



Containing the Border Fallout of Colombia's New Guerrilla Schism

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What's new? Former commanders of the demobilised Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) announced the creation of a new dissident faction from a location seemingly close to the Colombia-Venezuela border, triggering accusations from Bogotá that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's government is sheltering and supporting the group.

Why does it matter? Already at loggerheads over Maduro's legitimacy, the Colombian and Venezuelan governments could stumble into conflict along a 2,200km border crossed daily by thousands of migrants and exploited by non-state armed and criminal groups. A major Venezuelan troop deployment and Colombia's invocation of a mutual defence pact have heightened the risk.

What should be done? The emergence of the new FARC dissident faction underscores that the Colombian government should redouble efforts to reintegrate former fighters into civilian life. Colombia and Venezuela should work to repair their diplomatic rupture and, in the meantime, establish communication channels to mitigate the risk of misunderstandings over border violence.

I. Overview

Iván Márquez, a senior commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), announced a "new stage" in the organisation's armed struggle in a video released on 29 August. Allegedly recorded close to the Venezuelan border, the video sent shock waves through Colombia: not only did the FARC sign a peace agreement with the Colombian government in 2016, but Márquez was head of its negotiating team. He is the highest-ranking FARC dissident to return to arms up to this point. The blow to the peace process, as well as the peril to the Colombia-Venezuela border's stability, make it imperative that Bogotá continue to honour the 2016 accord and proceed with reintegrating former fighters into civilian life. At the same time, both countries should curb the risk of military escalation by scaling down their threats of action and, where possible, restoring channels of communication between the capitals and high commands.

Thus far, however, both Bogotá and Caracas have been ratcheting up the tension. Colombian President Iván Duque vowed to intensify an offensive against FARC dissident factions. Duque also blamed Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro for giving “shelter and support” to a “criminal organisation of narco-terrorists”. Maduro responded by declaring an “amber” alert along the border – one level beneath the maximum “red” alert – and announcing military exercises there. The drills began 10 September as the government claimed to have deployed as many as 150,000 troops in addition to tanks and missile defence batteries. A day later, Colombia and eleven other parties invoked the Rio Treaty – a mutual defence pact – raising tensions yet further.

The precise reasons for the new dissident FARC faction’s founding are disputed, as is the extent of the links between it and the Venezuelan government. But the total diplomatic breakdown between Colombia and Venezuela, combined with daily threats of escalation from both sides and the numerous conflict triggers along the border, are deeply worrying. Misunderstandings or deliberate provocations by non-state armed groups could easily drag the two countries’ militaries into a fight. Bogotá should redouble efforts to carry out the 2016 peace deal so as to discourage still more splinter groups from forming. More immediately, both Bogotá and Caracas should take steps to ensure that, even if they remain at loggerheads, they can communicate with one another to avoid inter-state clashes.

II. The Dissidents’ Motives

The FARC ceased to exist as an insurgency after it handed over its weapons in mid-2017.¹ It has since taken part in its first legislative elections and now has a guaranteed quota of seats in both houses of Congress. But discontent among former guerrillas with the peace deal and with the Colombian state has never fully disappeared.² Nor have the group’s leaders been able to stop disgruntled members from returning to armed struggle and enlisting new recruits in it. An estimated 2,300 dissidents – many of them recent recruits – are now operating in various regions, particularly along the Pacific coast and the Orinoco river, as well as in the eastern plains, where the First Front led by Gentil Duarte controls trafficking routes to Venezuela and Brazil.³

These dissidents claim that armed struggle is justified because the government has not abided by the 2016 accord – a deal Duque’s centre-right Democratic Centre party and its hawkish leader, former president Álvaro Uribe, opposed in a referen-

¹ On the Colombian peace negotiations, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°58, *Colombia’s Final Steps to the End of War*, 7 September 2016.

² Crisis Group Commentary, “Crucial Reforms Languish as Colombia Seeks to Consolidate Peace”, 19 July 2019.

³ On the origins of the FARC dissidents, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°63, *Colombia’s Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace*, 19 October 2017. The 2,300 figure appears in a Colombian military intelligence report cited in “Thousands of Colombian FARC rebels return to arms despite peace accord – military intelligence report”, Reuters, 5 June 2019. A more recent estimate puts the figure at 2,100, including 300 new recruits. “Más sombras que luces. La seguridad en Colombia a un año del gobierno de Iván Duque”, Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, August 2019, p. 33.

dum three years ago on the grounds that it absolved the guerrillas of their crimes and indulged them with perks instead.⁴

The government fed the dissidents' perceptions earlier this year, when it tried to make more stringent the transitional justice mechanism – the Special Jurisdiction for Peace – designed for demobilised guerrillas and state security forces involved in the conflict.⁵ Among other things, this mechanism favours truthful confession, community service and restrictions on freedom of movement over jail time for the accused, even for ex-guerrillas accused of serious crimes. In the end, Duque failed to limit the Jurisdiction's curbs on extradition and criminal prosecution for grave crimes. But his effort to do so provoked an outcry in former FARC ranks as well as among a broader swath of the peace deal's supporters in Colombia and abroad, who worried that it placed the entire accord in jeopardy.⁶

The 29 August video picks up on this theme. Alongside Márquez, who went missing a year ago, appeared Jesús Santrich, another former FARC commander, who had vanished from a reintegration cantonment in June, as well as eighteen other senior and mid-ranking former commanders.⁷ Wearing fatigues featuring the acronym FARC-EP and sporting high-calibre weapons, the men declared that they had once again taken up arms against the government because it had violated the 2016 accord, in particular by failing to distribute land to rural communities or honour promises regarding coca substitution.⁸ Márquez also appeared to refer to the attempt to alter the Special Jurisdiction for Peace: he claimed that the government had undertaken a “unilateral modification of the text” of the accord and spoke of the “judicial insecurity” to which ex-guerrillas are subject.⁹

Physical insecurity is also an acute concern among demobilised former FARC members. The Public Ombudsman's Office reports the murder of an estimated 149 former FARC combatants since the peace accord was signed, mainly at the hands of a variety of criminal groups, including dissident guerrilla factions.¹⁰ Dissidents have also pointed to killings of civil society leaders and community activists, reported by the Ombudsman's Office to number 462 in the three years prior to February 2019, to

⁴ Márquez made this argument after going into hiding but months before announcing his new armed group's formation. “Iván Márquez dice que el Estado traicionó el Acuerdo pero que luchará por la paz”, *El Espectador*, 12 January 2019.

⁵ Crisis Group Commentary, “Crucial Reforms Languish”, op. cit.

⁶ “Colombian Duque's bid to change peace deal rattles sabers, but war unlikely”, Reuters, 17 March 2019.

⁷ “El historial de los guerrilleros que aparecen junto a Márquez y Santrich en el video”, *Semana*, 29 August 2019. Santrich occupies one of the ten congressional slots allocated to the FARC under the peace deal. “The disappearance of Jesús Santrich threatens Colombia's peace deal”, *The Economist*, 6 July 2019.

⁸ The acronym stands for Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army, which is the name the guerrillas gave themselves at their Seventh Conference in 1982. They retained this name until August 2017, when they formed their political party Common Alternative Revolutionary Force.

⁹ “Former Farc commanders say they are returning to war despite 2016 peace deal”, *The Guardian*, 29 August 2019. “Los Judas de la paz”, *Semana*, 1 September 2019. The full version of the first video announcement is online. Since then, three additional videos have been released: on 1 September, on 4 September and, finally, on 8 September.

¹⁰ “Defensoría: Partido FARC tiene altos riesgos de sufrir actos violentos”, *Caracol*, 5 September 2019. An estimated 80 per cent of killings of former FARC fighters have occurred in areas with a high concentration of illegal businesses and criminal groups. “Las trayectorias de la reincorporación y la seguridad de los excombatientes de las FARC”, Fundación Ideas para la Paz, August 2019.

justify their distrust of the Colombian state and landowning elite, whom they hold responsible.¹¹ Citing these death tolls and the state's other alleged failings, Márquez insisted in his recorded statement that he and his comrades in arms were "obliged to take up arms again".

At the same time, criminal interests are doubtless at stake. Dissident groups along the Pacific seaboard are intimately involved in drug trafficking, from coca production to cocaine shipments.¹² Santrich was jailed for a year after the U.S. called for his extradition on charges of conspiring to ship ten tonnes of cocaine. He was eventually released in May after the Special Jurisdiction for Peace denied the extradition request.¹³ Márquez himself went into hiding over a year ago after his nephew became a protected witness for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.¹⁴ According to Rodrigo Londoño, alias "Timochenko", head of the rebranded FARC political party, this "personal motivation", possibly tied to stakes in drug trafficking and fears of prosecution, is sufficient to explain the new faction's formation.¹⁵

III. What Márquez's Pledge Means

FARC dissidents and other armed bands have posed a security threat in several peripheral Colombian regions since 2016. But the seniority of the figures involved in the 29 August video poses a heightened risk to the peace process, as does their desire to ally with the National Liberation Army (ELN), Colombia's other major insurgency, which is not party to the FARC peace deal.¹⁶

A pressing concern is that an armed group led by high-ranking FARC figures could prove a magnet for the 24 existing dissident factions – though as yet no evidence suggests that these outfits are looking for new leaders – and for those who are either not fully committed to demobilisation or are reconsidering their choice.¹⁷

While the government has poured resources into assistance for former combatants seeking to join civilian life, these efforts remain precarious. For example, around 3,000 former combatants have received support in the so-called Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation – which are essentially camps where they have been offered vocational training and backing for future business projects with the help of public funds.¹⁸ But the government is phasing out the camps. In mid-August,

¹¹ "Asesinan a Yunier Moreno, líder social de Cartagena del Chairá, Caquetá", *El Espectador*, 9 September 2019.

¹² Crisis Group Latin America Report N°76, *Calming the Restless Pacific: Violence and Crime on Colombia's Coast*, 8 August 2019.

¹³ "La JEP niega la extradición de Jesús Santrich a Estados Unidos y ordena su libertad", *Semana*, 15 May 2019.

¹⁴ "Marlon Marín, el testigo protegido de EE UU", BBC Mundo, 3 June 2019.

¹⁵ "FARC y el proceso de paz en Colombia: 'No sé si narcotráfico o qué, pero veo una motivación personal', dice Timochenko, líder del partido FARC, sobre la rebelión de exguerrilleros", BBC Mundo, 4 September 2019.

¹⁶ Crisis Group Latin America Report N°68, *The Missing Peace: Colombia's New Government and Last Guerrillas*, 12 July 2018.

¹⁷ "Proteger a los excombatientes", *Semana*, 1 September 2019.

¹⁸ "United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, Report of the Secretary-General", UN Security Council, 27 June 2019.

they lost their previous legal status as reintegration zones and thirteen of them are set to become permanent settlements, meaning that they risk eventually losing their privileged access to perimeter security, food and social services.¹⁹ A further eleven are due to be relocated because they are considered inaccessible or unsafe.²⁰ There is also uncertainty as to how much longer former fighters in and outside the camps will receive monthly stipends.²¹

Despite these developments, Londoño has insisted that over 90 per cent of the 13,000 officially registered former FARC members remain committed to the peace process.²² He also expressed concern that by announcing a return to war and seemingly confirming the suspicions of the peace accord's critics that the guerrillas could not be trusted, the dissidents were "handing on a silver platter to the enemies of peace the possibility of damaging the process".²³

Márquez's pledge that the new dissident group would seek greater coordination with the ELN also raises worries that the two groups could together pose a large, integrated insurgent threat.²⁴ In the past, such coordination seemed unlikely because, although both groups profess a shared Marxist ideology, they had a history of internecine violence. But cooperation between them has improved over the last ten years.²⁵ Moreover, the ELN is no longer in peace talks with the Colombian government following its January bomb attack against a police academy in Bogotá, which killed 22.²⁶ Local partnerships between ELN and FARC dissidents already appear to be under way on Venezuelan territory, including to coordinate drug trafficking between the border states of Arauca (Colombia) and Apure (Venezuela), as well as to assert control over illegal mining in the latter country's Amazonas state.²⁷

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, senior Colombian government official, Bogotá, 21 August 2019. "Viaje a entrañas de unos de los territorios de reincorporación", *El Tiempo*, 11 August 2019. "Las trayectorias de la reincorporación y la seguridad de los excombatientes de las FARC", op. cit.

²¹ Current government pledges indicate that these stipends, worth 90 per cent of the minimum wage, as well as other state provisions such as access to health services, or support for future livelihoods, will last another year and a half. "¿Qué pasará con los excombatientes de las Farc que siguen en el proceso?", *El Tiempo*, 30 August 2019.

²² "Más del 90 por ciento de los ex guerrilleros de las FARC siguen comprometidos con el proceso de paz", *El Mundo*, 29 August 2019.

²³ "Esto es lo que más le dolió a 'Timochenko' del anuncio de sus ex camaradas de Farc", *Pulzo*, 29 August 2019.

²⁴ One of the first points mentioned in Márquez's speech is a possible alliance with the ELN. Jaime Arias, alias "Uriel," commander of the ELN's Western War Front, welcomed Márquez's renewed commitment to guerrilla warfare, saying it was "better late than never". "Alias 'Uriel' del ELN celebra que 'Iván Márquez' y 'Santrich' retomen las armas", BLU Radio, 29 August 2019.

²⁵ Crisis Group Latin America Report N°51, *Left in the Cold? The ELN and Colombia's Peace Talks*, 26 February 2014.

²⁶ Kyle Johnson, "Bogotá Bomb Shatters Peace Talks with Colombia's Last Guerrillas", Crisis Group Commentary, 22 January 2019.

²⁷ "El ELN y las disidencias están coordinadas", *La Silla Vacía*, 3 December 2018; Crisis Group Latin America Report N°73, *Gold and Grief in Venezuela's Violent South*, 28 February 2019.

IV. The Venezuela Angle

Although in the 29 August video Márquez and his comrades claimed to be recording their statement in the eastern Colombian region of Inírida, senior government officials said the more likely location was in Venezuela.²⁸ Whatever the truth, there is no doubt that FARC dissidents as well as ELN guerrillas have expanded their presence and illicit business interests in Venezuela in recent years.²⁹ Their increasing reliance on Venezuela as a revenue source and territorial safe haven represents perhaps the most alarming aspect of the announcement for regional peace.

It is unclear what ties, if any, these groups have to Maduro's government or the Venezuelan armed forces, but the topic is a matter of intense speculation.³⁰ Maduro fuelled this speculation when he said in late July that former FARC leaders, including Márquez and Santrich (whom he referred to as "leaders of peace"), were welcome to attend a conference of left-wing activists in Caracas.³¹ Numerous local witnesses – mineral traders and ordinary residents – have said that Colombian guerrillas do illicit business with Venezuelan security forces and politicians, above all in the mining regions of southern Venezuela.³²

At the same time, the hostility between the Colombian and Venezuelan governments has created a climate of extreme mistrust, which the Márquez video has only aggravated. Diplomatic relations suffered greatly in January when Colombia, along with the U.S. and numerous Latin American and European states, refused to recognise Maduro as the Venezuelan president and instead recognised the Venezuelan National Assembly chair and opposition leader, Juan Guaidó. The two countries then severed ties in February after Colombia supported the failed bid by Guaidó to funnel humanitarian aid across the border into Venezuela.³³

Against this backdrop, President Duque has accused the Maduro government of providing the FARC dissidents a safe haven, and asked for Guaidó's support in cap-

²⁸ Colombia's High Commissioner for Peace Miguel Ceballos warned that the mention in the first video of a putative alliance with the ELN suggests that the recording was made in Venezuelan territory, given that an alleged 46 per cent of ELN fighters are based in that country. "Video de Iván Márquez y Santrich habría sido grabado en territorio venezolano: alto comisionado para la Paz", *El Heraldo*, 29 August 2019.

²⁹ Guerrillas from the ELN as well as FARC dissidents are heavily involved in illegal mining for gold and other valuable minerals in the southern Venezuelan states of Bolívar and Amazonas. See Crisis Group Report, *Gold and Grief in Venezuela's Violent South*, op. cit.

³⁰ *Semana*, a leading Colombian magazine, published a report citing allegedly leaked Venezuelan intelligence and internal military memoranda indicating that Maduro's government is harbouring Colombian rebels inside Venezuela. It claimed that a top military official under instructions from Maduro ordered generals to provide support to a so-called Red Group, referring to ELN guerrillas and FARC dissidents, at "training zones" inside Venezuela, and to jointly identify targets in Colombia for future attacks. *Semana* did not explain how it obtained the documents and published only heavily redacted excerpts. "Manguala contra Colombia", *Semana*, 8 September 2019. FARC party leader Londoño said he was "very much in doubt" that Maduro is supporting FARC dissidents. "La alianza de la disidencia con el Eln la veo complicada": Londoño", *El Tiempo*, 10 September 2019.

³¹ "Maduro says missing FARC leaders are 'welcome in Venezuela'", Reuters, 28 July 2019.

³² Crisis Group Report, *Gold and Grief in Venezuela's Violent South*, op. cit.

³³ "Maduro se atrinchera y rompe relaciones con Colombia", *El País*, 24 February 2019.

turing members of the newly announced guerrilla group in Venezuela, even though Guaidó has no control over Venezuelan territory or its armed forces.³⁴

Bogotá has also appealed to its international partners for help. Following Márquez's announcement, Colombia made its case regarding the alleged connections among the Venezuelan government, ELN guerrillas and FARC dissidents at the Organization of American States in Washington.³⁵ It also – together with the U.S. and ten other treaty parties – invoked the Rio Treaty of 1947, a mutual defence pact that creates a framework for coercive measures from sanctions to the use of force.³⁶ Duque has stated that at the UN at the end of September, Colombia intends to call for the Maduro government to be held to task for providing support to terrorism in violation of Resolution 1373 (though Russia and China, both supporters of Maduro, are likely to block any measure in the Security Council that would put him on the back foot).³⁷

Venezuela has taken escalatory actions of its own. Colombia's invocation of the Rio Treaty came just days after a reported 150,000 Venezuelan troops – together with tanks and missile systems – deployed along the frontier in drills that began on 10 September and are due to last until the 28 September.³⁸ Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López has also warned of a military response if Colombia violates the sovereignty of Venezuela.³⁹

Against this backdrop, the risk is now high that Bogotá will regard any cross-border incidents involving the FARC dissidents or ELN – including real, imminent or purported attacks on Colombian targets from bases on Venezuelan soil – as attributable to what it sees as an illegitimate and belligerent government in Caracas. Bogotá may also believe it has a free hand to act with or without the Security Council's blessing.

For one thing, Colombia's recognition of Guaidó as the Venezuelan head of state means that it may feel entitled to rely on him for consent to operate militarily on Venezuelan territory – which Guaidó could be inclined to give. Speaking to the National Assembly on 3 September, Guaidó said he would “ally with the democratic world” in

³⁴ “Duque solicita respaldo de Guaidó para capturar a Iván Márquez y Santrich”, Canal1, 29 August 2019.

³⁵ “Grupos armados ilegales y su relación con el régimen venezolano”, Colombian Foreign Ministry, 11 September 2019.

³⁶ “Venezuela: por primera vez en 18 años, la OEA activa pacto de defensa”, *El Tiempo*, 12 September 2019. Twelve of the nineteen treaty parties voted in favor of initiating activation of the Rio Treaty, also known as the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR in Spanish).

³⁷ Duque stated that, in front of the General Assembly, he will denounce the Venezuelan dictatorship for protecting and sponsoring Colombian terrorists on its territory, violating Security Council Resolution 1373, a cornerstone of the UN counter-terrorism architecture dating back to the post 9/11 period. “¿Cuáles serán los temas de Colombia en la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas”, Radio Nacional de Colombia, 12 September 2019.

³⁸ “Tensión entre Venezuela y Colombia: el régimen de Nicolás Maduro desplegará 150.000 militares en la frontera”, Infobae, 10 September 2019. The official number of active troops in Venezuela's armed forces is no larger than 150,000. “Fuerza Armada”, Venezuelan Ministry of People's Power for Defence.

³⁹ “Vladimir Padrino dice que el régimen de Venezuela responderá militarmente contra Colombia”, *Diario Las Americas*, 31 August 2019. Maduro has also claimed that ten plots to assassinate him are afoot in Colombia. “Maduro dice que hay 10 planes para asesinarlo desde Colombia: ¿cuántas veces ha denunciado que atentan contra su vida?”, CNN Español, 12 September 2019.

defeating the “threat to Venezuelans” posed by the FARC, ELN and other outfits that the opposition-controlled legislature has branded “terrorist groups”.⁴⁰

Moreover, should Venezuela prove unable or unwilling to stop an ELN or FARC dissident attack on Colombia that emanates from its territory, some views of international law (including Washington’s) would hold that Bogotá can take necessary and proportionate military action to address the threat inside Venezuela, and turn to the U.S. and other Rio Treaty parties to provide assistance in accordance with their obligations under Article 3(1) of the treaty.⁴¹

It is not clear how much Duque is spoiling for a fight. He has opted to classify the new dissidents as a “gang” or criminal group, language suggesting that they are a problem to be addressed through law enforcement rather than military action.⁴² Even so, without binational communication channels to establish the truth behind any border incident or prevent misunderstandings, violence by any of the numerous armed and criminal groups operating along the frontier could spur rapid, perilous military escalation.⁴³

V. What Should Be Done

The new dissidents’ announcement will further entrench a view long held by the 2016 peace accord’s critics: that the guerrillas are inveterate recidivists who cannot be trusted and do not deserve the benefits they have gained from signing the treaty.

In fact, however, the progress Colombia has made suggests the opposite. For all the challenges that the peace process has faced, the vast majority of former guerrilla commanders and members have made substantial gains in political participation

⁴⁰ “Guaidó: Declaramos al ELN, Hezbollah, ISIS y disidentes de las FARC como ‘grupos terroristas’”, *El Universal*, 4 September 2019. Guaidó said he would allow the use of satellite technology to detect the location of Colombian armed groups. “Guaidó permite uso de satélites para ubicar grupos armados”, *El Tiempo*, 3 September 2019.

⁴¹ The U.S. was one of the twelve signatories to vote to invoke the treaty on 11 September. Article 3(1) of the Rio Treaty memorialises the mutual assistance obligation as follows: “The High Contracting Parties agree that an armed attack by any State against an American State shall be considered as an attack against all the American States and, consequently, each one of the said Contracting Parties undertakes to assist in meeting the attack in the exercise of the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations”. The form of assistance is not, however, rigidly prescribed. Article 3(2) states that: “On the request of the State or States directly attacked and until the decision of the Organ of Consultation of the Inter-American System, each one of the Contracting Parties may determine the immediate measures which it may individually take in fulfillment of the obligation contained in the preceding paragraph and in accordance with the principle of continental solidarity”.

⁴² Writing in the *Washington Post*, Duque said of the new FARC dissident group that “this is a gang that has been emboldened, sheltered and supported in Venezuela by the dictatorship of Nicolás Maduro”. Iván Duque, “Colombia wants peace and will not be intimidated by ex-FARC criminals sheltered in Venezuela”, *Washington Post*, 3 September 2019.

⁴³ For instance, Venezuelan government officials claimed that Colombian paramilitaries may be deployed to carry out attacks on Venezuelan soil. In this regard, they have pointed to a photo showing Guaidó with two leaders of the Rastrojos criminal group established in the wake of the 2006 paramilitary demobilisation. “El oscuro prontuario de los delincuentes de la foto con Guaidó”, *El Tiempo*, 13 September 2019.

and reintegration into civilian life, while the vast majority of the 13,000 demobilised guerrillas now aspire to become law-abiding citizens. The best way to halt the growth of dissident FARC factions and prevent future Colombian insurgencies will be to help former fighters continue on their path to civilian life while also doing more to implement the long-term rural and political reforms laid out in the peace accord rather than undercutting them. Donors, other governments and multilateral institutions should underline their support for the peace process and urge the Colombian government to honour it. At the same time, the Colombian state should complement its military offensives against FARC dissident groups by ensuring a stable police presence in territories affected by these outfits and offering a path to demobilisation and reintegration for their members.

On the frontier, despite the manifest mistrust between Bogotá and Caracas, it is in both governments' interests to establish channels to communicate in order to resolve flare-ups of violence, whether these involve cross-border intrusions or attacks by armed groups or forced displacement caused by the presence of these same organisations. Optimally, the two governments would start by scaling down military drills and stepping back from the invocation of mutual defence treaties. Given the existence of numerous armed and criminal factions along the border, it is essential that both sides refrain from rushing to assumptions as to which group was involved and for what purpose. If restoration of diplomatic relations is off the table in the near term, as seems likely, then Bogotá and Caracas should give urgent consideration to the creation of a multilateral mechanism to monitor border incidents and to engage with both sides so as to discourage military escalation.

Bogotá/Brussels, 20 September 2019

Appendix A: Map of Colombia



Appendix B: Reports and Briefings on Latin America since 2016

Special Reports and Briefings

- Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).
- Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.
- Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid*, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.
- Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy*, Special Briefing N°1, 30 April 2019.
- Seven Opportunities for the UN in 2019-2020*, Special Briefing N°2, 12 September 2019.
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- Crutch to Catalyst? The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala*, Latin America Report N°56, 29 January 2016 (also available in Spanish).
- Venezuela: Edge of the Precipice*, Latin America Briefing N°35, 23 June 2016 (also available in Spanish).
- Easy Prey: Criminal Violence and Central American Migration*, Latin America Report N°57, 28 July 2016 (also available in Spanish).
- Colombia's Final Steps to the End of War*, Latin America Report N°58, 7 September 2016 (also available in Spanish).
- Venezuela: Tough Talking*, Latin America Report N°59, 16 December 2016 (also available in Spanish).
- In the Shadow of "No": Peace after Colombia's Plebiscite*, Latin America Report N°60, 31 January 2017 (also available in Spanish).
- Veracruz: Fixing Mexico's State of Terror*, Latin America Report N°61, 28 February 2017 (also available in Spanish).
- Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America*, Latin America Report N°62, 6 April 2017 (also available in Spanish).
- Power without the People: Averting Venezuela's Breakdown*, Latin America Briefing N°36, 19 June 2017 (also available in Spanish).
- Colombia's Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace*, Latin America Report N°63, 19 October 2017 (also available in Spanish).
- Venezuela: Hunger by Default*, Latin America Briefing N°37, 23 November 2017 (also available in Spanish).
- El Salvador's Politics of Perpetual Violence*, Latin America Report N°64, 19 December 2017 (also available in Spanish).
- Containing the Shock Waves from Venezuela*, Latin America Report N°65, 21 March 2018 (also available in Spanish).
- Mexico's Southern Border: Security, Violence and Migration in the Trump Era*, Latin America Report N°66, 9 May 2018 (also available in Spanish).
- Risky Business: The Duque Government's Approach to Peace in Colombia*, Latin America Report N°67, 21 June 2018 (also available in Spanish).
- The Missing Peace: Colombia's New Government and Last Guerrillas*, Latin America Report N°68, 12 July 2018 (also available in Spanish).
- Building Peace in Mexico: Dilemmas Facing the López Obrador Government*, Latin America Report N°69, 11 October 2018 (also available in Spanish).
- Saving Guatemala's Fight Against Crime and Impunity*, Latin America Report N°70, 24 October 2018.
- Friendly Fire: Venezuela's Opposition Turmoil*, Latin America Report N°71, 23 November 2018 (also available in Spanish).
- A Road to Dialogue After Nicaragua's Crushed Uprising*, Latin America Report N°72, 19 December 2018 (also available in Spanish).
- Gold and Grief in Venezuela's Violent South*, Latin America Report N°73, 28 February 2019 (also available in Spanish).
- A Way Out of Latin America's Impasse over Venezuela*, Latin America Briefing N°38, 14 May 2019 (also available in Spanish).
- The Keys to Restarting Nicaragua's Stalled Talks*, Latin America Report N°74, 13 June 2019 (also available in Spanish).
- A Glimmer of Light in Venezuela's Gloom*, Latin America Report N°75, 15 July 2019 (also available in Spanish).
- Calming the Restless Pacific: Violence and Crime on Colombia's Coast*, Latin America Report N°76, 8 August 2019 (also available in Spanish).
- Venezuela's Military Enigma*, Latin America Briefing N°39, 16 September 2019 (also available in Spanish).



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