***Colombia’s Peace Accords and Reintegration of FARC combatants - Applications for Boko Haram and Cautions to Take***

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***Abstract:*** Looking at the peace process between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the government of Colombia can shed light on appropriate paths to take when thinking how to reintegrate Boko Haram combatants into Nigerian society. The Colombian peace agreement aims to build peace from the bottom-up and top-down, fostering a culture of peace and reconciliation, which could inform the Nigerian path to reintegration of Boko Haram fighters. The Nigerian government should take caution and assess public opinion prior to reintegration.

***Time Period -* 1964 - present**

Since the 1960s, the civil conflict between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), the government and paramilitary groups have resulted in over 6 million displaced and 220,000 dead throughout the country.[[1]](#footnote-0) The government of Colombia has launched numerous peace talks with the FARC, starting in 1982, but each has crumbled.[[2]](#footnote-1) The latest, fourth, round of peace talks, launched in 2012 by President Juan Manuel Santos, were ratified by the federal government and by the FARC, but were rejected by the public through a national referendum on October 2, 2016. Many Colombians opposed the peace deal for being too conciliatory towards the FARC, criticizing the lack of jail time and the guarantee of seats in Congress to the FARC political party.[[3]](#footnote-2)

The opposition to the peace agreement was spearheaded by former President Alvaro Uribe, whose hard-line stance on the FARC is well-known in Colombia.[[4]](#footnote-3) The government and the FARC returned to the negotiating table in Havana, Cuba after the treaty was rejected and on Saturday November 11th, a revised peace agreement was produced that incorporated the opposition’s suggestions. It is not clear if the agreement will only have to be ratified by Congress or go through another national referendum.

***Insurgency Description***

The FARC (in Spanish: *Fuerzas Armadas Revolutionarios de Colombia, Ejercito del Pueblo*) is a Marxist-Leninist militant organization formed in the 1960s to institute land reform and redistribution in the countryside.[[5]](#footnote-4) It emerged as an offshoot of the Colombian Communist Party and was violently repressed by the right-wing government starting in 1964, through an military attack on the group in the Tolima department in May of that year.[[6]](#footnote-5) The FARC emerged after a particularly violent stage in Colombian history known as *La Violencia -* the Violence - in which Conservative and Liberal politics ballooned into a rural war and land grab. [[7]](#footnote-6)

The FARC fueled its operations through kidnapping and demanding ransom for targets like politicians and social elites. In its early years, the FARC often provided medical care, education and defense services for marginalized communities in areas where government was lacking. The organization started to link to narcotrafficking in the 1980s as well as illegal mining and oil extraction to fund operations.[[8]](#footnote-7) At its heyday in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were nearly 20,000 FARC soldiers; currently the number is around 7,000, including 3,000 women. There is a network of FARC sympathizers throughout the country.[[9]](#footnote-8) It’s important to note that people living in the Colombian countryside, especially indigenous communities, have been victims of attacks by the FARC, paramilitary groups/ bacrimes and by the Colombian military.[[10]](#footnote-9)

***Civilian Agency Involvement***

On a federal level, the National Victim’s Unit (UARIV) keeps track of IDPs and connects conflict victims to social services, like healthcare and education.[[11]](#footnote-10) This organization works also with local governments to implement Law 1448 of 2011, which recognizes the rights of people - particularly displaced persons (DPs) to settle in land that was taken from them by the FARC or paramilitary groups.

Other civilian agencies involved include the High Commission for Post-Conflict, Human Rights and Security, which was formed in anticipation of the peace accords being ratified by the public, is intended to facilitate the national transition to peace. Other governmental agencies supporting social protection programs in conflict zones include the National Planning Department, the Department of Social Prosperity, the Institute for Family Welfare and the National Department of Health, which provide services for conflict victims, including food assistance, emergency healthcare, school feeding programs and land redistribution. Additionally, other federal agencies like the Ministry of the Environment have oriented towards peace-building and are developing agricultural and environmental projects to promote peace and climate change adaptation.

***Military Involvement - Plan Colombia, aerial spraying***

During the 2000s, under the presidency of Alvaro Uribe, the Colombian military launched a massive offensive known as Plan Colombia. This was a $9 billion influx of military aid, primarily from the US, to bolster Colombian counter-FARC military capacities, as well as intelligence. Through Plan Colombia, dozens of high-level FARC leaders were killed, which significantly weakened the group. [[12]](#footnote-11) In recent years, the government has targeted coca plantations and sprayed them with herbicides, destroying the crops to reduce the sources of FARC funding. However, human rights groups decried the practice for causing illnesses (cancer) and for disproportionately impacting indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.[[13]](#footnote-12)

Within the proposed peace accords, the Colombian military are to be stationed around concentration zones, where FARC members will demobilize and hand in their weapons to the United Nations. However, it’s also important to note that the military was accused of war crimes as well during the 52-year long conflict, including the false positive scandal.[[14]](#footnote-13) Due to the tension and the history of human rights abuses on both sides, the Colombian government asked the UN to accompany the turning in of arms during the peace process and run the concentration zones.

***Impetus for Reintegration***

The above military campaign severely weakened FARC; by taking out FARC leadership, this military offensive reduced the social cohesion of the group, putting them on the move frequently, leaving them to resort to defensive tactics like explosions, rather than offensive attacks. In recent years, linked with the hard-line military campaign and with national advertising campaigns, the FARC had experienced a rush of desertion, reducing their numbers to less than half of their peak and providing the federal government with intelligence on the group.[[15]](#footnote-14)

President Juan Manuel Santos made it a priority of his administration to finalize a peace agreement with the FARC, and he was backed by the international community to do so. With hardline national policy on narco-trafficking, profits from coca and cocaine production were decreasing. The FARC had also proclaimed that it hoped to transition to bring its battle to the political sphere and enter as its own political party.

***Criteria for Reintegration***

All FARC combatants will be eligible for reintegration under the current peace agreement, as long as they hand in their weapons, help identify missing persons, and confess their crimes to a peace tribunal, through a truth and reconciliation process. Those who admit to their crimes are eligible to alternative sentences and restorative justice to make amends to victims - by working on community farms, demining, reforestation, substituting illicit crops, etc. However if the ex-combatants lie or do not turn in their weapons, they will be subject to up to 20-years in prison. As of now, the FARC is demobilizing in its entirety; there are no known FARC dissidents who are refusing to hand in their weapons and accept peace. Certain crimes disqualify ex-combattants from amnesty, including sexual violence, kidnapping, torture, extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances and recruitment of minors. The original peace agreement received a lot of backlash for its ‘soft’ stance on the FARC - specifically that most soldiers would receive no jail time.

In terms of the reintegration of child soldiers, within 15 days of the signing of the new agreement, the government will develop a special program for their effective reintegration. The National Reincorporation Council will be in charge of this program.[[16]](#footnote-15)

***Reconciliation, Social & Political Elements***

The approach that the government has taken to negotiations has been that the FARC should make reparations for the damage caused by the prolonged conflict and contribute to making the post-conflict society better. The agreement recognizes the differential needs of LGBTI and women ex-combatants and the psycho-social needs of victims of sexual and gender based violence. The agreement emphasizes that in post-conflict society, it’s important to create spaces for communities to express their suffering and reconcile with ex-combatants.[[17]](#footnote-16) Additionally, in the new agreement, the FARC will turn in all of its assets to the government, to compensate victims.

For the sake of this brief, I will go into two key elements of the reconciliation process outlined in the peace agreement, that can inform our recommendations on Boko Haram: *concentration zones* and political participation.

*Concentration Zones -*  After the peace agreement is signed, demobilizing FARC soldiers will migrate to 23 concentration zones, which are located in isolated regions of the country. The concentration zones will serve as a halfway zone for the FARC, where they were officially demobilize and transition to civilian life. Unarmed civilians can enter the concentration zones to provide social services like healthcare and education; the military is not allowed within one-kilometer of each zone. Within 180 days of the signing of the peace agreement, the FARC must turn in all weapons to the United Nations. Once the final peace agreement is signed, fighters will go to these zones for up to six months and then will be able to move on a restricted basis throughout the country. A monitoring and verification mission made up of UN, FARC and Colombian governmental officials have access to each zone to ensure compliance.[[18]](#footnote-17) Demobilized FARC soldiers, after leaving the concentration zones, are eligible 90 percent of minimum wage for two years as well as grants to start businesses.[[19]](#footnote-18)

*Political Participation -* After demobilization, FARC leaders will be able to run for office and thus participate in the Colombian political sphere.[[20]](#footnote-19) Over the next two election cycles, the FARC will have non-voting seats in the national Congress, after which they will be subject to the normal electoral process. Under the new peace agreement, the FARC political party will receive less government funding than in the original agreement.[[21]](#footnote-20)

***Community Engagement***

Public opinion on the peace agreements was polled frequently and captured in a national referendum on October 2, 2016. As mentioned above, the public rejected the peace agreement 50.2 percent to 49.7 percent - primarily in zones that are linked to former President Alvaro Uribe, specifically the Antioquia department. While the polls suggested for months that the peace would win by a landslide - in fact the international community was already congratulating Colombia on achieving peace before the referendum - many people throughout the country had deeply opposed it. It’s important to note that many of the communities that were most impacted by the conflict were the ones who most strongly supported the peace.[[22]](#footnote-21)

***Lessons Learned***

Colombia’s peace is an ongoing process- the agreement has not been signed into power as of 15 November 2016. However, along the way primary lessons learned about the process of forming a peace agreement are the following:

1. Engage with opposition parties when developing the peace agreement so that it is amenable across the political spectrum. The ‘No’ campaign, spearheaded by former President Alvaro Uribe, was a stronger voice politically than Santos’ team had originally imagined. That the government and the FARC took the opposition’s suggestions into consideration while revising the peace agreement shows the strength of the process.
2. Consider how the agreement is being marketed on a national level. Through the peace negotiations, several fears surfaced in the public mind about what would happen post-conflict - specifically that Colombia would turn into a Chavista state, ruled by left-wing rebels. Many Colombians are extremely familiar with the recent economic turmoil in Venezuela, thus that the agreement was being marketed as turning Colombia into the next Venezuela worked against them.

***Applicability to Boko Haram***

The nature of the militancy in Colombia is quite different to Boko Haram - not only did it start as a left-wing, non-religious political movement in the rural areas of the country, its links with the drug trade and other militant groups throughout Colombia distinguish it from the pseudo-religious Boko Haram institution. FARC has been active since the 1960s and has suffered high rates of abandonment in recent years whereas Boko Haram only began in earnest in the last six years.

However, there are parallels between the groups, including the recruitment of child soldiers, kidnapping, attacks on military and government infrastructure, heavy military repression by the national government and people joining these organizations, at times, for socio-economic reasons - lack of opportunity. Additionally, in both instances the national militaries also committed human rights abuses.[[23]](#footnote-22)

The following are key recommendations that the Nigerian government can extract when thinking about how to reintegrate Boko Haram combatants:

1. **Accompaniment by external verification missions -** Any reintegration and demobilization program should be accompanied by external verification missions due to the history of human rights abuses by both the Nigerian military and by Boko Haram.
2. **Assessing public opinion before reintegration is vital -** As with the national referendum on the peace agreement showing that many Colombians were not ready for peace, it will be important for the Nigerian government to survey and address public opinions on reintegration of Boko Haram combatants - to see if the time is right.
3. **Open up alternate routes for dissident voices to be heard -** Boko Haram, like the FARC, were heavily repressed by the national government. Opening up routes for peaceful participation in national politics is a key aspect of demobilization and reintegration - ex-combatants need to have a stake in the society they are reintegrating back into.
4. **Incorporate a cross-sectoral approach -** While the Colombian peace agreement has yet to be implemented, its cross-sectoral approach to reintegration may prove to be highly effective. That the agreement emphasizes rural development and infrastructure as well as political participation and psychosocial support through a gender and LGBT sensitive approach means that peace will be implemented at the individual, local and national levels simultaneously.
5. **Consider environmental conservation as a tool for a sustainable peace-building-** Both northern Nigeria and Colombia are vulnerable to the impacts of environmental degradation, unsustainable natural resource use and climate change. By building and maintaining healthy environments, both the Colombian and Nigerian governments can enhance local livelihoods and local economies - reducing the incentives of ex-combatants to rejoin guerrilla groups. A healthy environment can help maintain a long-lasting peace.
6. **Open up spaces for people to talk about the conflict and reconciliation.** The Colombian government is opening up campaigns to create spaces on the local level fo rpeople to come together and talk about their experiences and seek reconciliation. By doing so, the government hopes to foster a national culture of forgiveness and peace, which the Nigerian government could look to as a positive example.

1. Internal Displacement Monitoring Center. *Colombia IDP Figure Analysis* (2014) <http://www.internal-displacement.org/americas/colombia/figures-analysis> [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Stanford University *Mapping Militant Organizations: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- People’s Army* (2015) <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/89> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Many in the conservative countryside also opposed the inclusion of an LGBT focus in the original agreement, which recognized the differential needs of LGBT victims of the conflict. While Colombia has ratified same-sex marriage and adoption on a national scale, many conservatives in the countryside viewed the LGBTI lens on the peace agreement as another pillar to the current government’s liberal agenda. In the new peace treaty, it is specified that the LGBTI lens only applies to demobilized FARC soldiers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Kennard, Matt and Nick MacWilliam. *Was Peace Ever Possible in Colombia?* Pultizer Center on Crisis Reporting (October 2016) <http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/was-peace-agreement-ever-possible-country-complicated-colombia> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. *FARC*. InSight Crime. Web. 15 November 2016. <http://www.insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/farc-profile> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Otis, John.*The FARC and Colombia’s Illegal Drug Trade.* Wilson Center: Latin America Program (November 2014): <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Otis_FARCDrugTrade2014.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Paramilitary groups were founded by victims of FARC attacks to drive the group out of the jungle, however these organizations took on a life of their own, often killing civilians and saying that they were killing FARC soldiers and linking with narco-trafficking. Former President Alvaro Uribe launched peace talks with paramilitary groups in the 2000s, which granted nearly complete amnesty to paramilitary fighters. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Renwick, Danielle. *Colombia’s Civil Conflict.* Council on Foreign Relations (October 2016).<http://www.cfr.org/colombia/colombias-civil-conflict/p9272> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. ABColombia.El Panorama Actual de Colombia: Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras Ley 1448. (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Hylton, John. *Plan Colombia: The Measure of Success*. The Brown Journal of World Affairs. (Winter 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. Dion, Michelle and Catherine Russler. *Eradication Efforts, the State, Displacement and Poverty: Explaining Coca Cultivation in Colombia during Plan Colombia.* Journal of Latin American Studies. (2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. In 2008, the Colombian military recruited 20 + soldiers in Soacha, a poor urban center south of Bogotá, which has the highest concentration of IDPs in the country. After recruiting the young men, they brought them to a FARC-controlled area, shot them and dressed them in FARC uniforms, to satisfy the guerrilla-quotient. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Jose Miguel Sokoloff.*How Christmas lights helped guerrillas put down their guns.* [TedX](https://www.ted.com/speakers/jose_miguel_sokoloff). (December 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera. (November 2016). (Final Agreement to End the Conflict and Build a Stable and Durable Peace). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. *Facts about FARC 'Concentration Areas' and Colombia Peace Talks.* [TeleSur. June 2016](http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Facts-about-FARC-Concentration-Areas-and-Colombia-Peace-Talks-20160624-0029.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. *El dinero que recibirán las Farc para la reintegración y la política* [El Tiempo, August 2016](http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/proceso-de-paz/dinero-para-los-guerrilleros-de-las-farc-tras-acuerdo/16682663) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. *Colombia’s Revised Peace Accord* [New York Times, November 2016](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/opinion/colombias-revised-peace-accord.html?smid=fb-nytopinion&smtyp=cur) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. The town of Bojayá suffered a massacre by the FARC yet voted 96 percent yes to peace - [link](http://www.memoriasdelatrato.org/index.php/component/k2/item/220-bojaya-y-atrato-medio-urge-respetar-el-si-de-las-victimas-frente-al-acuerdo-de-paz) to the letter officials wrote to Uribe after the peace agreement was rejected. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. Acemoglu, Daron, Leopoldo Fergusson, James Robinson, Dario Romero and Juan Vargas.*The Perils of Top-down State Building: Evidence from Colombia’s False Positives*. Working Paper 2016.   
     [↑](#footnote-ref-22)