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COLOMBIA AT A CROSSROADS:
A CONVERSATION WITH COLOMBIA'S MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TRINKUNAS: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Harold Trinkunas. I'm the director of the Latin America Initiative here at The Brookings Institution. It is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of LAI and the 21st Century Security and Intelligence Center to a conversation with the minister of national defense of Colombia, Juan Carlos Pinzón Bueno.

I think we only have to think back to the last two decades in Colombia to realize how much has changed when it comes to the topic of security and defense. I think back to the news we had in the 1990s and compare it to what we're seeing in Colombia today, and I think we're really witnessing a remarkable change of affairs. And I think it's a testament to the difference that thinking and implementing of public policy, especially on security and defense, can make a real difference.

Since our time is brief today I'm just going to take a couple minutes to introduce our two guests, especially since Minister Pinzón has been part of implementing and crafting these policies since at least 2006, so I think we'll have an excellent conversation between Minister Pinzón and our senior fellow, Michael O'Hanlon, on these topics today. Juan Carlos Pinzón has been minister of defense of Colombia since 2011, but before that, he had been in the ministry since 2006 as the vice minister of defense for strategy and planning. During that period, under President Uribe, he was part of implementing the democratic security strategy, restructuring the ministry of defense, and also doing some very interesting work on restructuring the way that defense was financed in Colombia, which I think is part of the story of how this policy, this new approach to security and defense was implemented.

His own background is in economics and public policy, having studied at the Universidad Javeriana in Colombia and the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton.

Even though his background is in the financial world having worked at the World Bank and for Citigroup, he does have a personal connection to the military. His own family, his father I believe, served in the Colombian armed forces having retired as a colonel, so I think he's had a lifelong interest in and exposure to defense issues in Colombia.

And, of course, our other speaker today is Michael O'Hanlon, who's a senior fellow in the Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence. He's director of research for the Foreign Policy Program; a specialist in defense, security, foreign affairs. When I look at the list of articles and publications he's published they're too numerous to mention. In fact, when I try to think -- I look at that, I think I have to clone myself for write faster or both to just try to keep up with him.

So without too much further ado, I'll turn this over to Michael and Minister Pinzón for our conversation on "Colombia at the Crossroads." Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, thank you, Harold. And please, everyone, join me in welcoming the minister of national defense of Colombia. (Applause) We're thrilled at Brookings to have Minister Pinzón here.

And what we'd like to do this afternoon in the 60 minutes that we've got is to begin with a conversation in which we're going to have a chance just to recount a little bit where Colombia has been, what it's doing, what the minister and the rest of the government in Colombia are looking to do with their next round of policy decisions, next efforts. And then, of course, we will look for some regional implications, both in terms of the U.S.-Colombia relationship and the cooperation, next steps in that; maybe some other thoughts the minister may have about other regional relationships where Colombia has become really an example of what countries in the region can do to deal with internal and other security concerns.

And then, of course, we'll open it up to your questions. We're going to

begin with a question from Harold and then to the rest of you. So we'll try to spend about 20, 25 minutes up here getting started and then have plenty of time for discussion with all of you.

So again, Minister, thank you very much for being here. And I'm going to tell one quick story, which is I've had a great privilege in my life of being the professor of the minister. And the one thing I would say about this, Peter Fleming was a great tennis player who was John McEnroe's doubles partner and someone once asked him what's the key to being a great doubles player? And he said have John McEnroe as your partner. And I think any professor in the audience would agree with me that the key to being a successful professor, or at least looking like you're a successful professor, is to have students like this. And again, we are thrilled to have you here.

And I wanted to begin, if you don't mind, by inviting you just to tell a little bit of a capsule history, because we have people in the crowd who are experts on Colombia or Colombian themselves, people who know only the most general part of the story of where Colombia's been. If you could tell a little bit of the story of maybe the last one to two decades of how you would summarize the key breakthroughs that Colombia has achieved in making so much progress in its internal security, in the various threats that it's faced from narcotraffickers, from internal resistance groups, from the FARC. And, of course, that will then set us up for a subsequent discussion of where to go from here. But if you could please give us a little bit of a sense of how should we understand where Colombia is today.

MINISTER PINZÓN: Right. Well, thank you very much, Mike. I mean, you're very generous and the privilege was mine, you know, to have you as a wonderful professor and someone who has written so much about national security gave myself and others, I'm sure, a lot of inspiration (inaudible) knowledge, if I was good enough to

get that.

Anyhow, it's wonderful to be here at Brookings today. I think it's a great opportunity to talk about Colombia, where we have come from. I see real experts on Colombia here, so I'll try to be brief on history and try to get more on current events.

But anyhow, I think what can be told is for an American audience is that a lot of our progress no doubt has our own heroes and those are Colombian soldiers, those are policemen, those are judges, those are even people in the media who has done everything even to the extreme sacrifice of losing their lives to dramatically change a country, a country that 13, 14 years ago was maybe a pariah in the region. Not because we want or because we feel like that, but that's how they portrayed us. And these sacrifices changed the country very much.

But behind that effort always was the U.S. support. And I like to tell this story because I don't want to get entangled in so many problems you have here, your own political realities, but there are a few success stories on bipartisanship than Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia became, in my opinion, one story you will have to study, apply lessons learned, and probably find out how it can be implemented in a similar way in other parts of the world because the system was very simple. We had a major problem; drugs were all around from politics to the guerrilla. You know, not every revolutionary guerrilla includes as part of their funding and later as part of their business drug trafficking, as well on the paramilitary and as well on corruption (inaudible). That was our situation and a reality.

And then the country leadership and the people decided we have to change, and we did. And later I will refer to policy, in fact, that allowed us to make that. But somehow there was U.S. supporting us, but not creating an intervention, not invading, not, you know, getting massively, but supporting those who thought that the

country was in a need to change and to make policies that were effective. I think that's some recognition I have to start.

Let me just go back to 2000 and maybe what I'll do is just compare a few numbers. If I go to 2000, in security terms we had 30,000 homicides per year. If I go back last year, we had around 15,000, half. If I look on kidnappings we had in 2000, 2001, a number about 3,000 per year. By last year we had less than 300 and this year we have around 8 percent below last year. As well on homicides we are moving some few percentages points below last year. So evolution continues to happen.

And if you look at the country, let's phrase that by the end of the '90s, early this century, the world was in the middle of a very turbulent time in economic terms. So we had our crash at that time that was related not only to our internal politics, but really to what happened around. But it was the first crash in 75 years, 80 years, so, I mean, it really put alarms up. At the time we had foreign (inaudible) investment for around $2,000 billion per year. As we speak, we are in an average in the past 3 years of $15 billion per year. So it's absolutely a dramatic change and it is related to a security environment then.

What we care the most these days and what we will discuss, I'm sure, now, but in the future, is everything related to equality, everything related to reducing poverty, and every social indicator we can measure. Because certainly our policy right now implies that, yes, we want a secured environment, yes, we want to create real opportunities for investors to come, but at the end what we will care is how many employments do we get, how much we can reduce poverty, and how much inequality starts to be reduced.

And I think it's important to mention that if I compare, for instance, just 5 years ago we had a poverty rate of around 52 percent, and extreme poverty was around

40 percent. All these numbers have been reduced in the past four or five years as well as unemployment. We had unemployment in double digits from 1997 to 2011. So it was almost 13, 14 years with two-digit unemployment numbers, which is a critical number because at the end that's where people get money and money implies, you know, solving social problems and personal problems. So it was a huge gap that we had. Well, right now we can talk that we have around 9 percent of unemployment, which is still -- it's a big number for us, but when you think the quality of employment that we have created in the past years, it is substantial to look at because we are not any more creating just informal employment, but more and more formal employment; getting Social Security for people and, you know, creating a more stable social base.

Certainly this shows up how much the country has turned around. So now I can speak on phases on security. Certainly we have several challenges. We have -- you can look at it by agents or you can look at it by types of crime. But sometimes you have to talk about both because they're absolutely interconnected.

So for a long time what we had was FARC and ELN on the terrorist side, then you have AUC or paramilitary or self-defense illegal forces, and then you have cartels and just regular crime. And then on the other side you had drug trafficking as the main source of activity and business for all of them. More and more all (inaudible) connected and were in that kind of activity. In the beginning even FARC and ELN mentioned that they got into this just to fund their activity. But as time passed, they were just another cartel. That's what came to happen. Then you have other types of crime -- kidnapping, extortion -- and then even other more regular types of crime.

What we have done is, on one hand, having a strategy essentially first against drug trafficking. And I know there's a major debate in the world, which is are you being effective on the war against drugs? Does it make sense or not? And I can't

understand why you make the question in the U.S. and why that question can come along. In our case, fighting drugs was critical to end what I would say the gasoline that all types of criminal groups had. So for us, it was not a choice, we had to.

The consequence of that is that let me give you some figures. By 2000, we had around 163,000 hectares of coca, according to the U.N. numbers. Last year, we had the biggest reduction in a single year, 2012, and we moved from 63,000 to 48,000. In percentage numbers it was around 20 percent reduction, which is a very important number. And right now we are at the lowest number ever. Still, there's a problem, but now, for the first time last year, we became the second coca producer in the world, not anymore the first that we had that unfortunate honor for several years. Not anymore and I think that's an important fact.

Seizure of cocaine. We are seizing, let me just tell you since in I came as minister, above 600 tons of cocaine and around a similar number on marijuana, a little bit larger than that. So anyway, that is putting aside financial resources to all kinds of criminals. And that is certainly a very good way to pacify the country as much as they cannot hire more people, buy more weapons, and, you know, fund their activity, terrorist activity or other kinds, it is anyway good news.

The other thing we did was to really understand that part of our problem was that the country had somehow large chunks of the territory of ungoverned spaces. Ungoverned spaces implied that when you don't have control someone else will fill that absence, and that's what we got a lot. So in parts of the country it was FARC, in others ELN, and in others another type of self-defense forces, later criminal bands, and so forth.

So what we had to in all these years was to create a reasonable, sizeable security force that allows us to make an increasing presence in the country, more and more. Certainly first military because that was the first effort we had. We had

to go fight and shock the area to recover control. But more and more now the institution that is growing the most is police. In the past five years, that's the institution we are seeing growing because now they have to go and hold public order and contribute to -- include what is more important, the rest of the state.

That would be one criticism I would make to our nation anyway as we are, is still we need a faster path of presence of other state agencies at the same speed we go on the security side. Otherwise, what you get is a defeat of a criminal organization, but later you will not sustain that unless you change the whole security environment. And that is not only boots on the ground, arms, weapons, and so on, it's many other things.

Then what we did was to, I think, in a very important effort with the U.S., plan on critical capabilities: air mobility, special operations, intelligence, command and control, and communications. I would say that these four capabilities are what we have been building up in these years.

If I go to 2000, when Plan Colombia really started, at that time the U.S. funding as a percentage of the total defense sector funding reached a level of almost 20 percent, so it was a big chunk of money. The U.S. buying helicopters, the U.S. funding our military training and education. I can talk to you for this year it's below 1 percent. It's only .9 percent or so. What shows this? Show first the will of the Colombian people to, you know, pay our own bills, particularly to recover a nation, to recover our security. Second, certainly appreciating what we get from the U.S. that still we need to get, but showing that this only goes to quality capabilities, to things that are really exceptional in technology or knowledge that can really give a certain push. I think those are important features.

Then from the year 2000 to 2006, I think what was more relevant was to

recover the country from the presence of these kinds of groups or, in essence, you know, taking over roads, cities, and infrastructure. And that was done very well. That was a wonderful progress from democratic security at that time.

During the period 2006 to 2010, what we did was to go after the big names of all these organizations. So we went after the leadership of the FARC, the criminal bands, and we got them. And we learned processes on how to do this, you know, putting together intelligence fusion with special operations capabilities, real-time operations. Suddenly, we got a set of wonderful results.

Then by 2010, 2013, '14, as we are, what we have done is, in essence, going to every base area that they have at the same time. So we are putting the pressure in their own bases at the same time for the first time ever. And continuing doing a little bit of what we have done, which is keep the path and the level of activity against the leadership.

But something that is becoming more and more important is developing certain capabilities of the military that were somehow undeveloped in the past decade: military engineers. So what has happened in this period is that we are doing more military engineers projects than ever in the history of the armed forces. We're doing around 165 projects in the whole country trying to win some time for the rest of the state to come. And this is why I was (inaudible) before. I continue to demand, and I do this inside our cabinet, we need these to come in a faster pace.

Now, all these has set a reality. If I look at any of the threats, all the threats have diminished and most of the nation is now worried, when you talk about security, for the same worries they might have in Eastern Washington, they might have in Rio de Janeiro, or they might have in Mexico. Let me give you these numbers.

By 2000 -- '99, 2000 -- 55 percent of the municipalities of Colombia

(inaudible) had some kind of subversive action or terrorist action. Thirty percent of the municipalities had some kind of territorial control from former paramilitary. And around 20 percent of the municipalities had no presence of the elected mayor in the town. That was the terrible picture we had in '99 or so.

By 2009, I use that year by no different reason than I left the ministry and President Santos, who was the minister of defense, left the ministry, so that's a picture we have clear. By that time only 25 percent of the municipalities had some kind of terrorist action or subversive action. So in less than a decade it was cut by half their capability.

By November 30th, you know, the 11th month of this year, we had only 11 percent of the municipalities with some kind of terrorist activity. Let me remind you, Colombia has 1,103 municipalities, so it implies that almost -- only 100 of the municipalities had some kind of that kind of terrorist activities. Which municipalities are those? The ones that are in the base areas that we are pressuring. So somehow it's us that is creating that pressure and that we're fighting on their own turf, if you want to put it in a way. So what they do is somehow some kind of terrorist activity in those areas. Anyway, this year we have less terrorism than last year.

Now, only 14 percent of the municipalities have what we call criminal bands. Criminal bands are nationwide criminal structures that are very connected to drugs or criminal mining, which is a new threat, a new reality we have to look forward. Because of our environment, because of protecting the future of our children, but anyhow because they are using these to fund criminal activity, so it's something we have to care about.

It implies, in summary, that around 90 percent of Colombia's Colombians are 47 million, let's say around 43 million, when they talk about security problems they

are not talking anymore about the country falling to an illegal organization or to a terrorist organization. Certainly we have new worries. We have street crime as a serious concern. We have extortion, which is very typical from mobs from every side, as much as we have heeded very hard the criminal bands, we are creating some atomization of those bands, so, you know, it's more crime, but anyway very uncomfortable and creates challenges for the people around. So now what we're trying to do is to cope with this situation.

I don't have to talk to end this part about the peace process. Why are we in a peace process? We're here because we have armed forces that have been the most important peace-builders in Colombian history. Certainly that's my personal opinion, but I know it's the general take. With the FARC we had four previous processes. This is the first time really in which the equilibrium of power, if I can put it in a way, is absolutely clear not only in Colombia, but internationally, in favor of a Colombian state and the Colombian people.

Certainly some people might say, well, if you don't have your borders problem would you need to do this? Who knows? But anyhow, we have been keeping the pressure in those base areas. So certainly it makes sense for us that after technically defeating those enemies, those enemies of the Colombian people, they have done terrorism, they have done drug trafficking, they have done child abuse, they have kidnapped, they have extortion -- all kinds of crimes -- after putting them in this condition what we're telling is maybe it's time for you to get out of this situation.

How are we doing this? With a clear (inaudible) President Santos has signaled we will continue to pressure every day, everywhere, as hard as we can, so they understand that they only have one exit with dignity. It's trying to agree for an option of peace and getting into the political system, which, at the end, is part of what our

democracy conceives.

Anyhow, there are challenges and I'm sure later will come questions about those issues, but I think we are moving forward with strength, with decision, and we will keeping moving the bar as far as we can so these people understand that the Colombian people does not want this kind of violence anymore and it would be better for all. My frank opinion is that Colombia will reach peace. And I have said this publicly many times, we'll reach peace through reason, as we're trying, reason with strength, or we will reach it any way with force as we have built up this peace environment that more and more is getting to the Colombian people.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. You did an amazing job of painting a picture of Colombia with my impossibly big and unfair question to explain the entirety of your country, which you just did concisely in 15 or 20 minutes. And I'm just going to ask one more question and I think then Harold will probably want to pick up on the peace process issue where you just left off before we go to everyone else.

But my other question, you've painted such a story of promise and progress that I'll just put this question sort of provocatively. It sounds like most of the U.S.-Colombia bilateral cooperation can now really be transformed into a different approach, and that's my question to you. In other words, it sounds like if U.S. military aid is only 1 percent or less of your defense budget, and I didn't hear you suggest that it should be a lot more, that maybe American aid to Colombia can diminish and maybe go more into development sectors, but also that the U.S. and Colombia can work together to perhaps use the Colombian model with other Latin American states, especially in Central America and perhaps Mexico, that still have big problems with crime and have not yet turned the corner the way that you have. I know you're doing some of that already, but the question is have we really reaching a turning point in Plan Colombia and the U.S.-

Colombia relationship where we don't have to provide the same kind of help anymore, that it's more of a peer-to-peer military relationship and now we can transform whatever remaining American aid is still needed into the civilian and development sectors and also into regional security cooperation?

MINISTER PINZÓN: Well, (inaudible) you're not talking to the minister of finance of Colombia. You're still talking to the minister of defense, and every penny counts.

MR. O'HANLON: That's why I put it that way.

MINISTER PINZÓN: And every effort we can make, makes a difference.

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah.

MINISTER PINZÓN: Let me tell you, if you worked for me, I would even have more than I have because that will accelerate and guarantee a faster result.

But by the way, I know you're a football fan and I am, too. There are several bad quarterbacks in the red zone. I mean, those that become to greatest are usually the ones that in the red zone can make it. We're in the red zone already, but we are not in the goal line yet.

MR. O'HANLON: Nice.

MINISTER PINZÓN: So we got to make it there.

MR. O'HANLON: Right.

MINISTER PINZÓN: So don't spike the ball on the 10-yard line. (Laughter) I think that will be a terrible mistake. We really need to keep doing what we're doing. Actually it's intelligence what makes the difference. It's certain technology that can continue to move forward. But it still is education, professionalism, and, you know, these (inaudible) sharing that we are doing more and more that is raising the quality of our armed forces. And I think that is our major asset now and to the future. I think that's

something that became now a permanent asset of Colombia that should be used, as you said, for many options. One, as you said, is contributing to regional stability and the fight against (inaudible) national crime in the region.

Well, let me tell you that this year we have planned a lot with the U.S. and Canada on how we are bridging some of your efforts in Central America and the Caribbean, you know, funded by your funds, but anyway, done by our experts, both on police activities and military activities. I think we have to do more and more and of that.

There's a capability that was created in Colombia and now we have it and now what we have to do is use it in a way that is certainly useful for our interests. It's of our interests and a stable region. It's of our interests as a strong fight against national crime. Everybody needs that. But at the same time, it's good for the U.S. certainly and for Colombia to partner effectively on this.

So yes, I think we can get in a next phase increasing funds, not decreasing funds, but increasing funds, but not necessarily next time for strengthening our armed forces, but for strengthening their training capabilities so we can absorb more and more regional presence. And certainly if I look to the future I think that, you know, our efforts on diplomacy and security imply that certainly Colombia will have an important set of armed forces that can play a role in international peacekeeping, international peace-building, and certainly in regional and world stability. I think it's a willing situation and I think the next phase of our partnership is really built on these kinds of realities.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. Thank you. Let me turn things over to Harold. He's going to ask a question and then we'll go to all of you. Please. Oh, need a microphone, yes. And he'll set the good example of first waiting for the microphone. Thank you for that. And also, he doesn't need to identify himself, but please, when you get the microphone, do so in just a moment.

MR. TRINKUNAS: Thank you, Minister Pinzón, for that very interesting overview of the Colombian situation. I just want to follow up on your comments on the peace process in Colombia. As you well know, there's still at least four agenda items to discuss as part of the peace process, some of the toughest issues are coming up such as justice. You have an election season that's just started. I wonder if you could talk about some of the challenges that you might face going forward trying to deal with these agenda items during an electoral season, specifically for the Ministry of Defense? How does that contribute to that, solving those challenges? Thank you.

MINISTER PINZÓN: Well, several things. In our case, the armed forces and the Ministry of Defense, the government in general, has had elections for many years with the presence of terrorists, drug traffickers, and other. So what we have to do now is do it even better than in the previous one, which is enhance our efforts to create the necessary guarantees for democracy to operate in the whole territory, if possible. And that's my main challenge right now to offer the guarantees, the security, to have the right kind of democratic process.

Certainly on the peace process I have to confess, I not only have to be very prudent, but I am convinced I have to be prudent enough. I think that's a policy that the president himself has crafted. And he has done this in a way that whatever is discussed in this agenda is being under his own screening and his own decision-making.

There are four points, as you said, of the agenda that still have to be discussed; are not easy ones. You know, nothing about this is easy. Everything about this is challenging. But I think the world continues to be there and, more importantly, our role, the armed forces, our ministry, is to contribute to the strategy the way President Santos has designed it, which is keeping up the pressure as hard as we can so we can shorten the time, and I think that's what is relevant.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Let's begin here, the gentleman right there, yeah, fifth row.

MR. DOWNIE: Thank you. Richard Downie from Delphi Strategic Consulting. And Minister Pinzón, thanks very much for a great -- it's good to see you and thanks for a great presentation. I'd like to follow up a little bit on Harold's question.

As you mentioned, it's the president's policy to be prudent with respect to the negotiations, but from all reports we hear things are going well. And one of the key considerations in that would be demobilization of the FARC. I know recently you've gone through Central America. The Central American countries have had their own experiences with demobilization of forces and things like that. Have you gotten -- in terms of being prudent have you thought through this process of how Colombia might demobilize the FARC? Or have you gotten some tips from the Central Americans that you might find useful? Thank you.

MINISTER PINZÓN: Thank you, Richard. Good to see you again.

We plan in the Ministry of Defense these days on three tracks. Track number 1, 99 percent of the time which is working for the security of the Colombian people either against terrorism or trying to find solutions for citizen security as we call it. So that's our main goal, our main effort, and that's what we have to do. But certainly we have special teams thinking on a second track, which is what if this happens? How do we plan a good transition? So I can assure you we are thinking on a very high professional standard on how to do this in a way. And third, sure, we plan the future, the transformation, the vision for 2030, 2040. What kind of armed forces do we need? What kind of capabilities do we need? What kind of jointness do we need to create? And what kind of interoperability we want to have with other partners and nations. So we're working on that.

Let me go back to transition, which is your question. Let me remind you one thing. Demobilization is not a new thing for Colombia. Nothing about the peace process is new, in my opinion, for Colombia. We have had at least four or five successful peace processes in the past: EPL, ERG, AUC, Aim 19, (inaudible). All these five happened and all these five implied demobilization, reintegration, and so on. On every of those we have good experiences, not so good, and some bad experiences, but there is some previous knowledge about this.

And let me remind you one thing. I have an average daily demobilization of four members of the FARC or ELN that go and present themselves to the military and they give up weapons. This year I was present at a massive demobilization of around 35 members of the FARC -- of the ELN, sorry, a full structure of the ELN that gave away machine guns, rifles, explosives, grenades, everything they had, uniforms and so on. In front of the military and the president they gave their weapons to the generals, in fact.

I had the same experience six, seven months ago with a full structure of the FARC. Around 15 of those came and offered their weapons back. And they are being reintegrated as part of our humanitarian demobilization program and then they get into the reintegration program. Sure, we can discuss about the quality of our processes. Do we have a process of excellence that can really absorb the amount of members of the FARC that will come in? Certainly there are things we have to discuss, how to do it better, how to implement better. But I think the advantage we have is that this is not new for Colombia. It can be done better. It should be done even perfectly if we can. But there is some experience there. And certainly I went to El Salvador and Guatemala and I saw things that, in my opinion, we should not repeat and we saw others that I thought were interesting.

But as I said, our main focus, our main goal is not -- other people can

dream. The minister of defense can't. We have to do what we have to do for the good of the Colombian people. And by the way, those heroes of our armed forces are really becoming the peace-builders of our nation.

MR. O'HANLON: Next question over here, Diana.

MS. NEGROPONTE: Minister Pinzón, I'm Diana Negroponte from The Brookings Institution. I'd like you to address, please, your strategy towards the borders, particularly your border with Ecuador and Venezuela. How in your policy do you balance the need for commercial exchange, thriving trade across the border, and maintaining the security so that the rest and recreation facilities within Venezuela and Ecuador are constrained?

MINISTER PINZÓN: Interesting question, no doubt. Let me tell you the following. More and more are strategy in general terms related to cross-border -- to borders in general or to the region is to increase cooperation. For a while, but certainly during my tenure as minister, we have done bilateral meetings with every neighbor of Colombia and even countries that are not neighbors in order to agree on mechanisms to confront better different types of crime. We have done this with a lot of success with some countries. We have done this with less success with other countries.

Let me talk about Ecuador. We had a tough time in both countries five, six years ago. We were at our lowest in our relationship. I can say that by now we might be at one of the highest levels ever. And in security terms what we have done is to recognize that we're different, but there are criminals from different types in our border and, in consequence, we try to collaborate as much as we can. Borders in our country are difficult. Those are major jungles, those are big mountains, are very difficult to control because of the geography, but we're doing an effort. And what I can tell is that even Ecuadorean forces have fought FARC inside their territory.

Actually there is a hero from Ecuador, a captain from their special forces, who was killed fighting the FARC four months ago in Ecuadorean territory. We have received several members of the FARC, several members of criminal bands that have been captured in Ecuador, and we have been capturing drug traffickers, kidnappers, all kinds of criminals that have been captured in Colombia and sent back to Ecuador. So cooperation is evolving. I cannot talk about a perfect border, you know, because of the size, because of the realities, maybe resources, but we're moving exactly on the right track.

In the case of Venezuela, first let me remind you that our current plan, (inaudible), implies, as I said, offensive activities on what we call base areas, in this case of FARC or ELN. And actually we launch offensive on those border areas. And we have created pressure; we have increased the number of demobilizations, captures, and even killing actions in those areas. In terms of the relationship with Venezuela, the collaboration related to drug trafficking and criminal bands is substantial and I think they have captured people and they have extradited to Colombia.

In the case of the FARC and ELN, what has happened is that they have become supporters of the peace efforts to President Santos and, in consequence, that's the kind of contribution they are doing. Certainly it would be, in my opinion, even better if we can fight them together. You know, that will be even better, but I'm telling you what is the reality right now. So there is some progress, too.

We believe in cooperation. That's the strategy. We believe that countries should talk, should align efforts, and should do coordinated operations against different types of their national crimes.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. We'll go here and then we'll start to work our way back. Here in the second row, please.

MS. HAYES: Thank you. I'm Margaret Daly Hayes with Georgetown University. Minister, at the end of your prepared remarks or your comments you mentioned that simultaneously with carrying out this pacification you have been engaged in some substantial ministry-building in terms of planning, logistics, and so forth. Can you talk a little bit about what you have -- where you intend to go and what the goals with this project are?

And then can you also comment on the Colombian population's willing to continue supporting the armed forces at the level of capabilities that you have achieved? And in asking that question I'm thinking that you have -- in part, you've been able to reduce your foreign assistance because there has been a substantial tax that the Colombian taxpayers have paid to support the armed forces and will that be sustained.

MINISTER PINZÓN: Right. Well, thank you, Margaret, for your question. Well, no doubt, we are working on long-term planning, defining a planning for or by capabilities, you know. We're trying to do an effort of planning jointly, you know, so trying to -- looking for economies of scale among our forces. We are planning, thinking on different scenarios.

One scenario, of course, is still how much we need to commit in order to free the country from terrorism and drug trafficking, and that continues and will continue to be our main role, our main challenge as long as it lasts. Then we plan for different roles for the armed forces. So first, we're thinking on the future of national police. And yes, we think that national police should become more and more stronger in terms of street crime and citizen security, which is what people is caring even today more and more. So we need to enhance the police and enhance all the security systems related to this.

There's a discussion for some years from now: Should the police

continue in our ministry or it should go to another ministry? My opinion, as far as we continue to have the current challenges, it should be here. Later we can talk about it.

And in the case of the military, as I said, first they have to do what they have to do. Second, I think nobody is so ingenious to think that signing a peace process implied the next day no more drug trafficking, no more extortion, no more criminal mining. We will continue to have that and we will need to continue to guarantee that the rule of law gets in the whole country. So armed forces, first of all, should continue to plan on how to support that.

Then we have -- Colombia is a relatively large country and is a country that has very important natural resources, sources of water. So for any strategy planning in the world that thinks about the future of security, those (inaudible) become crucial. That's part of what has been discussed at different forums. So we need our armed forces to really -- are environmental friendly, but anyhow, and more importantly, take care of that reality.

Certainly the international presence, both doing contributions for regional security efforts, training our partners and our friends and our brothers in the region that require that kind of support, and definitely looking forward through NATO, through U.N., through other organizations to be part of world and regional peace-building and stability. And no doubt that the military can and should have, considering our realities and our limitations, a very strong contribution to development. So this is why enhancing the capability of the military engineers is something critical for the next decade. I think that we will need them strongly. If we reach peace, no doubt, who else will go to very far and away areas? And if we don't, even more, because the current strategy implies more and more of these efforts and less sometimes of kinetic efforts, if you will. So I think there is a whole set of opportunities and this is how we are planning.

On support, let me remind you that in Colombia, according to the latest polls, the institutions that are more appreciated in the country, even above the Catholic Church, Congress, the courts, other ministries, government, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, are the armed forces. Who knows if in the future the people will like them as they like them today considering everything they do and the level of sacrifice? I still have wounded soldiers. As I speak I be having a soldier there losing a leg because of a mine or from an IED. But anyhow, we continue to -- I lost track, huh? (Laughter) It happens, too, huh? It happens.

MR. O'HANLON: Pretty powerful argument for why the Colombian people still want to support the military and police.

MINISTER PINZÓN: Right. Thank you for the reminder, Mike, it was good. (Laughter)

So I was saying that still people appreciate this sacrifice very much. Very much. But who knows if in the future? So the only way that in the future the armed forces will continue to be so connected to the majority of people is if these tasks that I referred to before and the contribution to the element continues to be part of the Colombian life. And I think the armed forces can evolve to that level. They're almost ready to move forward there.

MR. O'HANLON: We'll take two more questions together and then the minister is going to have to go. As you probably know, President Santos is arriving for a visit and so there's a lot going on. So let me see where I can move closer to the back. So the very back row for the first question and then over here in the third row, in the gold tie, for the second. And give you the floor to finish up, please.

MR. SOSOONA: Thank you. (inaudible) Sosoona and I'm just a concerned Colombian. Minister Pinzón, my question is do you -- I've heard you say that

you're preparing for both, either if the peace process works or even it does not, but what's your personal opinion? Do you support this process and what's your take on it?

MR. O'HANLON: So we've got that question and then we could also combine with this one, please, to finish up.

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Okay. Alfredo Rodriguez, Inter-American Development Bank. Given that we're in the red zone what's missing, I mean, if anything? And I was thinking more in terms of maybe the International Court of Justice or something, but if you could share with us what will maximize the probabilities of your final goal, which is peace now that we're in the red zone.

MINISTER PINZÓN: Thank you. I think the two questions are related.

Why the armed forces fight. Because they want one day to have a peaceful and prosperous Colombia. That's the reason why they have been fighting and, you know, taking terrorists, drug traffickers, and other threats to Colombian society to the level where they are. And they will continue to push as hard as they can. The more we can do about this, the better for Colombian people. So it's peace-building what we do and it's, I think, and I say it the other day in Bogotá, there are many people that talk about peace, not so much that are doing peace. And I think that what the military and the police in Colombia are doing is building peace, is creating security, is really creating the environment that people hope to have at some point.

On what is missing, I think that still, as I said at some point in this presentation, if we were to enhance the presence of other state agencies in those 120 towns of Colombia in which we are still really having the confrontation with the FARC, ELN, and even with some criminal bands, that will really weaken them, weaken to a point of not having any popular support. Their support is minimal in the country. When you go to the polls, the support of FARC goes below 3 percent. And when you go to the regions,

I'm going to remind you about a study we discussed before coming in to this meeting. There is a study (inaudible) that measure the support of the FARC in the areas of confrontation, in what you might call the base areas. And even there people are against them, you know. People are against them. So what would really enhance the security campaign? What would really continue this way of, you know, peace-building effort? I think that is the presence of justice, no doubt, the presence of more investment, growth, opportunities for the people.

Now, I think your question may be also related to what are the key discussions inside the peace process right now? I have no doubt that one of the key discussions is what will be the legal future for many of those members of those organizations? Because there is no doubt they have been in drug trafficking, they have killed, kidnapped, terrorist activities, and so on. But that's what this is all about and this is why the president himself is trying to craft this in a way that we have peace with justice. How to do that? I mean, if it were easy maybe we wouldn't be in this challenge.

And from my side, I have to tell that there are members of the armed forces that because of this conflict got into legal problems, serious ones. Some of them are guilty; some others might not be and are just being investigated. But we don't have any doubt that we will have to find a solution for them, too. That's what President Santos has said as well because what we need to do is to create serious and permanent conditions for peace. Otherwise, this will be difficult.

And on that final point I have and I will continue to push this idea because I think it's somehow more and more accepted in the country as a necessary condition to move forward, which is, at the end, what everybody would like to have. Who would not like to have peace? I promise, as once a very famous American, General MacArthur said, you know, that there's no more -- no one else who would prefer peace

than the soldier because he's the one who suffers the wounds, who gets killed, and in our case who gets sometimes even in jail because of these complexities.

MR. O'HANLON: Mr. Minister, on behalf of Harold and myself and all of us here, thank you for what you're doing not only for your country, but for the whole hemisphere and what you're doing with your men and women to make all of us safer. And thank you for your visit today to Brookings. (Applause)

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