

Chapter 23

Caguan's and Havana's Peace Talks: Strategic Retreat or Stalemate Driven?

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ABSTRACT

Different to previous attempts, negotiations currently under way in Havana between the Government and FARC, since 2012, were preceded by a decline in both parties' contentious tactics. This chapter seeks to analyze the relation between the conflict cycle and the start of a peace process, through the Colombian experience, and Dean Pruitt and Sun Lee Kim's perceived stalemate concept. It is argued that Havana dialogues are likely to be successful on the grounds that it seems that both parties share a mutual perception of stalemate. Finally, it is suggested that the context in which dialogues arose may also have an impact in an eventual DDR process.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 1964, four main processes have been put in place seeking a peaceful settlement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The first round of dialogue was launched by Belisario Betancur's administration (1982-1986) in 1984, in La Uribe (Meta Department). Even though a bilateral cease-fire was in place for almost four years, La Uribe's peace dialogues ended without an agreement. The second endeavor to peacefully end the conflict was the Caracas-Tlaxcala dialogues, carried out in both

Venezuelan and Mexican cities, during César Gaviria's administration, in the early 1990s. After another failure and a subsequent escalation, President Andrés Pastrana was elected in 1998 with a clear mandate to seek negotiations with the guerrilla groups, mainly FARC. This attempt at negotiation, also known as Caguan's peace talks, started in 1999 after President Pastrana gave the order to the Military Forces to abandon an area of approximately 42,000 km² for the purpose of hosting the peace dialogues in that zone.

After three years of negotiations, few real advances, and the declining support of the population, President Pastrana suspended the dialogues

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9675-4.ch023

ending the Demilitarized Zone (DZ) in February 2002. This marked the beginning of a new escalation of violence period in the Colombian conflict, mainly driven by the state's initiative and opposed by FARC's declining military power (Echandía, 2012c)¹.

In subsequent years, the Armed Forces have been able to recover the strategic advantage in the war against the insurgent groups. In particular, regarding FARC's situation, the security forces have not only been able to regain the initiative, as is shown by Echandía (2008), but they have inflicted major losses in the rebels' command structure. Furthermore, one of the rebel group's strengths in the last decades, such as the conception and implementation of its Strategic Plan aimed to seize power, has now been minimized to the point of becoming a liability for them.

In spite of the fact that FARC has practically given up its pretension to seize power, the group has adapted to this new situation with the purpose of keeping its strategic rearguard, which allows it to survive as an armed actor. The result from this adaptation process, natural in guerrilla groups, has allowed FARC to maintain a considerable firepower. Higher mobility and smaller units, the increased usage of landmines, and a strategic retreat towards the borders have produced a decline in the efficiency of security forces' strategies against the rebels.

Presumably, bearing that context in mind, President Santos announced, on August 2012, that "exploratory talks" were taking place between the Government and FARC with the purpose of establishing a new attempt at a peace dialogue. The parties agreed a set of ruling principles during this new approach: no demilitarization zone, a six points' concise agenda, and no cease-fire. Even though one can find these elements in previous negotiation processes, it is to be highlighted that the rebel group yielded to negotiate without a demilitarization zone, which explicitly evidenced their declining power as they gave up a concession previously made by former administrations.

FARC also renounced its historical position regarding the agenda, which previously consisted in a broad encompassing set of issues, including Colombia's economic model and the profound causes of the conflict. A small agenda is therefore not a minor compromise. Notwithstanding the fact that President Santos initially stated that Havana rounds would also differ in terms of the time to reach an agreement which would be measured in months and not years, the process will probably surpass three years. This has been interpreted as a miscalculation on the part of the Head of State, rather than as a failure of Havana's peace dialogues.

The Havana scenario is, thence, substantially different from previous efforts to reach an agreement with the guerrilla. Something in the conflict dynamics probably has changed in recent years. This could explain the start and governing principles of this new attempt at reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict. Thus, in what way does the cycle of the conflict (escalation, stalemate, de-escalation) relate to the beginning of the negotiations between the Colombian Government and FARC in Caguan's (1999-2002) and Havana's (2012-the present) currently under way peace talks?

Therefore, it is suggested in this article that there is a perceived stalemate of the conflict by the Government and FARC, which would explain why the parties have decided to get involved in a new attempt to reach a peaceful settlement. The purpose of this chapter also seeks to suggest a view that may explain why the parties have reached a compromise in the aforementioned ruling principles, from which several scholars have inferred that Havana's peace talks are likely to be successful.

In order to fulfill this purpose, the chapter will examine both Caguan's and Havana's peace talks, the last two attempts at reaching a peaceful solution. The chapter is divided in two main parts that correspond to both processes and the conflict cycle that preceded their inception. From a methodological point of view, it is intended to

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