

U.S. Foreign Assistance as Colombia's Peace Talks on Cusp of Completion

July 20, 2016 (IN10454)

Related Policy Issue

- [Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

Related Author

- [June S. Beittel](#)
-

June S. Beittel, Analyst in Latin American Affairs (jbeittel@crs.loc.gov, 7-7613)

On July 18, 2016, the Colombian Constitutional Court [approved a plebiscite](#) to allow Colombian voters to decide the fate of the peace accord under negotiation between the government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the country's largest insurgent group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). After nearly four years of negotiations, a peace accord with FARC is close to signature. The leftist FARC has fought the Colombian government for 52 years with financing derived from extortion, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities.

By early July 2016, the FARC and government negotiators had resolved most topics in a limited six-point agenda after more than 50 rounds of peace talks held in Cuba. Colombia's Post-Conflict Minister said in a meeting in Washington, DC, on [July 15, 2016](#), that he anticipated that the final accord would be signed in late August 2016. The Colombian government previously announced deadlines to reach a final accord of March 23, 2016, and July 20, 2016, but both proved unachievable. The plebiscite vote is now tentatively scheduled for late September 2016.

On June 23, 2016, the Colombian government-FARC negotiators announced their agreement to a bilateral cease-fire and provided a [road map](#) for the disarmament and demobilization of the FARC, including 23 zones in which to concentrate and demobilize FARC combatants (see map in [Figure 1](#)). A United Nations mission had been approved in January 2016 through a Security Council resolution to monitor and verify the process. In late 2015, a demining pilot co-managed by the FARC and the Santos government was launched in Antioquia, Colombia. In July 2016, another "peace" pilot project got under way in 10 hamlets in Antioquia to demonstrate voluntary crop substitution, which is a critical feature of the drug element in the peace accord. The pilot project is intended to provide a model for replacing illegal crops with viable alternative livelihoods.

Background on U.S.-Colombia Cooperation

Colombia is a key U.S. ally in Latin America. In 1997, the U.S. government listed the FARC as a foreign terrorist organization. Since 2000, Plan Colombia, a [bilateral cooperation program](#) aimed at improving Colombia's security and strengthening its democratic development, has achieved significant progress in curbing illegal drugs and combating violent insurgents that threatened to overwhelm the Colombian government. Advocates credit Plan Colombia with decreasing violence and terrorism and stabilizing the Colombian economy, whereas critics contend the initiative was over-militarized and compromised [human rights](#). With assistance from the U.S. Departments of State and Defense under Plan Colombia and its successors, Colombian security forces have made headway in [weakening the FARC](#). President Santos launched peace talks during his first term (2010-2014) and was reelected on a peace platform in 2014.

In early February 2016, President Obama and President Santos met at the White House to celebrate the 15-year anniversary of Plan Colombia. The Colombian-written initiative received the endorsement of three U.S. presidential administrations, representing both political parties, and garnered nearly \$10 billion in support from the U.S. Congress between FY2000 and FY2016. Plan Colombia benefited from strategic U.S. backing, although the program was largely funded through Colombian security budgets.

In addition to celebrating Plan Colombia's gains, President Obama proposed a new "post-peace accord" approach to U.S.-Colombian cooperation, a program called Peace Colombia (sometimes referred to in Spanish as *Paz Colombia*). The total proposed effort includes \$450 million of support, \$391 million of which the Obama Administration requested in its [FY2017 congressional budget request](#) for foreign operations.

U.S. Support for Colombia's Peace Efforts

According to President Obama's February 2016 [announcement](#) about the Peace Colombia initiative, his proposed broadening of U.S.-Colombian security cooperation has three parts:

- **Ongoing Support for the Peace Process:** In February 2015, President Obama appointed Bernard Aronson as U.S. Special Envoy to the Colombian Peace Process. Many Colombians perceived this appointment as an unprecedented endorsement of the government-FARC peace talks by the U.S. government, and the appointment was lauded by both the Santos Administration and the FARC.
- **Peace Colombia:** The new bilateral cooperation framework builds on the current effort and is a multiyear initiative that, with Congress's support, the Obama Administration maintains will allow Colombia to "win the peace" if a peace accord is signed and endorsed by the Colombian people. It has three "pillars," according to the White House:
 - 1. Expand and consolidate gains in security and counternarcotics while reintegrating the FARC into Colombian society;
 - 2. Build stronger state presence in rural areas, especially conflict areas, by increasing the presence of institutions that will reinforce the rule of law and strengthen local economies; and
 - 3. Promote justice and other essential services for conflict victims.

Funding for Peace Colombia is proposed in President Obama's FY2017 bilateral foreign assistance request totaling \$391 million, including funds for humanitarian efforts to aid vulnerable populations, and Department of Defense counternarcotics assistance (expected to total \$44 million). If all elements are enacted, the overall effort will total \$450 million.

- **Global Demining Initiative for Colombia:** The President proposed an international demining effort in coordination with funders such as Norway, Chile, the European Union, and others. U.S. assistance proposed for the initiative totals \$33 million, comprised of reprogramed and new funding in the bilateral Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs, Conventional Weapons Destruction (NADR-CWD) account.

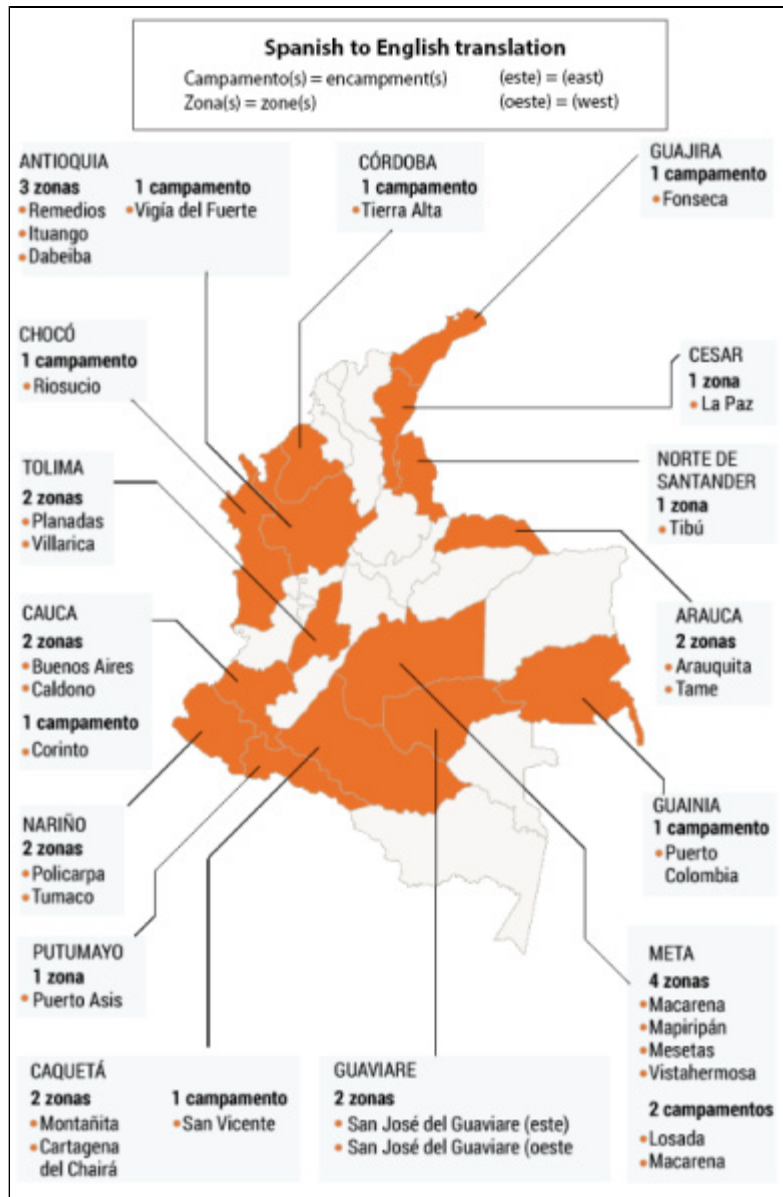
Congressional Action

In recent years, the Obama Administration and Congress have [encouraged](#) the Colombian peace process. Both the House and Senate introduced bipartisan resolutions in favor of the peace talks; the Senate resolution, [S.Res. 368](#), passed by unanimous consent on April 27, 2016. In response to the Obama Administration's request for aid in the evolving post-peace accord environment in Colombia, the Senate bill would match the Obama Administration's FY2017 request

and the House would provide substantially more, but under the condition that a peace accord is signed. The Senate bill, [S. 3117](#), includes a total of \$391.3 million, while the House bill, [H.R. 5912](#), includes \$300 million, with an additional \$191 million if a peace accord is signed and the Secretary of State certifies that it is in the national interest of the United States.

Figure 1. Map of Colombia with FARC Concentration Zones as Announced in June 2016

(department [state] name in capital letters followed by zones and encampments)



Source: El Espectador, at <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/paz/estas-son-23-zonas-de-concentracion-donde-estaran-farc-articulo-639658>.

Notes: The concentration zones (*zonas de concentración*) and encampments (*campamentos*) shown in the map were announced along with the bilateral cease-fire between the Colombian government and FARC on June 23, 2016. The

map shows a total of 23 zones and 8 encampments in 15 different states (*departamentos*).