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FEATURED Q&A

Will a Long-Awaited Report Spur Lasting Peace in Colombia?



Colombian truth commission head Francisco de Roux and President-elect Gustavo Petro spoke June 28 at the release of the commission's report on Colombia's armed conflict. // Photo: Facebook Page of Gustavo Petro.

Q Colombia's truth commission on June 28 published its long-awaited report on the country's more than five-decade internal armed conflict. According to the nearly 900-page report, the conflict's effects on rebel groups and the Colombian military have been "massive and intolerable." Additionally, the country's current drug policy has been ineffective and has allowed the conflict to continue, according to the truth commission. What are the truth commission's most important findings, and what are its recommendations to help Colombia move past the conflict? What will President-elect Gustavo Petro—a former guerrilla—do to bring about and maintain peace in Colombia? What roles did other countries, including the United States, play during Colombia's armed conflict, and were they beneficial or detrimental to the objective of peace?

A Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli, director for the Andes at the Washington Office on Latin America: "Colombia's truth commission on June 28 delivered on its herculean task of producing a report that brings together a cohesive narrative of abuses committed during Colombia's nearly 60-year internal armed conflict. Working during a time when the governing party was at odds with advancing the peace process as signed in 2016 and actively working to undermine the transitional justice system was not easy. The result is a multiple thesis-worthy analysis from the perspective of victims of all the armed actors, of the human and humanitarian impact of Colombia's internal fissures. The report focuses on presenting the truth from the victims'

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Mexico Agrees to Spend \$1.5 Billion to Bolster Border

Mexico agreed to spend \$1.5 billion over the next two years to strengthen its border. The announcement came as Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador met with U.S. President Joe Biden at the White House.

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BUSINESS

U.S. Charges Two in Laundering Scheme Related to PDVSA

The U.S. Justice Department announced charges against two asset managers in connection with a scheme at Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA.

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ECONOMIC

Brazil Seeking to Buy Diesel From Russia: França

Brazil is seeking to buy as much diesel as possible from Russia in order to supply agribusiness and other consumers, Foreign Minister Carlos França said Tuesday.

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França // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Mexico Agrees to Spend \$1.5 Billion to Strengthen Border

Mexico's government on Tuesday pledged to spend \$1.5 billion to strengthen its border with the United States, an agreement that came as President Andrés Manuel López Obrador met at the White House with U.S. President Joe Biden, Reuters reported. In a joint statement, the Mexican and U.S. governments said they would take "immediate and coordinated steps to manage the flows of migrants arriving in our two countries," the wire service reported. "Borders that are more resilient, more efficient, and safer, will enhance our shared commerce," the two presidents said in a joint statement, the Associated Press reported. We are committed like never before to completing a multi-year joint U.S.-Mexico border infrastructure modernization effort for projects along the 2,000-mile border," they added. López Obrador and Biden also vowed to fight the soaring rate of inflation as well as lower trade costs. "Despite the overhyped headlines we sometimes see, you and I have a strong, productive relationship,"

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perspectives and highlights the costs the political conflict placed on civilian populations with differentiated women's, Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, gender and LGBTQ perspectives. Importantly, it points out the role the United States played in the conflict due to the strong intertwined U.S.-Colombia security and antinarcotics relationship.

The recommendations focus on promoting peace with all illegal actors, reforming the justice system, addressing corruption and implementing transformative police reform to reduce rights violations. Now that this report has come out, U.S. policymakers and stakeholders should draw from it lessons on how to reform U.S. policy towards Colombia so that it is more effective in constructing peace, security and strong institutions. Fur-

Biden told López Obrador. "This will not be the first nor the last occasion on which we close ranks to help each other, we know," said López Obrador. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in Tuesday's Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

Brazil Seeking To Buy Diesel From Russia: Foreign Minister

Brazil is seeking to buy as much diesel as it can from Russia, and there have been talks between the two countries with deals that are being closed "as recently" as Monday, Brazilian Foreign Minister Carlos França said Tuesday, Reuters reported. França said Brazil is looking to buy "as much as we can" from Russia. "We have to make sure that we have enough diesel [for] the Brazilian agribusiness and, of course, for Brazilian drivers," he said in New York during a visit to the United Nations. "So that's why we were looking for safe and very reliable suppliers of diesel—Russia is one of them," he added, the wire service reported. França said he does not believe there has been any push-

thermore, it should serve as a framework for dealing with long-standing structural issues facing ethnic minorities and victims."



Camila Hernandez, associate director at the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center at the Atlantic Council: "Following

four years of investigation, Colombia's truth commission has made recommendations in eight areas to help end violence, advance reconciliation and guarantee the nonrepetition of the armed conflict. These include implementing the 2016 peace agreement and advancing negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN) and other armed groups; recognizing and aiding victims, who represent approximately 20 percent of

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NEWS BRIEFS

Dozens Killed in Gang Battles in Port-au-Prince

Dozens of people have been killed in Haiti's capital over the past four days amid clashes between two rival gangs, local officials said Tuesday, the Associated Press reported. Jean Hlslain Frederick, deputy mayor in Port-au-Prince's impoverished Cité Soleil district, said that at least 50 people had been killed and 50 others had been injured in the fighting that began last Friday, the AP reported. Doctors Without Borders said thousands of people in Cité Soleil had no access to food or water.

Protests Continue in Panama Despite Cortizo's Move to Freeze Fuel Prices

Protests in Panama, which have been occurring for more than a week amid soaring fuel prices, grew on Tuesday despite President Laurentino Cortizo's promise on Monday to extend a gasoline price freeze to all Panamanians, the Associated Press reported. Cortizo has blamed the rise in fuel prices on the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Panamanian population's "cup of tolerance and patience ... overflowed with the price of fuel, which is abusive, among other things," said Miguel Antonio Bernal, a professor at the University of Panama.

Petrobras Begins Sale of Stake in UEG Araucária

Petrobras on Tuesday started the nonbinding phase in the sale of its 18.8 percent stake in electricity distributor UEG Araucária, a joint venture between Grupo Copel and the Brazilian state oil company, Reuters reported, citing a company securities filing. UEG Araucária owns a natural gas plant located in Brazil's Paraná state that has a capacity of 585 megawatts. "This operation is aligned with the strategy of portfolio optimization and improved allocation of the company's capital," Petrobras said.

back from Western countries to Brazil's efforts to buy Russian diesel. "Russia is a strategic partner of Brazil. We are partners at BRICS," França said, referring to the emerging-market bloc that also includes China, India and South Africa. While leaving the Brazilian presidential palace on Monday, Bolsonaro told supporters, "I'll likely buy cheaper diesel from Russia," adding that "everything is going well in Brazil," Bloomberg News reported. Bolsonaro, who is running against former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in the October presidential election, has seen his political support wane amid high fuel prices in Brazil, Reuters reported.

Chilean Government Raises Expectation for Inflation to 11.1%

Chile's government on Tuesday increased its inflation estimates for this year, saying it expects an 11.1 percent rise in prices, 2.2 percentage points more than its previous projection, Reuters reported. Economic data last week showed Chile's inflation at its highest level since 1994. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow by 1.6 percent this year, one-tenth of a percentage point higher than the finance ministry's previous estimate, the wire service reported. "There is not a significant change when it comes to GDP," said Chilean Finance Minister Mario Marcel. "In the second half of the year we'll see greater weakness in consumption and demand," he added.

BUSINESS NEWS

U.S. Charges Two in \$1.2 Bn Laundering Scheme at PDVSA

The U.S. Justice Department on Tuesday announced that two financial asset managers have been charged in connection with a \$1.2 billion money laundering scheme that is alleged to have illegally obtained funds from Venezuelan state oil company Petróleos de Venezuela,

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

What Did Maduro Accomplish on His Middle East Trip?

Q In June, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro visited Kuwait, Qatar, Turkey and Algeria, among other countries, during a tour of the Middle East and Mediterranean. The trip overlapped with the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles, which the Biden administration did not invite Maduro's government to attend. What were Maduro's goals for his recent trip, and what did he achieve? Which regional relationships matter most to Venezuela? What do the countries Maduro visited offer Venezuela, and what does Venezuela offer them?

A Asier Achutegui, former international affairs manager at PDVSA: "One of Nicolás Maduro's main political priorities is to get international legitimacy and to be recognized as the sole leader of Venezuela. By refusing to invite him to the Summit of the Americas, President Biden hit him exactly where it hurt most, especially after some shy attempts of rapprochement in the previous months and pressure from friendly governments in the region to change Biden's mind. Refusing to also invite Juan Guaidó, his main rival in terms of international recognition, did not soften the blow. Once it became clear that

the decision of leaving him out was final, Maduro rushed to demonstrate that he is not isolated from the international community and organized an impromptu world tour, adding stops as they came along. It was most probably due to the last-minute organization that it left out his two main allies: China and Russia, as their protocol offices did not respond in time to arrange such a visit. Out of the six countries that did accept his visit—with all presidential honors—Turkey is the most important one, as it represents an alternative to the high dependence on Russian military equipment and routes for financial transactions of its oil exports. The tour showed Maduro's confidence in his international support as he did not seem nervous about taking a transcontinental trip while having a \$15 million bounty on his head. Since the warrant was issued, he has only trusted visiting Cuba and Mexico, two allies that would certainly not hand him over to U.S. authorities."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment above is a continuation of the Q&A published in the June 30 issue of the Advisor.

or PDVSA. Swiss national Ralph Steinmann, 48, and Luis Fernando Vuteff, 51, of Argentina were each charged with one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering in relation to the alleged scheme. The indictment was returned in U.S. federal court in the Southern District of Florida. The Justice Department alleges that Steinmann, Vuteff and others were involved in laundering "illicit proceeds in connection with a corrupt foreign currency exchange scheme" from around December 2014 to at least August 2018 and "discussed and agreed to create the sophisticated financial mechanisms and rela-

tionships required to launder more than \$200 million." The Justice Department also alleges the men opened "accounts for or on behalf of at least two Venezuelan public officials to receive their bribe payments." If Steinmann and Vuteff are convicted, they could face up to 20 years in prison. Vuteff has been arrested, and Steinmann remains at large, the Justice Department said. In June, Carmelo Urdaneta Aquí, a Venezuelan lawyer accused as a part of the alleged scheme, was sentenced in Miami to four years in prison for conspiracy to commit money laundering, Agencia EFE reported.

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Colombia's population; and promoting the political participation of minorities, protecting social leaders and guaranteeing the right to protest. The report also concludes that drug trafficking has exacerbated the conflict, recommending that Colombia legalize drugs and demilitarize drug policy. In addition, it identifies the need for an increasingly independent, impartial and efficient justice system, proposing changes to the way in which the attorney general is elected, creating a transition committee similar to Guatemala's CICIG. Other report recommendations include reforming the police to strengthen civil leadership (it currently operates under the Ministry of Defense) and promoting peace education in schools and in partnership with social and traditional media outlets. Most findings are in line with President-elect Gustavo Petro's 'paz grande' (big peace) government program—a concept he coined to criticize President Juan Manuel Santos for what Petro calls Santos' 'paz chiquita' (small peace). Although report recommendations are nonbinding, they serve to validate Petro's 'paz grande' proposal, focused on implementing the peace agreement, negotiating with the ELN and demilitarizing the relationship between the state and its citizens. As a result, many have expressed confidence in Petro's commitment to implementing report recommendations to help Colombia move past the conflict."

A **Andrea Saldarriaga Jiménez, international and government relations expert and previous advisor to former Colombian presidential candidate Sergio Fajardo:** "The findings of the truth commission's report should not be surprising for any Colombian who lived through the conflict, but they should be humbling and a lesson to us all of the importance that truth bears to be able to rebuild a different country and future—a future where we remember this truth and commit to never reliving it, to ensure non-repetition. This report is historic, and every

Colombian should read it and take it seriously. The recommendations of the report are essential for social and economic justice, and to build a path toward a more peaceful society. The report also reinforces the importance of building consensus around

“**The findings of the truth commission's report should not be surprising for any Colombian who lived through the conflict...**”

— **Andrea Saldarriaga Jiménez**

the need for the full implementation of the peace accords—which has not yet been achieved. Colombia's current administration unfortunately did not make it a priority. The incoming administration, led by Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez, promised during the presidential campaign to make implementation of the peace accord a priority. They both have the first-hand experience to understand the importance of protecting social leaders, implementing agrarian reform, rethinking drug policy and so many other important recommendations that the truth commission's findings reinforce. For Colombia's future, let's hope they can make it a reality. They have a truly historic opportunity. Moreover, countries such as the United States have played a crucial role as allies of the government during the past few decades with Plan Colombia. During the Obama administration, the United States played a key role in helping to sign peace and approve Peace Colombia. The Biden administration could now play a key role in helping build political consensus around a new drug policy and a reshuffling of the priorities in the bilateral agenda from a security-based perspective to a social and economic agenda that allows Colombia to finally turn the page on half a century of conflict."

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