

Chapter 22

Might the Keys to Peace Open the Doors to Extractivism?

Reflections on Colombia's Post-Conflict Extractive Economy

Richard Clayton Doughman
Universidad del Rosario, Colombia

ABSTRACT

The present paper explores what the ongoing peace talks between the Colombian government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército Popular (FARC-EP) may mean to Colombia's growing extractive economy. Militarization during the decades-long conflict and the spike in rural, state and paramilitary violence under former President Alvaro Uribe Vélez's (2000-2008) have left an unequal land structure favorable to resource extraction by foreign multinational corporations. Concessions for mining and oil exploration now cover a large percentage of Colombian territory, and the policy environment has become ever more welcoming to foreign capital. While armed conflict has opened new territories for resource exploitation, the instability it has created could deter long-term foreign investment. This paper hypothesizes that current President Juan Manuel Santos's pursuit of peace with the FARC-EP aims to enhance conditions for intensified resource extraction in Colombia in consonance with the regional trend toward a recolonization of Latin America's natural commons.

INTRODUCTION

In September 2012, the Government of Colombia under President Juan Manuel Santos announced the signing of a General Accord to End the Armed Conflict in Colombia, formally entering into peace negotiations with the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del*

Pueblo (FARC-EP). Though talks to agree upon an agenda for the peace process began in secret earlier in 2012, the public announcement of peace talks marked a surprising shift in recent policy toward the guerrilla group. Santos's bid to end the country's civil war comes after a period marked by the bloodiest fighting in the history of the decades-long conflict. Santos himself, both as President

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9675-4.ch022

and earlier as Minister of Defense under former President Alvaro Uribe Velez (2002-2010), has backed an aggressive military offensive against the guerrilla group that drastically reduced the guerrilla's ranks while killing a number of its top military officers in a series of highly publicized and controversial, precision strikes.¹

The military's campaign to reassert control over the nation's territory and the glut of paramilitary violence that has accompanied it have left behind a wake of gross human rights violations: massacres, torture, forced migration, mass graves, rape and the intimidation of local communities. Since 1985 over 5.7 million Colombians have suffered forced displacement within the country leaving behind over 6.5 million hectares in abandoned lands. Over the past 15 years, conflict has displaced an average of 296,988 Colombians each year, consistently placing the country among the world leaders in this category (Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, 2013).

Parallel to the country's militarization, former President Uribe advanced a series of neoliberal reform policies aimed at opening Colombia to foreign investment, particularly investment in the exploitation of the country's wealth of natural resources. As military and paramilitary forces gained control of new territories, foreign capital poured into the country's growing oil, mining and biofuels sectors, often in the very territories refugees had fled. Between 2002 and 2010 over \$57 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) entered Colombia, with over \$30 billion in the mining and oil sectors alone². The annual average of FDI during Uribe's presidency was over twice that of the previous five-year period. (Banco de la República, 2014). Eager to shake its label as a failing state, Colombia looked to replicate the same export boom enjoyed by many of its Latin American neighbors who have ridden sustained, high commodity prices to rapid rates of economic growth, though often at the cost of heavy, primary sector dependence, social conflict and environmental destruction.

President Santos's economic policies have largely been a continuation of his predecessor's. His 2010 National Development Plan names the agribusiness, transportation infrastructure and mining/energy sectors as among the "locomotives" that will drive economic growth and turn Colombia into a competitive player in the world economy. While peace talks are ongoing, no cease-fire has been declared; violence still grips the nation's countryside, and guerrilla groups often target economic infrastructure despite substantial efforts by the armed forces to protect it. Security risks associated with operating in Colombia weigh down efforts to lure foreign investment, thereby limiting capital accumulation based on raw material extraction and export.

This paper seeks to explore the potential impacts of the Colombian government's peace negotiations with the FARC on the country's extractive economy. It recognizes the fundamental role that state and paramilitary violence have played in the expansion of the extractive economy over the past decade, acting as a guarantee for territorial control and allowing capital to penetrate areas of the country where previous conditions limited accumulation. At the same time, it suggests that the current peace talks reflect the Santos administration's recognition that continued violence is no longer functional to medium and long-term capital accumulation in Colombia, and that the administration's pursuit of peace aims to establish better conditions for capital accumulation through intensified resource extraction.

The paper consists of six sections, including this introduction. The background section serves as a brief, conceptual prelude defining key terms and placing Colombia in the context of an international division of labor within the capitalist world-system, under which Latin America is a periphery relegated to the subordinate role of a provider of raw materials for the central economies. The third section describes the historical relationship between state and paramilitary violence and increasing FDI in Colombia during Uribe's presi-

25 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/might-the-keys-to-peace-open-the-doors-to-extractivism/142264

Related Content

Identifying Forward and Backward Linkages From China's Infrastructure Investment in Africa

Ehizuelen Michael Mitchell Omoruyi (2021). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-31).

www.irma-international.org/article/identifying-forward-and-backward-linkages-from-chinas-infrastructure-investment-in-africa/272582

Education: The Basis of Democracy

(2019). *Mathematical Approaches to Understanding Democracy: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (pp. 64-83).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/education/217746

Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration (FFP LA) for Land Tenure Security as a Re-Uniting Tool for International Relations: Bridging LA Researchers in Zimbabwe, the European Union, and the United States of America

Tsitsi Muparari, Mavis Mbiriri, Mufaro Dzingirai, Freeman Ali, R. Mugandani, Foward Dewa, Paul Muchechetere, Trevor P. Mapurisaand Tanaka Muromo (2023). *Global Science's Cooperation Opportunities, Challenges, and Good Practices* (pp. 190-228).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/fit-for-purpose-land-administration-ffp-la-for-land-tenure-security-as-a-re-uniting-tool-for-international-relations/327190

China's Infrastructure Financing and the Role of Infrastructure in Awakening African Economies

Michael Mitchell Omoruyi Ehizuelen (2021). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-25).

www.irma-international.org/article/chinas-infrastructure-financing-and-the-role-of-infrastructure-in-awakening-african-economies/279131

Identifying Forward and Backward Linkages From China's Infrastructure Investment in Africa

Ehizuelen Michael Mitchell Omoruyi (2021). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-31).

www.irma-international.org/article/identifying-forward-and-backward-linkages-from-chinas-infrastructure-investment-in-africa/272582