and sustainability, acting responsibly with the environment and society to ensure a better future for all.

Colombia and the United States have established and strengthened bilateral ties, jointly advancing in this global dynamic, always coordinating around the shared values of democracy, security, free trade, and prosperity.

While dialogue and cooperation have been fundamental pillars for a mutually beneficial relationship, in changing environments like the current one, we call for governments and companies to continue evolving, facing challenges, and innovating side-by-side to rebuild our social fabrics, prevent and mitigate the impacts of climate change, and boost economic gains for both countries.

Business leaders across all sectors of Colombian industry play a key role in guaranteeing these advancements, promoting sustainable development, and maintaining a robust bilateral relationship with the United States, ensuring that Colombia remains the United States' closest strategic partner in the Western Hemisphere.

For the energy and oil and gas sectors, in particular, it is critical to maintain responsible, ethical, safe, and efficient operations, contribute to ecosystem conservation and biodiversity, be guarantors of the energy transition and infrastructure, and promote the development and well-being of communities to consolidate sustainable strategies that result in improvements in their quality of life. Likewise, we must take important steps in the integrated hydrocarbon chain, electrification, diversification, and the decarbon-

ization of operations through investments in new non-conventional energy businesses.

By doing this, we all win.



Use your phone to scan the QR code and access the video.



“Global cooperation is key to advancing environmental protection, while at the same time, supporting economic development in Colombia and in countries around the world. From tropical rainforests to alpine tundra ecosystems, Colombia is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, and its natural resources play an important role in sequestering carbon emissions from the atmosphere. The United States has already worked in partnership with Colombia to protect its natural resources as part of my Tropical Forest and Coral Reef Conservation Act program through a \$10 million debt-for-nature agreement, which has helped lay a strong foundation that all nations, working together, can continue to build on.”

ROBERT PORTMAN

US Senator (R-OH), US Senate



“As the impacts of climate change intensify, we urgently need collaborative policy making, improved early warning systems, nature-based solutions, and innovations in financing adaptation to build more resilient communities and institutions. The United States and Colombia are uniquely positioned to work side-by-side in favor of a safer, inclusive, and more sustainable world.”

KATHY BAUGHMAN MCLEOD

*Senior Vice President and Director,
Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center*



PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE

ESSAYS 21-23

21

Partner for Sustainable Pathways *page 164*

PAULA CABALLERO

*Regional Managing Director, Latin America,
The Nature Conservancy*

SARAH GAMMAGE

*Director of Public Policy and Government Relations for
Latin America, The Nature Conservancy*

22

Deepen Conservation Partnerships *page 171*

JOHN B. GANTT

President, International Conservation Caucus Foundation

23

Innovate to Protect Our Ecosystems *page 177*

SANDRA VALENZUELA

Chief Executive Officer, WWF Colombia

VIDEO *page 183*

MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG

*Founder, Bloomberg LP & Bloomberg Philanthropies; Chair
of Climate Finance Leadership Initiative (CFLI)*

ESSAY **21**

PARTNER FOR SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS

The United States and Colombia can play a key role in supporting green recovery and nature-positive futures by applying the commitments and frameworks they have pledged to uphold to shift the balance of fossil fuels and renewables in their energy sourcing.

PAULA CABALLERO

Regional Managing Director, Latin America, The Nature Conservancy

SARAH GAMMAGE

Director of Public Policy and Government Relations for Latin America, The Nature Conservancy

THE CONVERGENCE OF CRISES ON A PLANETARY SCALE collides in ways that translate into exceptional opportunities and responsibilities for Latin America. The vast natural riches of the continent host more than 50 percent of the world's biodiversity, one-third of its freshwater, and underpin its vital and increasing role as a global breadbasket. The immense landscapes of its forests, watersheds, and coasts also harbor a significant percentage of the nature-based climate solutions needed to shift emission trajectories.¹ Latin America and the Caribbean hold the largest reforestation potential to mitigate climate change.² But there is a narrow window to effect the transformation needed in a region with spiraling, unabated deforestation, where agriculture and ranching drive 70 percent of land-use change,

and one of the world's most important carbon sinks—the Amazon basin—veers toward an irreversible tipping point.³

The United States and Colombia have a unique opportunity to intervene at this decisive juncture through diplomacy, assistance programs, and commitments to trade agreements sanctioning products that cause deforestation. The two countries have long-standing bilateral relations; in the last few years, high-level dialogues have embraced shared agendas across social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Both have sought to increase the collective ambition in climate change negotiations as part of the High Ambition Coalition.⁴ A drive for bolder action has been prominent in their engagement around climate and biodiversity at the recent United Nations (UN) Conference of Parties, the Paris Agreement in Glasgow (COP26), and in the working groups in 2022 supporting the global Convention on Biological Diversity.

Beyond pledges, diplomacy, trade, and official development assistance, investments and efforts must focus on advancing nature-based solutions that shift the greenhouse gas emissions curve while increasing ecosystem resilience, ensuring that the poor, smallholders, and landless benefit. A significant proportion of these emissions (between 35 percent and 60 percent) in Latin America come from the agricultural, forestry, and land-use sectors; these stand at 62 percent in Colombia. Fulfilling commitments under the Paris Agreement will require that Colombia take action across these sectors.

Moreover, as Colombia and other Latin American economies emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and respond to the challenges it has left in its wake, prioritizing investments in nature-based solutions is crucial to stem the planetary emergency and protect the critical underpinnings of the region's economies.⁵ According to *Fastmarkets*, “GDP levels at the start of 2021 fell back to levels not seen since 2011. Latin America lost an entire decade of economic progress.”⁶ In Colombia, gross domestic product fell to levels not seen since 2015.

Yet, as countries seek to stimulate growth and promote recovery, analysis from the UN Environmental Programme underscores that Latin American countries risk missing a unique opportunity to reorient their economies toward just and sustainable growth.⁷ Given the vast natural endowment of the continent and that, on average, 23 percent of the land is under the stewardship of Indigenous peoples and local communities—28 percent in

Colombia—nature-positive, carbon-neutral, and more equitable development trajectories that uphold Indigenous rights must be supported and advanced.

Countries like Colombia that have made significant investments and commitments to meet their climate goals are vital partners for the United States, despite the challenges inherent in achieving economy-wide shifts to lower carbon trajectories. In approving a national carbon tax on fossil fuels in late 2016, Colombia was a frontrunner in climate finance. In 2017, Colombia approved a measure allowing carbon credits to be used against the new carbon tax, permitting entities to offset 100 percent of their tax liability. From 2017 to 2021, \$507 million was levied through the carbon tax and disbursed to cover operating costs for the protection, preservation, restoration, and sustainable use of strategic areas and ecosystems through reforestation programs and payment for environmental services.⁸

The Leticia Pact

The Leticia Pact, spearheaded by President Iván Duque and signed by seven South American Amazon countries, also signaled Colombia's pledge to tackle deforestation and the illegal activities that threaten the integrity of this unique biome. It spoke to the recognition that strong, aligned political will is needed to bring about the necessary structural shifts. Leaders signed a 52-point action plan. However, implementation has been weak, and traditional communities and Indigenous peoples are demanding a greater voice and agency in this pact.

There is a huge opportunity and need for continued leadership to effectively reshape extractive modes of production and align incentives toward regenerative practices, sustainable land management, and biodiversity protection that will deliver multiple benefits across this biome. For example, greening development pathways and eliminating deforestation and environmental degradation through trade regulations that enforce more transparency in supply chains offer historic opportunities to address existing inequalities, promote green growth, and tackle the root causes of entrenched poverty and economic insecurity. These same initiatives can also uphold Indigenous land rights, enable more secure titling, and resource oversight mechanisms that increase transparency and traceability in supply chains,

reducing the threats against existing protected areas and Indigenous communities.

Deforestation and decarbonization

However, as the Climate Action Tracker analysis underscores, “Reducing emissions from deforestation is a vital part of Colombia’s climate action, but to fully decarbonize its economy, Colombia would need to focus on other sectors, especially energy and transport.”⁹ Colombia updated its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) target in December 2020, but the NDC demonstrates that it intends to rely primarily on land-based mitigation measures to meet 70 percent of the reductions needed for its updated target. Moreover, despite bold commitments to extend new protected areas through initiatives like Manacacías National Park, deforestation levels continue to rise, and current forest protection policies are not adequately resourced or enforced.

Methane

In addition to ensuring that sufficient resources are forthcoming for forest protection and enforcement, it is essential to strengthen collaboration on other fronts. There is ample room for targeted collaboration around methane. At COP26, the United States, with partners, led a pledge signed by more than one hundred countries to reduce methane emissions by 30 percent. According to the US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, there was a record increase in methane emissions in 2021.¹⁰ Colombia is also actively supporting the Global Methane Pledge and has developed a standard for methane emissions introduced in early 2022 that focuses primarily on emissions from mining and extractives.

The Colombian Ministry of Energy and Mines aims to contribute to the pledges made at COP26 to reduce methane leaks by 2.7 million gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. However, in both the United States and Colombia, the leading source of methane emissions is livestock. In Colombia, 32 percent of emissions are from enteric fermentation, so there is a valuable opportunity to collaborate further on this front.

30x30

Similarly, the Americas need to live up to ambitious commitments on restoration and achieve its obligations to protect 30 percent of land and sea by 2030, an initiative known as 30 by 30.¹¹ Colombia is taking courageous steps to develop a new National Biodiversity Law, consulting broadly across different sectors and reviewing other countries' laws and policies. This will enable it to meet its 30 by 30 promises eight years ahead of schedule, as announced at COP26.

Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Panama announced the creation of the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor initiative at COP26,¹² which would increase the size of their protected territorial waters, creating a fishing-free corridor covering more than 500,000 square kilometers (200,000 square miles) in one of the world's most significant migratory routes for sea turtles, whales, sharks, and rays. The United States has played an important role in spearheading increased protection for the world's oceans; this is another critical front for enhanced and continued hemispheric collaboration along the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Prior to COP26, US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry announced US support for regional initiatives such as Renewable Energy for Latin America and the Caribbean (RELAC), through which countries will endeavor to achieve a regional goal of at least 70 percent renewable energy capacity by 2030. As an active member of RELAC, Colombia has committed to reaching at least 70 percent of renewable energy participation in the region's electricity matrix by 2030. Both countries should continue to pursue these commitments actively, leading to more ambitious and rapid decarbonization.

Colombia is well-positioned to act as an effective mediator at the September 2022 Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biodiversity in Kunming, China and the next UN Climate Change Conference, COP27, in Egypt. Colombia has an established global presence as a country that helps bridge positions, and it should leverage its domestic efforts to call for increased action on climate, biodiversity, and finance across these critical agendas.

Looking ahead

The United States and Colombia can play a key role in engaging on the global and regional stage supporting green recovery and nature-positive futures. They can use the commitments and frameworks they have pledged to uphold to shift the balance of fossil fuels and renewables in their energy sourcing. The two countries can potentially follow the route of the European Union¹³ and the United Kingdom¹⁴ in legislating that trade involve only deforestation- and conversion-free commodities such as soy, beef, coffee, cacao, and palm oil. They can support Indigenous guardians of the forests and uphold their human and environmental rights. They can pledge to protect oceans and restore reefs. They can lead with funding that resources their commitments to sustainability at home and in Latin America.

As Colombia and the United States celebrate two hundred years of diplomatic history, the time is ripe to leverage this partnership to boldly address the environmental challenges of our time.



Endnotes

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ESSAY 22

DEEPEN CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS

The United States has had a long, valuable collaboration with Colombia to conserve nature, biodiversity, and sustainable natural resources; prospects for further progress are promising.

JOHN B. GANTT

President, International Conservation Caucus Foundation

COLOMBIA IS THE MOST IMPORTANT US ALLY in South America. Our relations include close and strategic cooperation on security, countering narcotics, human rights, and rule-of-law matters. But it is not always perceived how long and valuable our collaboration has been in conserving nature, biodiversity, and sustainable natural resources, due mainly to active support by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including Audubon, Conservation International, the International Conservation Caucus Foundation (ICCF), Rainforest Alliance, Rainforest Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society, and World Wildlife Fund.

Colombia is the second most biodiverse country on Earth. More than 10 percent of all species on our planet are found in this one medium-sized nation. The diversity of birds is especially notable; there are at least 1,900 bird species (the most in the world), from a global total of 10,800. This abundance now attracts growing numbers of birders: The National Audubon

Society has helped support the creation of hundreds of miles of bird-watching trails that have attracted considerable numbers of US tourists.

Fundamental to conservation in the country is the extensive natural parks and reserves network: fifty-nine sites totaling 65,000 square miles or 14 percent of the national territory. In the early days of the parks movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the US National Park Service provided vital training and field help to Colombia, including preparing some of the first park management plans. The Peace Corps also assisted with long-term help. The parks included the gems of the system, Tayrona and Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The International Conservation Corps, an affiliate of ICCF, regularly provides teams of volunteer park experts from the United States and Canada to assist with the preparation of park and protected area management, the visitor center, and interpretation plans.

The parks network is still growing. Colombia recently expanded the park at Tatama with help from the private Rainforest Trust, and further expansions are under study at Sierra Nevada and Malpelo, among other sites. The Colombian government of President Iván Duque endorsed the global goal of “30 by 30” (30 percent of all land and water territory under some degree of protection by the year 2030).

Tourism, much of it nature-based, is playing an increasing role in economic development. Foreign visitors grew 300 percent from 2006 to 2019, including large numbers of US nationals. Tourism grew especially fast (8.5 percent per year) after the peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia was signed in 2016. This opened up many rural areas that had been closed due to insecurity. By the end of 2019, the tourism industry employed 1.4 million people and contributed \$19 billion to the economy, equal to 3.8 percent of the gross domestic product.¹ Then came COVID-19 and a sharp decline in tourism, but Colombians are already rebounding by focusing on services, security, new infrastructure, and unique landscapes. As Colombians say with pride, Colombia is the only place on Earth where a visitor can sit on a tropical beach (at Santa Marta) and look up to see snow-capped mountains.

US-Colombia parks partnerships

The most significant factor in US-Colombian cooperation for conservation has been through USAID programs. As part of its global mission, USAID initially concentrated on issues of industrial growth, infrastructure, and housing. But since the early 1990s, nature conservation, especially in the sense of biodiversity, has been a priority. Colombia benefited from Parks in Peril (PiP), which for seventeen years after 1990, was the most extensive conservation program in Latin America. In partnership with the Nature Conservancy, it aimed to raise “paper parks” to a minimum level of long-term protection and active visitation by the public.

As elsewhere in the region, many parks in Colombia had been proclaimed by the government but not actually protected from inappropriate or illegal development by agricultural land invaders, loggers, illegal miners, and the drug trade. Parks in Peril worked in Colombia over several years to raise park sites to what was called “consolidation,” typically meaning that park boundaries had been marked, a visitor center had been built and staffed, park guards were trained and on duty, and local communities benefited from jobs and tourism income. La Playa, Chingaza, and Cahulnazi were among the parks that PiP helped.

Although PiP has ended, the conservation mission remains critical to USAID and Colombia. The largest such program has been USAID’s Natural Wealth, a multi-million-dollar 2017-2022 program. Working principally in the dry forests of the Caribbean region and the seasonally-flooded freshwater regions of the eastern plains, Natural Wealth has improved the management of parks while strengthening their governance by local communities and Indigenous tribes managing and legally defending their lands.

Colombia has massive potential for nature tourism in public parks and private reserves. Such projects can deliver jobs and prosperity while preserving landscapes (especially forests) vital to mitigating climate change. Moving forward, US government agencies, particularly USAID, should continue to find new ways to partner with Colombia on nature tourism projects. US development assistance, NGO support, and public-private partnerships to leverage Colombian investment are crucial to the success of these efforts. The ICCF’s work to strengthen political will for conservation will help facilitate these partnerships and raise awareness among Colombia’s political

elite about emerging opportunities in nature tourism and other preservation efforts.

Conservation caucuses

The ability of USAID to support conservation via Natural Wealth and other efforts worldwide is made possible by the biodiversity line item passed each year by the US Congress within the State and Foreign Operations appropriation. This item grew from about \$100 million annually in the early 1990s to more than \$400 million, due mainly to the House and Senate members' consistent support of the US Congressional International Conservation Caucus (ICC), founded in 2003.

The advantage of a congressional caucus is it allows any member interested in a topic an opportunity to become more engaged and informed, regardless of committee assignments. Of the dozens of caucuses in the US Congress, the ICC is the second biggest, with almost one-third of the total membership of the House and Senate. Its mission is “helping the United States lead public and private international partnerships that provide stewardship of natural resources for habitat and biodiversity protection, poverty reduction, economic development, and regional security.”²

The larger caucuses typically have a 501(c)3 organization affiliated, which arranges events of interest to the members, such as expert briefings, panel discussions, and field visits. The ICCF plays that role for the ICC. Beginning in 2015 with Colombia, the ICCF Group has extended the caucus “model” to more than fifteen foreign countries throughout the global tropics. Members attend expert meetings in the capital city, visit parks, and are invited to international events. The ICCF itself does not have any set agenda for conservation: the issues engaged are those raised by the legislative members. In addition to Colombia, in Latin America, the ICCF Group has staff and active caucuses in Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and several islands of the Eastern Caribbean, with further expansion anticipated to Paraguay and Ecuador.

Of these international caucuses, Colombia's remains the most active and successful. More than forty members belong to the core conservation caucus and a parallel caucus that concentrates on ocean issues. Membership has included the speaker of the lower house and vice president of the Senate. The Colombian conservation caucus has also encouraged regional activism

by Colombian members of the Andean Parliament, Amazon Parliament, Leticia Pact, and observer status at gatherings such as the Biodiversity Convention Conference of the Parties. Chiefly through the interest and engagement of these caucus members, the Colombian Congress has adopted the following new conservation laws in recent years:

- **Approval of 2013 Minamata Convention on Mercury.**
Led to Colombia's formal accession to the Minamata Convention on Mercury.
- **Law for the Protection of Andean Highlands (Páramos).**
Regulates activities in and around the Andean highlands for the restoration and sustainable use of these integral ecosystems.
- **Police Code to Fight Use of Mercury in Illegal Gold Mining.**
Prohibits the use of chemical substances in the irregular removal of minerals.
- **Plastic Bags Ban, Isle of San Andrés.** Phases out single-use plastics in the Colombian archipelago.
- **Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol.** Adds the fifth modification to the Montreal Protocol for the ozone layer.
- **Approval of the Global Green Growth Initiative Project.**
The Global Institute for Green Growth is established in Colombia as an international organization.

By adding an element of “political will,” the caucus movement engages political elites with conservation issues, encouraging them to take ownership of them, potentially reducing dependence on outside assistance.

Colombia is increasingly taking responsibility for and making notable strides toward conserving its natural resources. Still, larger domestic appropriations for national parks and protected areas will be crucial to future progress. The creation of sizeable new protected areas, particularly in the forested zones, is a possibility and should be a priority—as recently demon-

strated by Rainforest Trust's commitment to subsidize the creation of a new national park. There is substantial potential for partnering with US-based NGOs and public-private partnerships for nature tourism infrastructure. In partnership with the US Government and with US-based nonprofits, foundations, and other private-sector actors, Colombia can preserve and leverage its vast biodiversity and natural wealth for the benefit of the Colombian people and for our shared future.



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ESSAY **23**

INNOVATE TO PROTECT OUR ECOSYSTEMS

Mobilizing financial mechanisms and methods to reduce deforestation, preserve Colombia's biodiversity, and promote social inclusion and governance are ongoing challenges. Here's how Colombia and the United States could accomplish these goals.

SANDRA VALENZUELA

Chief Executive Officer, WWF Colombia

US-COLOMBIA COOPERATION is often viewed through the prisms of security or economic interests. Yet, bilateral conservation and biodiversity protection efforts are ongoing and have the potential to become an increasingly important component of our shared agenda. In the 2021 National Intelligence Estimate, President Joseph R. Biden's administration said Colombia is among eleven countries globally that would be "especially helpful in mitigating future risks to US interests" in terms of climate change.¹ Our two countries are well positioned to work side-by-side to address environmental concerns, protect biodiversity, and safeguard natural resources for the entire region.

Colombia's protected and conserved areas

As the second most biodiverse country globally, Colombia plays a key role in preserving our planet's natural resources. The country's commitment to conservation efforts is reflected in the establishment of

its Sistema Nacional de Áreas Protegidas (National Protected Areas System or SINAP), which covers 31 million hectares (ha), equivalent to 15 percent of the country's territory. The SINAP includes all of Colombia's protected areas, providing essential ecosystem services to local populations, including water provisioning and regulation.

Protected areas produce the necessary water to generate 50 percent of Colombia's hydro-energy (estimated at \$502 million) and provide drinking water for more than twenty-five million people (an annual value of \$491 million). In an average year, water provision and regulation services from national parks are expected to add at least \$2.3 billion to the gross domestic product.²

Troublingly, around 24 percent of Colombia's freshwater ecosystems show transformations caused by urbanization, agriculture expansion, cattle ranching, and infrastructure development.³ Future water yield will be largely determined by land usage and the impacts of climate change. Data indicates that Colombia will be unable to sustain the hydrological functionality of its watersheds without safeguarding forest, water, and coastal ecosystems via the designation and effective management of key protected areas. This would not only protect biodiversity, but also support ecosystem services such as water provision and climate regulation, enhancing community well-being.

Recognizing this, the Colombian government approved the National Policy for the Consolidation of the SINAP (CONPES No. 4050) in November 2021, aimed at "reducing the drivers of degradation of the natural and cultural values conserved in the National System of Protected Areas." However, Colombia's SINAP faces a significant structural financial gap to achieve its climate and biodiversity policy goals by 2030. Barriers to addressing this gap can be grouped into two interconnected categories—both of which would benefit from a stronger partnership with the United States. The first is the inadequate capacity of environmental authorities to access and sequence funding instruments that the government has or plans to put in place. The second is management inefficiencies due to a limited capacity to develop and implement sustainable land practices and climate change adaptation measures in protected areas and adjacent private lands.

As a staunch supporter of the climate change agenda, the United States could support Colombia's efforts to preserve natural resources, biodiversity,

and cultural heritage through the SINAP. It should also build on, replicate, and expand existing initiatives to support water regulation and provision in Colombia—the two most important ecosystem services. For example, the Nature Conservancy’s Water Funds Partnership help ensure that upstream communities are compensated for protecting the lands and freshwater ecosystems that supply water to cities.⁴ To date, Water Funds has helped safeguard water sources for sixteen million people in Bogotá, Valle del Cauca, Medellín, Cali, Cúcuta, Cartagena, Santa Marta, and Ciénaga.⁵ It has also contributed to improved water governance among the various Colombian agencies that oversee water security.

Implementing Heritage Colombia

The strategic vision of Colombia’s SINAP 2030 policy was informed by a baseline assessment of finance for protected area management,⁶ recognizing that the system was already facing a \$15 million annual shortfall prior to COVID-19. The assessment identified the need for a new financial model to address existing financial challenges.

In 2015, Heritage Colombia (HECO)⁷ was established as a possible solution—an innovative strategy to expand coverage and support the effective management and governance of Colombia’s SINAP and its surrounding landscapes. Led by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, in partnership with Parques Nacionales Naturales, Patrimonio Natural, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wildlife Fund, HECO contributes to the long-term conservation of more than 20 million hectares. Following the results-based payments approach of the Project Finance for Permanence (PFP), an initiative from the world of finance, HECO addresses funding gaps by leveraging diverse funding sources and significantly increasing baseline government investments in the initial implementation period. It also builds a portfolio of long-term sustainable financing mechanisms with public and private capital, allowing for the development and financing of conservation policies and programs far into the future.⁸

Given HECO PFP’s vast scope and estimated \$1.2 billion cost, implementation will occur in phases. Phase one seeks to secure permanent protection for 8.7 million hectares of terrestrial protected areas and at least 10 million hectares of marine protected areas and their surrounding landscapes.⁹ In

its first ten years, HECO PFP aims to attract \$100 million in new investment from government, private sector, foundations, and individual donors for four selected landscapes that include more than 500 protected areas. In the next ten years, the PFP would secure new resources from the Colombian government (way above baseline investments), generating the projected \$7.2 million needed annually to address the structural financial gap.

The United States can play a critical role in supporting HECO. With over two decades of partnership, the United States has facilitated more than \$60 million in investments to promote activities to preserve, protect, or effectively manage Colombia's natural and biological resources.¹⁰ In addition to providing HECO-specific investments in Colombia, the United States can also leverage its National Park Service experience and partner with Colombia's SINAP to develop policies and programs for protected area management. These policies and programs could entail planning for the management of conservation areas in relation to ecotourism, capacity building in the "Leave No Trace" methodology,¹¹ workshops on the design and maintenance of paths for visitors and sustainable infrastructure, technical assistance to improve public-private interaction in ecotourism, and climate change assessments for vulnerability management and as a criterion to declare new protected areas.

HECO's initial interventions to protect and maintain at least ten million terrestrial ecosystems—including its expansion of terrestrial and marine protected areas—indirectly benefit approximately 34 percent of Colombia's population. The estimated avoided emissions are 8.9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO_{2e}) by HECO's first ten years and 45.9 million tCO_{2e} cumulatively over its thirty-year lifespan. This means that HECO will contribute between 14 and 18 percent of Colombia's targeted reduction in emissions from deforestation by 2030.¹²

Expanding HECO's impact

The US and Colombian governments have a strong track record of collaboration to protect biodiversity. They have worked together to mobilize investments and develop financial mechanisms to support protection and conservation programs. For example, the 2004 debt-for-nature swap agreement (based on the US Tropical Forest Conservation Act [TFA])

of 1998) helped secure increased resources to combat deforestation, preserve biodiversity, promote social inclusion, and enhance governance in protected areas.¹³ The agreement remains active and contributes to the conservation and sustainable management of Colombia's tropical forests, recognizing that tropical deforestation and forest degradation are growing challenges worldwide.

US-Colombia cooperation also led to negotiating a financial endowment scheme of \$10 million, managed by Colombian Trust Fund *Fondo Acción* (Action Fund), to directly invest \$5 million in grants and \$5 million in an endowment.¹⁴ Lessons from this experience and other TFA financial mechanisms could be applied to HECO financial management.

Moving forward, the US and Colombian governments could work together to identify and structure financial mechanisms to fund HECO, including green bonds and impact investment funds. Collaboration on this front would contribute to the sustainable financial management of Colombia's protected areas, supporting environmental services and preserving our planet's biodiversity. The United States could also aid Colombia's efforts to establish public-private alliances at the national and international levels to advance sustainability and income diversification for protected areas. Implementing financial mechanisms such as short-term donor support, government budget allocation, taxes, and park revenues could also help achieve a broader, more comprehensive financial strategy.

Increasing investment in productive landscapes surrounding protected areas will require coordination, efficiency, and leveraging private finance and investments from different partners. HECO is well-positioned to be a fundamental strategy in Colombia's fight against climate change and the conservation of protected areas. And it's a strategy that aligns with our shared bilateral interests.



Endnotes

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VIDEO

MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG

*Founder, Bloomberg LP & Bloomberg Philanthropies; Chair
of Climate Finance Leadership Initiative (CFLI)*

Use your phone to scan the QR code and access the video.



“As President of the Colombian Red Cross, I have witnessed the great impact of implementing holistic strategies for migrants, focused on reinstating their rights and providing access to essential goods and services. Our invitation is for all humanitarian actors, governments, and organizations to prioritize effective stabilization and integration, stigma reduction, and anti-discrimination efforts toward populations that migrate. These migrants bring with them not only great need, but also capabilities and skills that can enhance their new communities.”

JUDITH CARVAJAL DE ÁLVAREZ

President, Colombian Red Cross



“Colombia’s special relationship with the United States is like no other and has served to counter transnational threats and enhance regional stability. Importantly, this partnership is built on shared values and democratic principles. Just look at how Colombia’s kind, forward leaning posture on the Venezuelan migrant crisis serves to calm matters and adds yet another dimension to helping keep Venezuelan spillover effects in check. In short, the Colombians are better off for their tight bond with the United States, and we are safer in the United States thanks to the sacrifices of our Colombian brothers and sisters.”

JUAN CRUZ

Former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere, US National Security Council; Senior Advisor (Non-resident), Americas Program and Director, Argentina-US Strategic Forum, Center for Strategic & International Studies



ADDRESSING INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION

ESSAYS 24–25

“Since at least 2015, Colombia has demonstrated remarkable leadership, with uneven support from the international community, to address the unprecedented migration sparked by Venezuela’s collapse into chaos. Rather than respond with nativism and overzealous border enforcement or buckle under the weight of such a large, displaced population, Colombia—across two quite different presidential administrations—rose to the challenge. In so doing, it provides invaluable lessons to countries throughout the Americas, including the United States, and well beyond, in an era of accelerating dislocation.”

DAN RESTREPO

Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress; Former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs, US National Security Council



ESSAYS

24

Prioritize Internally Displaced People *page 188*

ELIZABETH FERRIS

Research Professor, Institute for the Study of International Migration, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University

25

Support a Holistic Migration Strategy *page 195*

ANDREW SELEE

President, Migration Policy Institute

DIEGO CHAVES- GONZÁLEZ

Senior Manager, Latin America and Caribbean Initiative, Migration Policy Institute

ESSAY 24

PRIORITIZE INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

The history of internal displacement in Colombia, government responses, and the impact of the 2011 Victims Law and 2016 peace agreement provide the foundation for understanding recent challenges—and possible solutions—to continued and new displacements.

ELIZABETH FERRIS

*Research Professor, Institute for the Study of International Migration,
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AT A TIME WHEN MORE ATTENTION IS FOCUSED on the desperate plight of Venezuelan refugees and migrants—and indeed, their needs are enormous—it is important not to lose momentum for resolving Colombia’s internal displacement. Despite significant progress in recent years, future improvement will partially depend on ongoing support to implement the historic 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). This agreement ended a conflict that led to some 220,000 deaths and the internal displacement of more than eight million Colombians.¹

More than five years after the peace agreement, Colombia is still grappling with a long-standing and difficult-to-resolve internally displaced person (IDP) population alongside continuing displacement. The gov-

ernment is also confronting the challenge of responding to a large-scale influx of almost two million Venezuelan refugees while the urgency around Colombian IDPs is dissipating.

Solutions that enable IDPs to go home or begin new lives elsewhere will require continued US support.

Origins of Colombia's internal displacement

The story of internal displacement in Colombia is rooted in the history of long-standing conflicts with guerrilla groups, such as the FARC, National Liberation Army (ELN), and paramilitary and successor armed groups known as *Bandas Criminales* or BACRIM. Displacement has been a deliberate strategy pursued by armed groups and the consequence of governmental counterinsurgency efforts. The struggle to control land has been at the center of insurgency campaigns and economic interests linked to the narcotics trade and illegal mining operations.²

In the late 1990s, the Colombian government adopted Law 387, which upheld the rights of IDPs and provided assistance and support.³ This was the first comprehensive legislation on IDPs globally, and since then, Colombia has developed an impressive array of laws and policies intended to support IDPs. Yet, despite laudable innovation and achievements on the policy front, the number of IDPs has continued to increase over the past thirty years.

Displacement has taken various forms in Colombia. In some cases, whole communities have been displaced while some were dislocated individually, known as *gota a gota* (drop by drop) displacement. Many people have been displaced multiple times. Every province in Colombia has been affected, but it has been especially significant in areas of conflict where state presence is lacking. Afro-Colombian and Indigenous groups have been disproportionately displaced. Almost 90 percent of Colombia's internal displacement has been from rural to urban areas. Intra-urban displacement has also increased in the past decade, mainly due to turf battles between rival criminal groups.⁴

In 2011—five years before the peace agreement—the Victims and Land Restitution Law (Victims Law) recognized IDPs as conflict victims.⁵ Colombian IDPs, who thought the authorities and public had overlooked their plight, had long sought this. The Victims Law provided compensation and the restitution of land to displaced persons. With US Agency for International Development (USAID) support, the Colombian government set up

a Victims Unit to register and compensate victims. The tally of victims in the Victims' Registry includes deaths, disappearances, and other human rights abuses, but IDPs make up the largest number. According to the Victims Registry, as of April 21, 2022, 9,263,826 people were registered as victims, of whom 89 percent were IDPs. Of those, 81 percent (6,711,922) were eligible for assistance.⁶ Compensating so many people is complex, and restituting their land is even more so. While the law provides land restitution to IDPs displaced after 1991, the process has been slow due to ongoing conflicts in many areas; most of the displaced have not received any form of government compensation.⁷

Resolving displacement as key to the 2016 peace agreement

The 2016 peace accord sought to address the underlying causes of the conflict, support victims' rights, and assure transitional justice and reconciliation. IDPs participated in the consultative processes leading up to the agreement, an unprecedented process globally, largely due to IDPs organizing themselves and strong support from civil society organizations. The resulting peace agreement reflects their engagement because land reform—and returning land to IDPs or compensating them—is central to the accord.⁸ The peace agreement, complementing the 2011 Victims law, allowed for compensating victims and redistributing assets obtained by the FARC. Between August 2018 and September 2021, some \$735 million in individual compensation was paid.⁹ However, implementing the land provisions of the agreement has lagged behind executing other components of the peace agreement.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the peace agreement did not mean the end of the conflict—or displacement. Since 2016, more than 800,000 people have been displaced—and the UN projects an increase in 2022.¹¹ In Medellín, criminal and gang violence is estimated to force 5,000 to 15,000 people from their communities every year.¹² The ELN, BACRIM, and other groups filled the vacuum left by the FARC when they demobilized and are now the main actors driving displacement. The continuing violence means that even when IDPs are authorized to reclaim their land, security issues often prevent them from doing so. Moreover, Colombia is deeply affected by landmines, which force people from their land and impede their return. And in addition to dis-

placement, there are growing numbers of people experiencing “forced confinement,” in which armed groups prohibit individuals from leaving their communities in search of safety. The UN reports that in 2021, there were 66,000 people forcibly confined, an increase of 77 percent since 2020.¹³

In addition to continuing violence-driven displacement and forced confinement, there have been alarming attacks on social leaders and human rights defenders, including IDPs and their advocates, reflecting the always contentious issues around land. Hundreds of leaders have been killed since 2020.¹⁴

With solutions to displacement taking far longer than anticipated, Colombian IDPs continue to face insecurity, stigma, and poverty. They often live in informal settlements that lack adequate housing, services, and infrastructure and experience high levels of violence due to criminal and gang activity. In a positive move, the Colombian government has taken steps since the 2000s to legalize these informal settlements, enabling IDPs to access state support for housing and other social services.¹⁵

The United States has worked for many years with the Colombian government, UN agencies, and civil society groups to support IDPs and find solutions.¹⁶ The US Department of State’s Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration provided substantial funds for humanitarian assistance for IDPs, which has now been taken on by USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, focusing on resilience and livelihoods in conflict-affected areas.¹⁷ USAID’s *Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2020-2025* focuses on vulnerable groups, including IDPs, and emphasizes the importance of restoring trust in government and reconciliation—factors essential for creating an environment where IDPs can return to their land.¹⁸ This balance between supporting humanitarian aid for the newly displaced and investing in longer-term structural changes has been essential and should continue.

Finding solutions

Finding lasting solutions for Colombia’s eight million IDPs is a challenging and complicated process, particularly as many have been displaced for years or even decades. But it is key to Colombia’s future security and development. When 16 percent of Colombia’s population remains displaced within their borders, and tens of thousands are uprooted every year, it is hard to talk of post-conflict stabilization or reconciliation. Ending

internal displacement means making time-consuming decisions on restitution and compensation and enabling IDPs who cannot return to rebuild their lives elsewhere.

Recommendations for US-Colombian future collaboration:

- The United States should continue to support Colombia's efforts to implement the 2016 peace agreement, including provisions related to resolving displacement. In particular, US support for land reform in rural areas and formalizing urban settlements¹⁹ is crucial and offers opportunities for private sector engagement. US support for Colombian IDPs has been consistent and essential over the years and must be sustained—even as new displacement crises in other countries strain humanitarian funding. The United States can also do more to highlight the continuing needs of IDPs in its diplomatic and public outreach activities, such as in multilateral meetings and public statements on Colombia and humanitarian issues.
- The United States should increase its efforts to protect leaders of IDP associations and human rights defenders and urge Colombia to do more to end impunity for these attacks.²⁰ Civil society groups play a vital role in denouncing human rights violations and monitoring governmental progress in resolving displacement and implementing the peace agreement. The United States should make it clear to the Colombian government that this is a high priority and monitor the effectiveness of governmental efforts to protect social leaders through Colombia's National Protection Unit, for example, which provides protective measures, such as bodyguards and protective gear.²¹
- Colombia's Truth Commission (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y a la No Repetición)²² is expected to present its final report by mid-2022,²³ offering an opportunity to assess Colombia's progress with transitional justice and redouble US government efforts to support lasting solutions. Following this publication's release, USAID could orga-

nize a roundtable with representatives from government, civil society, IDPs, and academia to assess progress and identify steps to speed up the lengthy process of resolving displacement.

Colombia's IDPs have been waiting for a long time to end their displacement. The Colombian government has taken impressive action to ensure that mechanisms are in place to allow them to recover their land and return to their communities. But finding solutions for almost seven million IDPs requires renewed commitment from the Colombian and US governments and the international community.



Endnotes

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ESSAY **25**

SUPPORT A HOLISTIC MIGRATION STRATEGY

Colombia has welcomed displaced Venezuelans with open arms, setting a global example. Continuing and deepening these policies will remain challenging and require even greater US and international support.

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COLOMBIA HOSTS ONE OF THE LARGEST displaced populations in the world, roughly 1.8 million Venezuelans, who have fled their country due to political conflict, economic turmoil, and the partial breakdown of the healthcare system.¹ Most of these displaced migrants arrived after 2017, when the underlying push factors accelerated. Another half-million Colombians living in Venezuela have returned simultaneously. More than two million Venezuelans have crossed through Colombia in transit to other countries, with Haitian, African, and Asian migrants increasingly moving through Colombia toward the United States. Their arrival has

turned Colombia, once a country with few immigrants but many nationals living abroad, into an immigrant society.

Two elements have been particularly innovative in Colombia's response to Venezuelan displacement. First, the country offered temporary, long-term legal status to Venezuelans arriving in the country before January 31, 2021. This decision was a first-of-its-kind move in Latin America and provides a long-term path to permanent residence for a population increasingly likely to stay. In contrast to many countries receiving large-scale displaced peoples, Colombia has chosen to integrate Venezuelan migrants into the local labor market, education system, and national life instead of relying on the international community to shelter, feed, and care for those arriving.

Second, this approach has been an all-of-government effort directed by the presidency rather than a single agency or set of agencies. In many other cases, governments have implemented short-term legalization programs, but often with contradictory signals from different parts of government on whether the migrants are welcome.² The Colombian government has made it clear that it is the official government policy to receive, recognize, and integrate all Venezuelans who arrive. Most local governments have also engaged in this effort, and all political parties have sought to avoid politicizing the question of Venezuelan immigration, even if some individual politicians haven't always toed the line.

The Colombian response represents an act of solidarity with people from a neighboring country, and a strong element of pragmatism, given Colombia's real limitations to restrict irregular entries from Venezuela and the need to know who is entering and staying in Colombia. There is a realization that the arrival of so many Venezuelans will eventually produce economic benefits. At the same time, actual adjustment costs need to be paid upfront, including emergency services, implementing regularization campaigns, and, most importantly, expanding education, healthcare, and other services to deal with a rapidly growing population. The international community has helped defray some of these costs, but others are being borne by Colombian taxpayers in the short term.

Colombia's emergency response evolves

Initially, no one could have imagined the number of Venezuelans who would eventually cross Colombia's border. At first, in 2017, the Colombian government issued a temporary two-year stay permit, the *Permiso Especial de Permanencia* (Special Stay Permit or PEP), to Venezuelans who entered the country legally through official ports of entry. Other regularization programs followed for those who had entered without registering, and by November 2020, Colombia had regularized the status of 707,000 of the 1.72 million Venezuelans in the country.³ However, the measures never fully kept up with the demand, and the requirement to renew the PEP every two years created bureaucratic backlogs.

Finally, the government decided in February 2021 to conduct an even more ambitious effort by offering a ten-year stay permit to all Venezuelans who were already in the country, regardless of their legal status. The new permit, the *Permiso de Protección Temporal* (Temporary Protection Permit or PPT), sought to cover all Venezuelans who had entered the country by January 31, 2021, and would be available during the next year for those who entered Colombia legally from Venezuela. The PPT permit allows access to services and employment and creates a pathway for recipients to transition to permanent residence with time already spent in the country counting toward the five-year residency requirement.⁴

The Colombian government also offered a *Tarjeta de Movilidad Fronteriza* (Border Mobility Card or TMF) to Venezuelans living in the border region, allowing them to cross the border freely. This mechanism was introduced to dissuade migrants from moving to the country's center by providing a border permit to allow access to emergency health services, education, and work.⁵

Also, all children born in Colombia of Venezuelan parents are citizens, even though Colombia's constitution usually does not allow this unless the parents are legally domiciled in the country. The Colombian government got around this limitation by enacting a presidential decree, *Primero la Niñez* (Children First), noting its obligations under the International Convention on Statelessness of 1961.⁶

Since 2019, it has been made clear that all Venezuelans are eligible to enroll in primary, secondary, and tertiary education.⁷ Emergency medical assistance is also open to all, regardless of immigration status. However,

Colombia's healthcare system is not universal, making the incorporation of recent migrants into the healthcare system more complex; many are not yet affiliated.⁸

Despite these efforts to incorporate Venezuelan migrants through legal documentation and access to education and basic healthcare, according to a 2021 study, 97 percent of Venezuelan nationals in Colombia worked in the informal economy, compared to only 48 percent of Colombian citizens.⁹ A key obstacle to accessing the formal labor market has been credential recognition. Many Venezuelans arrive in Colombia with strong qualifications and professional experience but find it difficult to get their educational and professional credentials recognized, limiting their job opportunities while depriving Colombia of essential skills. Streamlining the credential recognition process would help Venezuelan migrants and the Colombian economy, which needs doctors, dentists, engineers, and teachers.

Colombia's migration decisions on the global stage

The other essential ingredient needed to continue deepening the integration process for Venezuelan migrants is public buy-in. Colombian political and social leaders have consistently tried to include average citizens in their efforts to welcome Venezuelans, but this is challenging in a society already divided along ideological, regional, and ethnic lines. September 2020 polling shows that more than one-third of Colombians believe facilitating migrant integration benefits Colombia more broadly, but most Colombians are less certain.¹⁰

Changing this perception is critical for getting the necessary public support to integrate migrants and ensure that current efforts survive changes in government at a national and local level. Doing so will be even more challenging during pandemic recovery since people often feel they are competing over scarce resources and jobs and have had fewer opportunities to forge social connections during intermittent lockdowns. To achieve ambitious policy reform, the public must believe its best interests are being served and that there is a sense of common purpose between migrants and host communities.

This necessitates investing in basic public services, ensuring that schools, hospitals, and housing stock expand in cities hosting large numbers of Venezuelan migrants so migrants and native-born Colombians ben-

efit equally. Some pushback against new arrivals has nothing to do with the migration itself but with the precarious nature of public services that were already overtaxed before Venezuelans arrived en masse.¹¹

But ensuring a mutual sense of purpose between Colombians and Venezuelans also requires building new narratives about Colombian society that emphasize why and how Colombia has responded by receiving and integrating Venezuelans and how they share a common future.¹² The current administration—and many local political and social leaders—have been adamant about finding a future together, but there are also increasing voices of hostility toward the Venezuelans living in Colombia, especially on social media and in local politics.

The international community can play a vital role in supporting Colombia's efforts to integrate Venezuelan migrants in tangible and intangible ways. Among the most crucial international endeavors have been concessional loans from the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, which have supported infrastructure development, healthcare access, and housing in parts of the country with significant immigration. However, moving from concessional loans to preferential interest rates and other measures to support Colombia as a recipient of the hemisphere's largest refugee and migration crisis would be a smart next step.

The Regional Platform for Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants, led by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, which supports a regional response to the displacement crisis, has been a vital source of support for a range of initiatives from improving education access to combating xenophobia. And behind all these initiatives, the US government has been a particularly important partner, channeling funding and political support into these undertakings.

The US and Colombian governments have also worked closely on a broader regional strategy to promote safe, orderly, and regular migration across the hemisphere. The October 2021 ministerial summit hosted by Colombian Foreign Minister Marta Lucía Ramírez and US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken in Bogotá was a critical step toward building a broader shared understanding of migration across the hemisphere, as was the April 2022 ministerial in Panama that followed. The main points of those two meetings—how to integrate migrant populations and create legal path-

ways that generate order in future migration movements—speak directly to Colombia’s current challenges.

The key question is how to ensure that Colombia’s commitment to integrating a large displaced population leads to positive gains for the country overall, not only in its international reputation and bilateral relationships but also in the everyday lives of Colombians. It is critical for the policy of the last two administrations to remain state policy as administrations change. This will require the ongoing commitment of the Colombian government and strong and consistent support from the international community. As a result, Colombia’s solidarity with displaced Venezuelans will also depend, at least in part, on the solidarity of other countries around the world. Here, no country could play a bigger role than the United States. Using its leverage within financial institutions and its resources, it could help Colombia expand its education system, healthcare access, and infrastructure to incorporate the arrival of Venezuelan migrants and make sure that host communities benefit in the process.



Endnotes

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- 2 Andrew Selee and Jessica Bolter, *An Uneven Welcome: Latin American and Caribbean Responses to Venezuelan and Nicaraguan Migration* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, February 2020). There have been similar whole-of-government approaches from Argentina and Uruguay and, to a lesser extent, Brazil, but the numbers of arrivals compared to the overall population are a fraction of Colombia’s. The signals have been mixed across different government agencies in other countries receiving large numbers of displaced Venezuelan migrants, including Chile, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago.
- 3 Selee and Bolter, “Colombia’s Open Door Policy,” 119–120.
- 4 Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan and Diego Chaves-González, “What Comes Next Now that Colombia Has Taken a Historic Step on Migration,” Migration Policy Institute, February 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/colombia-historic-legalization-what-next>.
- 5 Although the government discontinued using this permit in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this measure issued 5.2 million TMFs to Venezuelan nationals. Still, it is hard to determine how many of these holders remain in Venezuela, how many regularized their status under the PEP or PPT schemes, or how many transited to other countries. Selee and Bolter, “Colombia’s Open Door Policy.”

- 6 This decree allowed the National Registry of Civil Status to grant Colombian nationality to all children who had a Venezuelan parent and were born in Colombia as of August 19, 2015. This measure later evolved into a law expanding its validity for two more years.
- 7 Government of Colombia, “Welcome, Integrate and Grow, Colombia,” 2020: 92. Before 2019, one of the main challenges of integrating students into the education system was the documentation barrier. Migrants without legal status could not access or move through the different levels of education. The government established detailed instructions for Colombian educational establishments to overcome this obstacle. For Venezuelan students without a valid passport or foreign identity card—a requirement needed for taking the state exams or validating their high school diploma—the government passed a resolution that allowed them to do so.
- 8 There are two different healthcare regimes: subsidized and contributory, which have consistently remained restricted for migrants. Data from Colombia on access to public health insurance is limited, but official numbers from 2021 found that 60 percent of Venezuelan migrants did not have health insurance, and three out of four with health insurance were taking part in the subsidized regime since many migrants are not part of the formal economy, which would allow them to access the more robust contributory healthcare regime.
- 9 Diego Chaves-González, Jordi Amaral, and María Jesús Mora, *Socioeconomic Integration of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees: The Cases of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, July 2021), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/socioeconomic-integration-venezuelan-migrants-refugees>.
- 10 Proyecto Migración Venezuela, “Diferencias regionales en la percepción de los Colombianos hacia los migrantes,” Fall 2021: 5, https://s3.amazonaws.com/semanaruralvzla/documentos/1609184052_boletin_16_de_percepcion_regionalpdf.
- 11 Selee and Bolter, *An Uneven Welcome*.
- 12 Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, Haim Malka, and Shelly Culbertson, *How We Talk about Migration: The Link between Migration Narratives, Policy, and Power* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, Rand Corporation, National Immigration Forum, and Metropolitan Group, 2021).

“I celebrate the bicentennial of US-Colombia relations and think of the next two hundred years as an opportunity to promote and position art and culture as a tool for progress and partnership between our nations. Recognizing our artisans’ talent, alongside the value of and respect for our crafts and ancestral techniques should be at the forefront of our collaborative agenda for further development of our communities. We can find most of the answers and synergies to counter today’s challenges in our biodiversity, cultural diversity, knowledge of our communities, and the power of our women.”

JOHANNA ORTIZ

Creative Director, Johanna Ortiz



“The COVID-19 pandemic made technology an even more essential part of our daily lives, and this transformation also impacted art with the advent of non-fungible tokens (NFTs). While NFTs and colored coins have existed since 2012, mainstream awareness and adoption kickstarted in 2021. This new wave of innovation and the increasing relevance of the metaverse will transform art as we know it and democratize access to it. A stronger partnership between our two countries focused on English language training and exchange programs would allow many Colombian artists with great potential to take their creations to the next level.

CAMILA “SOY FIRA” FIERRO

Cryptoartist; Founder, Ya Tengo Donde Escribir



ALLIES:

TWENTY-SEVEN BOLD IDEAS TO REIMAGINE THE US-COLOMBIA RELATIONSHIP

ADVANCING STEM* AND THE ARTS

ESSAYS 26-27

***SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, MATHEMATICS**

“Art has not only helped put Colombia on the map, but also opened doors for many talented Colombian creators and artists. Our close relationship with the United States has led to great collaborations and developments in the world of fashion, shining a spotlight on Latin heritage and beauty—our bright colors, diverse silhouette, and vibrant patterns. As a Colombian fashion designer, I have had the opportunity to position my brand in the United States and look forward to many more years of growth and helping to put Colombia and Colombian art on the world stage. Together, we can accomplish great things.”

ANDRÉS OTÁLORA

Fashion Designer



26

Recognize the Power of Music *page 206*

LEILA COBO

Vice President, Latin Industry Lead, Billboard; Author, Novelist

27

Share the Colombian American Dream *page 212*

JOHN LEGUIZAMO

Actor, Comedian, Producer, Director, and Writer

VIDEOS

CARLOS VIVES *page 216*

*Singer-songwriter; Actor; Businessman; Member, Advisory Council,
Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, Atlantic Council*

ANA MARÍA PORRAS *page 217*

Biomedical Engineer, University of Florida

ESSAY **26****RECOGNIZE
THE POWER OF
MUSIC**

Colombian musicians have become global leaders. They are the single-most recognized ambassadors of the country's culture, folklore, and traditions. They are vocal agents of change, thanks to an ever-growing number of artistic collaborations and an increasingly solid business infrastructure.

LEILA COBO

Vice President, Latin Industry Lead, Billboard; Author, Novelist

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP IN THE PRE-INTERNET 1980s in Cali, Colombia, my father subscribed to *Time* magazine, and every week, the shiny, ostensible purveyor of everything that was of import in the world arrived in the mail.

I'd scour *Time* in search of any news—good, bad, whatever—about Colombia. Save for an occasional natural disaster reviewed in a paragraph or two, there never was any. Until Pablo Escobar became the world's anti-hero in the late 1980s, and except for Gabriel García Márquez's Nobel prize for literature in 1982, Colombia was mostly absent from global and certainly from US consciousness. I read the dry entry on Colombia in *Collier's Encyclopedia* and attempted to make sense of its insufficient information. Was this how people in other parts of the world viewed us? A far-away, underdeveloped tropical nation whose primary assets were a plethora of birds (thank

God for that “Colombia is the country with the most variety of birds” stat) and coffee?

When I auditioned for the Manhattan School of Music, a female professor, considered one of the leading pianists of her generation, said: “You’re from Colombia? I have a good friend from Argentina. Perhaps you know her?”

Alas, I did not. But I understood then that even though the distance from Miami to Cartagena is a mere 1,100 miles—while Buenos Aires is 4,410 miles—for many in the Northern Hemisphere, anything South of Mexico was one big blob of sameness—unremarkable save for the extremes of tragedy and crime.

Colombia—and Colombians—were largely invisible

It wasn’t that we had nothing to offer. Colombia had a decent soccer team, even if it never seemed to get past the first rounds of the World Cup. It had Juan Valdés and Gabriel García Márquez. And, to our eternal consternation, in the mid-1980s, it had Pablo Escobar, whose infamy eclipsed all those other blips of achievement.

But, of course, there is a world of difference between notoriety and respect, recognition and scorn.

And then, the music came.

It started almost surreptitiously with Carlos Vives and his new take on vallenato, an almost subversive artistic creation at home (after all, wasn’t vallenato the music of the proletarian masses?) that suddenly found exotic acceptance in the United States.

Then came Shakira with her crossover aspirations, her bilingual hits—a first-ever for a Colombian artist—and her use of Colombian rhythms and patriotic expression. When Shakira sang “En Barranquilla se baila así” in 2005 as she shimmied to the beat of “Hips Don’t Lie,” millions of people, for the first time, looked up her native city on a map.

It took roughly a decade, but now, two generations of musical artists have followed in Shakira’s steps and, almost impossibly, stepped into an international spotlight that was unimaginable in my teen years.

Music has long been the great equalizer. Historically, it has crossed barriers of race, class, politics, nationality, and language, with music in English—the world’s vast lingua franca—consumed by people from around the world.

Thanks in no small measure to a growing contingent of Colombian superstars that includes Shakira, Juanes, Maluma, Camilo, and J Balvin, music in Spanish has also sliced the language barrier and is listened to broadly by non-Spanish speakers worldwide.

How did this happen? Our circumstance as a country in near-perpetual conflict favored the development of music as an alternative, outlet, and solution. Yet, music was long insular in Colombia. We listened to local acts and imports from the United States, Spain, Argentina, and Mexico, as did most Latin Americans. Colombia was a depository of music from other places, but our own rhythms and beats were regarded as too, well, Colombian ever to be appreciated outside the confines of our borders.

Seen dispassionately, the evolution of Shakira is almost miraculous. As a young girl growing up in Colombia in the 1980s and 1990s, there was no one she could artistically emulate or aspire to and no industry to viably support her brand of youth-oriented, slightly rebellious rock. Shakira not only managed to set foot outside Colombia into other Spanish-language countries but improbably pierced the veil of mainstream acceptance, becoming a global superstar who sang in English, recognized on equal footing with artists like Madonna and Ricky Martin in their heyday. It had never happened before to one of us. Once Shakira was able to break that barrier, possibilities unfolded for new generations.

After all, the musical movement borne out of Medellín is a post-narco phenomenon, fueled by young artists who sought to depict their social malaise through music and strove to get ahead through musical art that came from their very own streets and culture, rather than through violence or conformism.

When J Balvin showed “*molas*,”¹ “*palenqueras*,”² and “*chivas*”³ in his video of “*Mi Gente*” (my people), he served as a de facto ambassador for Colombian culture and folklore, placing it on a platform that allowed for its mass consumption. When Maluma tattooed the word *Medellín* on his famous chest and sang using the colloquial language of his city’s streets, he turned preconceived notions of Latin crooners on their heads, offering the image of the singer as a patriotic symbol instead. When Camilo sings “No es vida de rico, pero se pasa bien rico,” (“It’s not a rich man’s life, but we have a great time”) he speaks not just for millions of young Colombians, but for the millions of young Spanish speakers who tackle their struggles with humor.

Yet, until just a few years ago, the fact that musicians were leading the fray in terms of raising Colombia's visibility abroad was widely discounted. Until relatively recently, music was seen as mostly a trivial pursuit, certainly not a "real" career, and unworthy of serious consideration by influential decision makers and politicians.

Except, musicians overall have become the decision makers, and Colombian musicians, in particular, have become global leaders. This is obvious, not just in terms of fame—easily measurable nowadays by the number of social media followers and music streams and downloads, but also in terms of tangible social and economic impact and influence. Colombian musicians today are the single most recognized ambassadors of the country's culture, folklore, and traditions and are also vocal agents of change. Witness Shakira's *Fundación Pies Descalzos* (Barefeet), Juanes's *Fundación Mi Sangre* (My Blood), and Maluma's *El Arte de Los Sueños* (the Art of Dreams) foundation. Not only do they transform lives inside Colombia, but they raise the country's equity everywhere.

And now we have *Encanto*, an animated Disney film remarkable for its sheer visual beauty (which reflects the beauty of the Colombian countryside near the coffee-growing region where the mythical *casita* stands), uplifting family themes, and joyful music, much of it performed by—Oh My Goodness—actual Colombians! At the time of this writing in March 2022, the film's soundtrack had spent eight non-consecutive weeks at No. 1 on the fabled *Billboard* 200 chart, which measures consumption of all albums in every genre. No soundtrack has ever done that in the chart's history.

That's not the only record it's set. *Encanto* is the first soundtrack to go to No. 1 since 2019 and the sixth animated soundtrack to ever top the chart.

Beyond that, *Encanto* is a film set in Colombia, with a predominantly Colombian cast that sings and speaks in Spanish and English. Animated or not, this degree of exposure and success for our country is unprecedented on the screen.

As Colombian actor John Leguizamo, who voices Bruno in *Encanto*, once told me: "It's more common to see aliens than Latinos on mainstream film and television." And Colombians? Aside from Leguizamo and Sofía Vergara, there are no other actors you can name off the top of your head.

For years, movies about Colombia were filmed elsewhere. Such blockbusters as *Collateral Damage* and *Clear and Present Danger*, for example,

were both shot in Mexico because Colombia was deemed too dangerous, and Colombian characters were played by Mexicans or Spaniards speaking with the wrong accent.

Encanto, on the other hand, really minded its Ps and Qs, from accents to outfits to minute details like the hand-painted tableware, the embroidered dresses, the food, the various colors of our skin, and the animals—from the ubiquitous toucan to the yellow butterflies that are synonymous with García Márquez.

Many years ago, I asked Carlos Vives—who performs two songs in the soundtrack—if he thought his music was too regional and Colombian root-based to attain international success.

“Being local is what allows me to be international,” he replied, way ahead of his time. It’s not surprising, with this mentality, that Maluma and Sebastian Yatra, another new-generation Colombian singer, are also featured in *Encanto*.

The year 2021 was a watershed year for Latinos in film, with *In the Heights*, *West Side Story*, and *Encanto* featuring Latin lead actors, none of them hugely famous. After all, it’s been a year of breaking parameters, zeroing in on inclusivity and diversity, and looking beyond the well-mined bubbles. But in film, the only major success thus far has been *Encanto*, a musical and arguably the narrowest in scope. What made it work?

I want to think Colombia and its music made it work. Yes, the country is indeed that dangerous, with thousands displaced from their homes every year because of violence, as the film superficially shows. But it’s also that beautiful, that exuberant, that passionate, that family-oriented, that hospitable, that delicious, that musical, and yes, that magical.

Now, that musicality is systematically finding its way to the rest of the world. Music isn’t something you can taste or smell, like our coffee, or see and touch, like our birds. But thanks to an ever-growing number of artistic collaborations and an increasingly solid business infrastructure, it’s become perhaps the most effective and widely-lauded vehicle to transmit eminently Colombian emotions to the world, without constraints of borders or language.

At the 2022 Academy Awards, *Encanto*, an animated musical based in Colombia and proudly featuring Colombian voices and sounds, won Best

Animated Feature. At the 2022 Grammy Awards, there were eight nominees from Colombia in the four Latin categories, more than any other country.

It's not just about what happens with our music on an international stage. Inside our borders, for perhaps the first time ever, there's a multi-tiered, highly-profitable music industry that allows inspiration to have a ripple effect that reverberates throughout the local economy: from the recording studio to the 50,000 tickets Karol G sold to her show at Estadio Atanasio Girardot in Medellín.

At a recent international award show, Maluma performed with four fellow artists from Medellín, all wearing t-shirts that said: "*Medallo en el Mapa, + Música – Violencia*," (Medallo⁴ in the Map + Music – violence).

The message was proud, but also defiant.

Thanks to music, we are finally being seen and heard. And we are making change happen.

Portions of this essay originally appeared in the article by Leila Cobo published by Billboard on January, 2022 "With 'Encanto,' Colombia Is Finally Seen and Not Just Heard," accessible here: <https://www.billboard.com/music/latin/encanto-colombia-positive-image-1235017931/>



Endnotes

- 1 Molas are colorful pieces of stitched artwork created by the Indigenous Gunadules community (also known as Kuna) in Colombia. Kuna women design and sew Molas, which they wear as part of their traditional clothing.
- 2 Palenqueras are afro-Colombian women who wear vibrant, colorful dresses and balance bowls of tropical fruits in their heads, particularly in the streets of Cartagena. They are direct descendants of the world's first free African slaves, established in San Basilio de Palenque in the southeast of Cartagena. Today, Palenqueras stand as one of Colombia's most iconic national symbols.
- 3 Chivas are colorful, rustic buses typically used in rural Colombia as a form of public transport.
- 4 Colloquial name given in Colombia to the city of Medellín.

ESSAY **27****SHARE THE
COLOMBIAN
AMERICAN
DREAM**

Colombian Americans are integral to the arts and culture in the United States. From an immigrant working-class family in Queens to a renowned artist in theater, film, and television, I share my story and aspiration for other Colombians to seize their dreams and follow in my path.

JOHN LEGUIZAMO

Actor, Comedian, Producer, Director, and Writer

GROWING UP IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD of Jackson Heights, Queens, in New York City taught me an early lesson on being myself. From a tender age, I felt the pressure of “being different,” and experiencing the world through an unusual lens as I witnessed my mother work several exhausting jobs to keep our family afloat in a country that was foreign to us. Soon, I realized that “being different” made me a target to those who did not sympathize with the way I looked or how I spoke. Living in a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood forced me to learn about survival, who I was, and, ultimately, who I was meant to become.

I was born in Bogotá, Colombia, and although I moved to the United States at a young age, I never ceased exalting my identity as a Colombian and a Latino. I don the badge and the title of being an immigrant to the United

States with the utmost honor and respect. Throughout my career in the arts—from performing in local New York City venues to opening a show on Broadway and eventually breaking glass ceilings in Hollywood—I have accomplished what might have seemed unimaginable through unspeakable hours of hard work and tribulation, a marvelous quality that all Latino immigrants share.

Making a decent living in the United States as a minority is no simple feat, yet there is no one better than an immigrant with a dream and a purpose to upend that expectation. As a young boy running around the streets of New York, using my humor as a means to stay safe in the urban jungle, I learned to channel the gargantuan resilience of a Colombian American, repurposing life's difficulties into fuel to keep my dream alive.

Most of the people who once bullied me quickly found me hilarious—or perhaps I worked at crafting that comedic image better than I could have imagined, and it was precisely that comedy that took me down trails not blazed before. I was aware of being a skimpy little brown kid with a funny speech pattern who could imitate every accent imaginable.

I was a nerd in love with the arts, reading, comic books, plays, movies, and great performers; I used this adoration to empower myself in a place that was not seeing me or my potential. I refer to this source of motivation as “Ghetto Nerd Power.”

It was by the library's bookshelves and, later, inside the theater where I met my true self and decided to step into my future, no matter the hardships, setbacks, or prejudice. I was ready to do it all: study drama, learn diverse acting techniques, practice tongue twisters, follow elocution lessons, and audition for every single role possible. It was never easy, and sometimes it still feels that way, but failure was and is never an option. I stand by the statement “Latinos must do twice the work to get half the opportunities,” because I have experienced this scenario on several occasions. Nevertheless, Latino tenacity, spiritual fiber, and passion from my Colombian DNA propelled me to search within myself and forge my destiny.

I first won over audiences in 1991 as the star and writer of *Mambo Mouth*. I have portrayed seven different Latino characters in sold-out theaters off-Broadway. I have played various characters from different backgrounds, including a lowlife criminal in *Carlito's Way* (1993), Luigi in *Super Mario Bros* (1993), and nineteenth-century French artist Toulouse-Lautrec in *Moulin*

Rouge (2001). And even though I have been blessed with international success, I still source much of my material from my unlikely path to stardom—from a working-class family in Queens to a renowned artist in theatre, film, and television.

This beautiful nation has offered me life-changing possibilities. I am humbled by the astonishing achievements I have amassed in the United States. My indigenous *Chibcha*, *Muisca* (*The Muisca* [also called *Chibcha*] are an indigenous people and culture of the Altiplano Cundiboyacense, Colombia), and Afro-Latino identity is deeply-rooted and informs who I am as an artist and human being. I cherish the best of what these identities have granted me—from bilingualism to delicious food to incomparable music to amazing people. I never tire of representing Colombia in this country and in front of the world.

As a Colombian American, I am continuously astounded by the immense talent that treks from Colombia into the United States. I cherish it, and it overwhelms me with unwavering pride. This is why continuous US-Colombia relations signify a beacon of hope, especially when I consider the bond between two nations fighting for the betterment of their people. At the same time, that story and fight do not end here. I may very well be an example to millions of Latino immigrants who are still unsure whether to follow their dream or walk away from it because they have no other choice.

I want to be more than an example. After decades of working in the entertainment industry and sharpening my artistry, I ache to be more than just an image for people to look up to.

Multiplying a Colombian American dream

My experience in this country as a thriving creative and spokesman for positive societal change means that other Colombian Americans can also create a prosperous future where they can empower their careers, livelihoods, and families. This speaks to the need for more programs that foster and enrich the potential of young, brilliant minds who may not have the means to attend top-tier universities or institutions. Programs through which children and young adults can approach educators, resources, and funding are catalysts to spur equity among our youth.

The arts are the most competitive field in the marketplace. Our young Colombian minds should be able to tap into their fullest potential within

Colombia and abroad in the United States by participating in cultural and educational residencies to learn how to be great storytellers and collaborators and, ultimately, create their own work with the potential to be seen and commissioned.

Oftentimes, potential is squandered before it can blossom due to a lack of access to opportunities; this is the gap that cultural programs should close. The demand for foundations and artists' funds at the local level is rising. It is up to established creatives and their teams to champion more tangible opportunities aimed at those who aspire to grow within a career in the arts. Ultimately, it is our responsibility to leverage programs and mentorship.

I wish to gift my message and life experiences to future generations of Colombian Americans, and Latin immigrants everywhere, as a means to inspire. I want to show them that what I have done is not only possible but also attainable; no matter the language they speak, the accent they have, or the color of their skin, they can conceive a beautiful future where they can be seen and celebrated.

This, right here, is what I consider the American dream. And it is now time for it to become a reality for any of mis paisanos (my fellow Colombians) who one day dare decide to claim the extraordinary life for which they have never stopped struggling. I wish for them to open their arms, beam their gorgeous brown smile, and embrace their own Colombian American dream.



VIDEO

CARLOS VIVES

*Singer-songwriter; Actor; Businessman; Member, Advisory Council,
Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, Atlantic Council*

Use your phone to scan the QR code and access the video.



VIDEO

ANA MARÍA PORRAS

Biomedical Engineer, University of Florida

Use your phone to scan the QR code and access the video.



AFTERWORD

THE UNITED STATES HAS MANY ALLIES and partners around the world, but only a small number of true friends, bound in a unique relationship that has stood the test of time and the twists and turns of history. As this book reminds us, Colombia is certainly in that small number.

The United States and Colombia are bound together by history and culture.

Colombians have helped shape the very fabric of US society. Americans have enjoyed studying Colombian literature, listening to its music, admiring Colombians on television and in movies, cheering on hometown legends in sports, and tasting Colombian food and coffee.

We are bound together through economic ties and our shared belief in the importance of private enterprise and inclusive economic development. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement, which has seen Colombia rise to become our twenty-fifth largest trading partner in total two-way goods and services. Colombia has been welcomed as a member of the OECD and as a Major non-NATO Ally.

We are bound together through our partnership, most deeply since the advent of Plan Colombia, in addressing key transnational challenges—the scourge of illicit narcotics, the rise of authoritarian forces in the hemisphere, economic inequality, the causes of and fallout from rapidly increasing climate extremes, and the impacts of forced human displacement.

Perhaps most importantly, we have been bound together by the values our people share: a belief that representative democracy, market economies, and human rights and human dignity are the essential foundations of healthy societies that strive to meet the central aspirations of their citizens.

The many contributors to this volume rightly celebrate the extraordinary bipartisanism that has characterized the US approach to Colombia. It

is important to recall that bipartisanship did not simply emerge; leaders in both nations worked together to overcome challenges and disagreements. These open, honest, and fruitful debates—and the ability to adjust policy to incorporate different perspectives—are precisely what has given strength and resilience to policy over time.

We have seen tremendous progress and opportunities in Colombia throughout our professional careers. During Mark Green's tenure as administrator of the US Agency for International Development, he visited Colombia five times—more than any other country. What brought him back repeatedly were not just the challenges at hand—fallout from the tragedy of Venezuela's economic and authoritarian descent— but opportunities to help Colombia lift lives, build communities, and expand hope. He is proud to have partnered with President Iván Duque's administration to extend the formalization of land titles in rural communities, support community-based development projects that create viable alternatives to the illegal drug trade, strengthen protections for biodiversity, increase the inclusion of Afro-Colombians and other marginalized communities, and so much more.

And he is just as proud to be part of the Wilson Center and its Latin American Program, which has partnered with Colombian leaders and scholars over the years in crafting ideas and alternatives to bring Colombia's promise to every part of society.

For her part, Cindy Arnson first visited Colombia as a researcher for Human Rights Watch in 1993, when Pablo Escobar's bombs still scarred downtown Bogotá and terrorized the country. At the Wilson Center, she followed closely the arduous efforts to achieve a peace accord in Colombia as part of a comparative project on negotiated settlements to civil wars. Despite many remaining challenges, the country's transformations over these thirty years are astonishing, the product of the immense resilience, sacrifice, and never-ending creativity of Colombians themselves.

There is no question that, despite its past achievements, US-Colombian relations need further strengthening to face unique and profound challenges. Holding on to a bright future will require imagination, creativity, and a shared commitment.

The existing networks of past and present public officials, private sector and civil society leaders, journalists, and cultural icons provide a deep well

of experience and strength from which to draw. And the growing density of relations between our two societies provides an asset and further opportunity for deepening ties.

Let us not forget the sacrifices made or the hard work and commitment it took to get this far. We must work collaboratively to protect and strengthen Colombia's strong and vibrant democracy.

In the years ahead, it's clear that there will be bends in the road and many challenges to confront, just as there were over the last two hundred years. But the future for its resilient people is bright, indeed. So, too, is the future of the US-Colombia relationship. We are allies and partners, but most importantly, we are close friends.

AMB. MARK A. GREEN

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Rebecca Bill Chavez is the Inter-American Dialogue's president and CEO. From 2013 until 2016, Dr. Chavez was deputy assistant secretary of defense for Western Hemisphere Affairs, where her focus areas included defense institution building, combating law enforcement militarization, and women, peace, and security initiatives. Before joining the administration of President Barack Obama, Dr. Chavez was a tenured professor of political science at the US Naval Academy.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON

Bill Clinton served as the 42nd president of the United States from 1993 to 2001. He previously served as governor of Arkansas from 1979 to 1981 and again from 1983 to 1992, and as attorney general of Arkansas from 1977 to 1979. Since leaving office, Clinton created the Clinton Foundation to address international concerns such as the prevention of HIV/AIDS and global warming.

LEILA COBO

Leila Cobo is a Latin music expert and vice president/Latin industry lead for *Billboard*, where she also leads the *Billboard* Latin Music Conference and Awards. She has authored five acclaimed books, including *Decoding Despacito: An Oral History of Latin Music* (New York: Vintage, 2021). Cobo is a classical pianist and a Fulbright scholar.

ROSARIO CÓRDOBA

Rosario Córdoba is the president of Grupo Argos' board of directors and served as president of the Private Competitiveness Council until July 2021. Previously, she worked at Fedesarrollo as an editor and *Coyuntura Económica* as an associate researcher. She was part of the Commission of Experts for Equity and Tax Competitiveness and is a current member of the Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Task Force.

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Amb. Paula J. Dobriansky is a senior fellow at the Future of Diplomacy Project at the Harvard University Belfer Center and vice chair of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security. During her thirty years in national security affairs, she served as under secretary of state for global affairs (2001-2009), director of European and Soviet Affairs at the National Security Council and deputy assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs. From 1997-2001, she was senior vice president and director of the Council on Foreign Relations.

ALEJANDRO EDER

Alejandro Eder is a former presidential high counselor for reintegration of the Republic of Colombia (2010-2014) and was a Colombian government negotiator during the secret and public phases of the peace process with FARC (2010-2014). Afterwards, he served as executive director of the Cali-based ProPacífico Foundation. In 2019, Eder ran for mayor of Cali as an independent civic candidate.

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Admiral Faller is a retired four-star US Navy admiral, former commander of the US Southern Command from 2018 to 2021, and former chief of legislative affairs for the US Department of the Navy, the top Navy liaison with Congress. He is currently a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center and Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security.

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Elizabeth Ferris is an Institute for the Study of International Migration research professor at Georgetown University and previously served as senior fellow and co-director of the Brookings Project on Internal Displacement. Ferris has held positions at the World Council of Churches, the Life & Peace Institute, Church World Service, and several US universities. She has authored seven books and numerous essays on humanitarian and human rights issues.

SARAH GAMMAGE

Sarah Gammage is the director of policy and government relations in Latin America for The Nature Conservancy. With over twenty-five years of experience working on economic development, Gammage has held positions at the International Institute for Environment and Development, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the International Labor Organization, and UN Women.

JOHN B. GANTT

John B. Gantt Jr. is president of the International Conservation Caucus Foundation (ICCF), which he helped establish in 2006. Gantt has supported numerous ICCF development programs in Africa and Latin America and has managed the foundation's Congressional and partner relations and communications.

MARK A. GREEN

Amb. Mark Green (ret.) is the president and CEO of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Previously, Green served as executive director of the McCain Institute, administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), president of the International Republican Institute, and senior director at the US Global Leadership Coalition. Green also served as the US ambassador to Tanzania (2007-2009) and a member of Congress representing Wisconsin's 8th District (1999-2007).

VICKI HOLLUB

Vicki Hollub is President and CEO of Occidental Petroleum Corporation (Oxy). She has been a member of Oxy's Board of Directors since 2015. Hollub serves on the boards of Lockheed Martin and the American Petroleum Institute. She is chair of the World Economic Forum's Oil and Gas Community and a member of the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative. Hollub was the inaugural Chair of the US-Colombia Business Council.

FREDERICK KEMPE

Frederick Kempe is the president and CEO of the Atlantic Council. Kempe was previously a prize-winning editor and reporter at the *Wall Street Journal*, where he served in various roles including the longest-serving editor and associate publisher ever of the *Wall Street Journal Europe*, where he oversaw the *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial operations in Europe and the Middle East. He is the author of four books, including *Berlin 1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth*, a *New York Times* Best Seller and a National Best Seller.

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Maria Claudia Lacouture is the executive director of the Colombian-American Chamber of Commerce and president of Alianza de Asociaciones y Gremios (Aliadas). Lacouture previously served as the minister of commerce, industry, and tourism of Colombia, following her position as president of ProColombia from 2010 to 2016. Lacouture is a columnist at the *La República* newspaper and a member of the Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Task Force.

JOHN LEGUIZAMO

John Leguizamo is a Colombian American actor, comedian, producer, writer, and director. Leguizamo rose to prominence co-starring in *Super Mario Bros* (1993). He was nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actor for his role in *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995) and has since appeared in more than one hundred and sixty films, most recently in *Encanto* (2021). Leguizamo has received numerous awards for his prolific theater career, including a special Tony in 2018.

MICHAEL T. MCCAUL

Representative Michael T. McCaul (R-TX) has been the Congressional representative for Texas's 10th congressional district since 2005. McCaul is the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and is a senior member and former chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security. McCaul previously served as Chief of Counter Terrorism and National Security in the US Attorney's office, Western District of Texas, and led the Joint Terrorism Task Force. McCaul also served as a Texas Deputy Attorney General.

P. MICHAEL MCKINLEY

Amb. Michael McKinley is a former US ambassador to Colombia, Afghanistan, Brazil, and Peru. As ambassador to Colombia, McKinley helped finalize the entry into force of the bilateral free trade agreement between the United States and Colombia and provided support for Colombia's peace negotiations. His articles have appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, the *Financial Times*, and *Politico*. McKinley is a member of the Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Task Force and a non-resident senior advisor for the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Americas Program.

THOMAS F. "MACK" MCLARTY, III

Thomas F. "Mack" McLarty has been chairman and co-founder of McLarty Associates since its establishment in 1998 and serves as chairman of the McLarty Companies. He previously was President William J. Clinton's chief of staff, where he helped enact the North American Free Trade Agreement. McLarty was appointed as special envoy for the Americas in 1997. McLarty is a member of the Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Task Force.

GREGORY MEEKS

Representative Gregory Meeks (D-NY) has been the congressional representative for New York's 5th District since 1998 and is the first Black member of Congress to serve as chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He is also a senior member of the House Financial Services Committee and chairman of the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Financial Institutions. He is member of the Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Task Force.

LUIS ALBERTO MORENO

Amb. Luis Alberto Moreno served as president of the Inter-American Development Bank from 2005 to 2020. Before that, Moreno was Colombia's ambassador to the United States for seven years. Previously, Moreno acted as a representative for the Andean region of WestSphere Capital and worked as a senior advisor for the Luis Carlos Sarmiento Organization.

DAVID H. PETRAEUS

Gen. David H. Petraeus (US Army, Ret.) is a partner with the global investment firm KKR and chairman of the KKR Global Institute, which he established in May 2013. He is also a member of the board of directors of Opti, FirstStream, and the Atlantic Council. Prior to joining KKR, Petraeus served more than thirty-seven years in the US military and was director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

JUAN CARLOS PINZÓN

Amb. Juan Carlos Pinzón has served as Colombia's ambassador to the United States since 2021. He was the president of Probogotá between 2018-2021 and Colombia's ambassador to the United States between 2015-2017. During his first ambassadorship, Pinzón established the US-Colombia Business Council and contributed to Atlantic Council work on the US-Colombia relationship. Previously, Pinzón was Colombia's minister of defense from 2011-2015. He was a presidential candidate in 2018.

ANDREW SELEE

Andrew Selee has served as president of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) since 2017 and chairs MPI Europe's Administrative Council. He is a Georgetown University adjunct professor and author of several books. Prior to his tenure at the MPI, Selee spent seventeen years at the Woodrow Wilson Center as a program director and the center's vice president for programs and executive vice president, and he worked as a staffer at the US Congress.

DAVID R. SHEDD

David R. Shedd is a former deputy director of national intelligence for policy, plans, and requirements. Between 2005 and 2007, Shedd served as chief of staff and acting director of the intelligence staff to the director of national intelligence. He also held several posts at the National Security Council from 2001 to 2005, including special assistant to the president and senior director for intelligence programs and reform.

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Kiron K. Skinner is the Taube Professor for International Relations and Politics at Carnegie Mellon University's Institute for Politics and Strategy. Skinner formerly served at the US Department of State as the director for policy planning and senior adviser to the secretary of state. Skinner is a lifetime director on the board of the Atlantic Council and a visiting fellow at the Heritage Foundation's Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy.

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Sandra Valenzuela is the chief executive officer of WWF Colombia. Valenzuela previously worked at the National Protected Areas Agency in different capacities, including policy development, negotiations with local communities on protected area boundaries and governance, and as director for the Amazon and Orinoco regions. She is the co-chair of the Green List and Effective Management Specialist groups from IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas.

KEVIN WHITAKER

Kevin Whitaker served as the US ambassador to Colombia from 2014 to 2019; during his tenure, Colombia signed and began implementing the landmark 2016 Peace Accords. He was previously the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs' deputy assistant secretary of state for South America. He is a member of the Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Task Force and a nonresident senior fellow at the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center.

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JASON MARCZAK, CAMILA HERNÁNDEZ, AND CYNTHIA J. ARNSON

