

The Proposed U.S. Foreign Assistance Initiative "Peace Colombia"

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On February 4, 2016, President Obama and Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos met at the White House to celebrate the 15-year anniversary of Plan Colombia, a [bilateral cooperation program](#) aimed at improving Colombia's security and strengthening its democratic development. The Colombian-written Plan Colombia 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.

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*). It anticipates a peace agreement following more than three years of negotiations between the Colombian government and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country's main leftist guerilla group. 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. The U.S. Congress may be interested in the timing and scope of the program, as the Colombian government appears to be working toward what most analysts consider the most difficult phase of any peace negotiations—implementation of the peace accord.

Background

Since 2000, Plan Colombia and its follow-on strategies, which received strategic U.S. backing but were largely funded by Colombian security budgets, achieved significant progress in eradicating and interdicting illegal drugs and combating violent insurgents that threatened to overwhelm the Colombian government. Advocates credit the Plan with decreasing violence and terrorism and stabilizing the Colombian economy, whereas critics contend the initiative was over-militarized and compromised [human rights](#).

The FARC has fought the Colombian government for five decades with finances derived from extortion, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities. In 1997, the U.S. government listed the FARC as a foreign terrorist organization. Since 2002, with support from the U.S. Departments of State and Defense, 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. By the end of 2015, government and FARC negotiators had resolved four topics

in a limited six-point agenda after more than 45 rounds of talks held in Cuba. They announced a March 23, 2016, deadline for signature on a final peace accord. (For more background, see CRS Report R43813, [Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations](#).)

Elements of Peace Colombia

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

- **Support 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 it 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 in 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 with funders such as Norway, Chile, the European Union, and others. The U.S., Colombian, and Norwegian governments will host a meeting of experts to address the challenges in Colombia and to coordinate assistance efforts in May 2016.

U.S. assistance for the initiative totals \$33 million, comprised of \$3.5 million each in FY2015 and FY2016 bilateral Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs, Conventional Weapons Destruction (NADR-CWD) funds; \$21 million in bilateral NADR-CWD that is part of the President's FY2017 request; and \$5 million in FY2014-FY2016 centrally managed NADR-CWD funds to be reprogrammed for Colombia following notification to Congress.

Developments at the Peace Talks in February and Early March 2016

In mid-February, several FARC negotiators, including lead FARC negotiator Iván Márquez (Luciano Marin Arango), led a rally in La Guajira, the far northern department (state) of Colombia. The Santos government allowed the FARC negotiators to travel from Cuba to visit FARC forces in northern Colombia as part of an effort to educate FARC's rank-and-file about the nearly-completed peace agreement.

However, Márquez and others also held a political rally in the village of Conejo on [February 18, 2016](#), that was protected by a reported 500 armed FARC guerrillas and involved local townspeople. The five-hour armed gathering, according to press accounts, violated the government's understanding of the visit. Some observers called it a calculated act of defiance by the FARC leaders and noted that it was a clear violation of ground rules, ultimately sowing distrust. It has led to a crisis and a temporary stoppage of the peace talks. Supporters of the peace process, including the foreign ministers and other intermediaries from Norway and Cuba (known as the peace talks' "guarantors"), have undertaken an intense diplomatic effort to cajole the FARC leaders to return to Cuba.

The FARC negotiators eventually returned to Havana, and the negotiations restarted on March 2, 2016. However, media coverage of the incident may provide support for those urging the Colombian public to reject an eventual peace accord.

In public remarks during his visit to Washington, DC, President Santos acknowledged that the March deadline for finishing the talks may not be reached; the Guajira incident led him to warn that the talks must result in a final accord by [March 23, 2016](#), or the negotiations would be abandoned. Reportedly, many observers think that the talks are more likely to conclude with an agreement by [mid-June](#).