

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION  
FALK AUDITORIUM  
THE FUTURE OF THE U.S.-COLOMBIA RELATIONSHIP  
A CONVERSATION WITH  
AMBASSADOR JUAN CARLOS PINZÓN  
Washington, D.C.  
Friday, July 29, 2022

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Brookings. I'm delighted to have the opportunity today, along with my colleague Vanda Felbab-Brown, to welcome the outgoing Ambassador from the great country of Colombia to the United States, Juan Carlos Pinzón Bueno, for a discussion today about Colombia, its future, and certainly, the U.S.-Colombia partnership, alliance, and collaboration going forward. It's a topic that we discussed here before. Juan Carlos Pinzón is a very longstanding and good friend of mine. We've hosted him at Colombia four or five times previous here -- about Colombia, but at Brookings, four or five times previously in various stints. As many of you know, he's had a remarkable career for such a young man with I'm sure a remarkable career still ahead of him.

I got to know him after he had been Vice Minister of National Defense in one of the important periods in the early 2000's when so much progress was made in Colombia in dealing with violence, and crime, and bringing Colombia into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in really one of the most remarkable counterinsurgency, counter-crime campaigns the world has ever seen done in collaboration with the United States.

He went on to become Minister of National Defense after a brief stint as Chief of Staff to the President of Colombia. And since that time, he's been ambassador twice because his skills, not only in dealing with crime, and violence, and insurgency, but also in dealing with business, economic development, and certainly, the U.S.-Colombia relationship had been appreciated now by two presidents of that great country in asking him to represent Colombia here in Washington.

So, because it's such a special moment for me and because it's a bit of a milestone, I think Vanda and I would be grateful if you would join us in welcoming the Ambassador one more time to Brookings.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: Thank you, you're very kind. Thanks. Thank you, Vanda.

MR. O'HANLON: And as you know, on August 7th in less than two short weeks, 10 days, Colombia will inaugurate President-elect Petro, as well as Vice President-elect Marquez. A remarkable and fascinating story and I'm sure we will touch on their careers. It's certainly a turning point, to say the

least, in Colombia's governance and in the U.S.-Colombia relationship.

But rather than focus too much on sort of that turning point and acknowledging that President-elect Petro has the chance and opportunity to speak for himself and to send his own ambassador to succeed, Juan Carlos, I thought we would begin by talking a little bit about the strength of the relationship and where we are historically in Colombia, its progress, and how it has partnered with the United States on so many key issues.

And so, Juan Carlos, I know you are, Mr. Ambassador, you're such a student of history and you've been part of so much history, I wonder if you could just take a minute to tell us how you think of this partnership in terms of where it is today, and what it's gone through, what it represents. We became major non-NATO allies during your tenure. We're very close. Colombia's fought with the United States in a number of wars across oceans. There's been a lot that we've done together beyond the counter-narcotics and counterinsurgency agendas. But how do you think of this relationship as you prepare to leave Washington, at least for the moment in this time around?

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: Well, thank you, Mike, you know, it's a privilege to be here again. I always feel very honored every time I can come to Brookings. On whatever position or capacity, I have had, Brookings has always been a platform. And a platform for discussion because by the way, here there are not single points of view, are multiple points of view. And that's what I think is valuable. I bring my own, but I know there are others and, you know, that's what I believe is important in a democracy and in the world we are today. Tolerance to ideas is critical. Maybe I will state that.

So, I think that we have a very strong relationship. And I'm very happy to tell you that I'm leaving probably at one of the times of highest level of U.S.-Colombia relationship. And I'm proud for my team that was able to accomplish that. Of course, I am thankful to the leadership of President Duque and President Biden for allowing this time to come and, of course, to all my predecessors and colleagues. Because at the end, you say it very well, Colombia ends today this tenure at the level of major non-NATO ally. Which in common language will be the highest level of national security partnership that the United States assigns to a friend, to a country that is close to its interests. That's what we have today. That's

where we are.

But there are other facts. The first quarter of this year had the highest level of exports from Colombia to the United States in terms of nontraditional exports, meaning exports other than oil, gas, or mining, which is very important, and I have to tell you, I wish this to continue and move to the future. Now, still the United States continues to be the major investor in Colombia. In most of South America, other countries have come to take the role of major investors, and Colombia is the United States the major investor country.

But in addition to that, I think it's important to speak about the level of relationship coming from the social agencies. USAID has just appointed a new director. And frankly speaking, they have more budget for Colombia now than in any other time before. And what that money comes for, for marginal areas of Colombia, for communities that are in difficulty, and somehow for a way to move forward.

On the security arena, I just will describe the relationship from my own experience this weekend. I was in Cartagena with the board of one of your other think tanks in Washington, and the Colombian Navy prepared for us an exercise on interdiction on, you know, how they do it. And, you know, it's always fun just to see these kind of exercises. And I have to confirm that every time you go to Cartagena, for those that haven't been there yet, it's lovely, you know, it's kind of your sentiment gets more positive just by definition.

But what I was impressed was at the end the comment of one of these senior American citizens that was with us. And he came to me and said you know what, what I just saw is an American exercise with Colombian faces. What that person wanted to mean that the doctrine, the techniques, the professionalism of our security forces is basically the same you will find in the U.S. services.

And that has not happened by chance. That has happened by years of strengthening that relationship. So, I sound like doing a little bit of an advertisement exercise not for me, but the team that I represent and the country that we are, but we are leaving this relationship at a peak, at a very high level. And frankly speaking, it's a great opportunity for the next administration because as different

visions they might have and different priorities they can have, they can start from a very high positioning point.

And I will end these first lines by saying it's bipartisanship what has made Colombia strong in this relationship. This has been a 200-years' relationship. Actually, this year we celebrated. And from the early beginnings, we have seen all kinds of presidents in Colombia, all kinds of presidents in the United States, all kinds of congress, you know, different terms. And I have to tell you, out of 200 years, only -- or better, 90 percent of the time has been positive, only 10 percent was not so fun.

When Panama separated from Colombia, and it really was a wound that still we remember about it. But, however, the U.S. always, as done in other cases, came back with a recognition and somehow compensation for that. So, even that 10 percent that was negative was put behind. It's history. It's not anymore something that is part of the relationship.

So, out of these 200 years, the relationship is positive. It has been strong. And we have been together in almost every major event. The first one, of course, we were the first country to establish a diplomatic office in the United States from Latin America. But the first country in which the United States sent a diplomat to Latin America was to Colombia.

So, it's not a coincidence. Why? Because behind that are values. Colombian patriots were inspired on the founding fathers of the United States. And the set of values that the United States created as the real republic were adopted by those patriots for the country we wanted to be. It's democracy, it's freedom, it's rule of law, it's respect and defense of human rights and, of course, it's free markets and trade. Those five elements are not perfected in the U.S., definitely not perfected in Colombia. Probably we are far from that. But are the aim, the permanent aim that different governments have tried.

And about major world events, we've been together in World War II. We were together during the creation of the UN, the creation of the OAS that did happen in Bogota. By the way, there are many people now against OAS. And I have to tell you, be aware that the reason is because it has a democratic charter, and we Colombians and Americans believe into those values. So, we better watch it

and keep it. You know, we have to be careful not to, you know, undermine rules so everybody can do whatever they want and then call themselves democracies.

It's a little bit more editorial what I just did. And, of course, I think it's important to say that we created together also the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank, the IMF. But then, during Korean War, we fought together. Thousands of Colombian soldiers and marines were fighting with the United States and for the same purpose, democracy, and freedom. That's what we did.

Later on, during cold war, we kept on the same size -- on the same side, but with a very specific characteristic. While the rest of Latin America went for dictators and caudillos, military dictatorships, Colombia is today regarded with the United States to be the second oldest democracy in the Western Hemisphere. So, we were despite everything, kept democracy. Never perfect, always needing change and evolution, as probably we need now, more change, more evolution, more broad perspective.

But at the end, when we were really having the hardest times in our history, like 20 years ago when cartels were really running parts of the country. The terrorists of FARC of the time, were really running part of the country. Paramilitaries of AUC were really running part of the country. The state was weak. We were able to craft together with the United States, Plan Colombia.

And I was describing that what is important about Plan Colombia as a general concept, but more on the relationship between us and the U.S., is that we get the best of the two worlds, the pressures from the Republicans and the pressures of the Democrats. What we get from the Republicans, they want national security, and they want business-oriented policies. What we got from the Democrats, respect for rights and human rights and social development. So, in an ideal world, if we were to advance in those four activities, you're really moving forward as a society. Well, somehow that's what we got, and that's what we have been doing these, the past 20 years around these realities.

I will end by saying there's no way we can describe Colombia as perfect or that every policy has been wonderful. No, no, no, far from that. But it is undeniable that Colombia today is so better positioned of what it was 20 years ago. And by the way, we just had the test of democracy. And we just

elected a new government that probably comes from a very different background as compared to other governments in Colombian history, and we did it through democratic means. And as we speak, a full peaceful transition of power is happening in Colombia.

So, we have to feel proud of that. But by the way, this leads me to make this final line. That's what we need to keep. We need to keep what is good and advancing whatever we need to advance. But if democracy is something that is a seal from Colombia, a trademark from Colombia, that's what we want and need to keep for the good of our country, for the good of our people.

MR. O'HANLON: Wonderful. Second oldest democracy in the hemisphere, and I should have said earlier, fourth most populous country in the hemisphere.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: Yes.

MR. O'HANLON: And so, a very important country in many ways.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: And the size of Texas, California, and Virginia together.

MR. O'HANLON: And with some of the most remarkable environmental and ecological resources in the world as well. Before I go to Vanda, I wanted to ask you, Mr. Ambassador, to now focus in a little bit more on what's been going on in the last five or 10 years. And we're not going to talk heavy duty Colombian politics here today, but I do think to situate the policy conversation about what are some key options for the two countries going forward in their partnership, which I know Vanda has thoughts on as well, I'd like to really make sure that we establish a little bit of a common understanding as best we can on what's been going right and wrong in Colombia especially the last few years.

Because, and I'm just going to make a little provocation here for you to react to, you've accomplished a lot in your career. The governments that you worked with have accomplished a lot. You know, I had the pleasure and privilege of going to Medellin to see how that country or that city within your country has reduced violence by 95 percent since the cartel days. It's just quite remarkable.

But things haven't been going so well in many ways for the last few years. And I wanted to ask you to put that a little bit in perspective and then ask Vanda that same question. Because I know that the progress in fighting violence has plateaued and maybe even been slightly, partially reversed.

Colombia is far better off today certainly than it was. But it's not as safe as it should be and as you want it to be, I know that.

Also, the peace process produced a historic agreement, but there have been challenges to that. And certainly, on the economic side of things, I mean, the whole world's been dealing with COVID, but even before that, Colombia was seeing some difficulty. And you're an expert on economics and finance, as well as on national security. So, I wondered if you could just help us see these last five to eight years in some historical perspective. Just do you see it as a plateauing? Do you see it as a partial reversal of progress? Is Colombia in crisis? Or is this just sort of Colombia pausing as it tries to gear up for the next big phase in its forward motion?

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: Well, Mike, a few things. First, thank you for allowing me not necessarily to give opinions on the incoming government, because as you said, they're going to come, and they're going to have their own chance of explaining and hopefully succeeding. It's the only thing I want for my country, I want to be continued success and that would be great.

Other than that, of course, I can speak about these past few years because a lot has happened and, you know, somehow, I have to take an even open clear political stance on some of these issues. And sadly, you know, I look backwards and said, well, maybe I was not because I saw things that others didn't, but because probably I had the experience in the field, some of the things that I thought were going to happen have happened. And unfortunately, we have been in a bit of a struggle and with some difficulties.

Let me start by saying this. I think the country, the first 15 years of the 21st Century for Colombia are probably the gold standard. You know, everything was really moving very positively. The economy, investment, reduction of poverty, reduction of inequality, advanced slowly but steadily, and frankly speaking, always with huge challenges, but that was a time of progress.

I think a few things began to happen at the time. On the economic side, I remember that the super cycle of commodities, you know, somehow came down. So, whatever we were getting on outflow -- on inflows from oil, and coal, and mining, slowly went down and fiscal problems began to

appear. So, the government had to, in order to keep the fiscal balance, make some cuts. And probably it did happen just at the time where maybe the need of more funding was necessary.

Second, I think that at that time and for years, we were able to have a national consensus for security. Consensus doesn't mean 100 percent of agreement. It means typically 60 to 80 percent of agreement. That's a consensus. Always there is, you know, in a world and in society, people that disagrees. But for a long time, around 70 percent of Colombians were fully agreeing that if we wanted to advance even on social policies, securing the country was critical.

And it was so that those of us who were leading the charge against terrorism and other sources of crime in Colombia, we got to the conviction that seeking a faster end through a negotiated peace was the right response and the right answer. Up to there, I still believed that with all the different political colors, there was a general agreement. Because what Colombians from every corner will always talk about is peace. Probably the understanding of peace might depend on who you talk to, but the concept of peace is what really people want to see.

And when those negotiations began, I think that there was some hope that because Colombian state was for the first time really so strong, and after so many military victories and evidence of strength, that the negotiation was going to be a one in which, you know, benefits were going to be granted, but were going to be reasonable and accepted by a general consensus. Unfortunately, you know, that's the first thing that happened. That consensus was broken because the benefits that were conceived were not shared by the totality of Colombian population.

By the way, the first time the agreements of Havana 2016, were taken to Colombian people, Colombian people voted against it. And in democracy, that's not a minor thing. And I will encourage this as a model to discuss for the future to any country. If you go against public and, you know, people's will, you will get in trouble sooner than later. So, I think it's important for that reason to respect. So, when that was not respected, that even created a push with the theory that, you know, signing the agreement was more important than any other thing. And it was done. But, of course, that sin, original sin was there already, but somehow what happened it divided Colombian society.

Now, some consequences of the agreement. You can say that a government could do more or less for implementation. That's a big debate, but in my opinion, there were three major issues. Number one, over promising. So, we promised things without the money to make it happen. Neither the previous administration, nor the current administration, and maybe nor the next one. It's, you know, we promised things that are not being funded. And if you want to fund it, you need to find sources of wealth to be able to do that. That's number one.

Number two, in my opinion, was maybe whomever was negotiating on the Colombia side were naïve to think that the agreement was really going to end the cocaine business and the illegal mining of gold. And I have to tell you today, as we speak, there are five times more metric tons of cocaine produced by year than where we were, you know, six years ago. And there is three times more illegal gold than what we had six years ago.

What are the implications of those facts? Unfortunately, that money is not coming into, you know, the wealth of the country or communities, but it's coming to fund criminal organizations, and somehow deteriorating the territorial control that was granted and fought for years. But also, a multi-criminalist scenario in which it's harder to fight because you don't know exactly who you're fighting. Some of them are former paramilitary, some of them are former FARC, others are the ELN, others are people that who in hell we know who they are, you know. And that's very problematic.

And when you deteriorate the security conditions, from my experience, taking the social solutions becomes very difficult because we get into the same dilemma. Do we need social solutions? The answer is of course. That's the real answer. But if we cannot take those solutions or those solutions compete with criminal options, simply you cannot implement those solutions and really stabilize a community. So, this criminal activity has become very difficult.

And the third element of that was justice. Let's be frank. You know, I don't think that today at the time we are, nobody will, you know, even propose on a reasonable way some reversal of what we have. It is what it is. But let me tell you one thing. We are the only country in the world that have in its congress, people who committed crimes against humanity being members of congress with no

liable consequence.

And maybe that was thought as a way to really assure peace. But that hasn't assured peace. That even has created frustration. Their victims are angry. There is a confusion today that if you misbehave, maybe you can get a benefit. And let me remind you, now we have the ELN, the Clan del Golfo, and, you know, 100 of organized crime bands expecting benefits and treatment for their crimes. Not for their good things, for their crimes. So, that created an issue.

The second major issue, Venezuela, you know, and the Maduro regime. Not Venezuela. Venezuela is a lovely country. You know, we are Siamese brothers. But what Venezuela brought to us in these years, the Maduro regime. Number one, harboring terrorist organizations and criminal bands. The leaders of the ELN, the leaders of the FARC, the leaders of every criminal organization, they go and stay in Venezuela. But worse than that, sometimes they coordinate and do actions into Colombia. So, it's problematic. It's a safe haven.

If Colombia were an island, probably we're already in peace because, you know, those guys would not have a place to go. But we're not an island. We are a very beautiful, wonderful nation that is connected to the grand Colombia regional created by Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru. But in the case of the Maduro regime, they have facilitated that.

Second, unfortunately, the Maduro regime is making money out of cocaine and out of illegal gold. And they take a cut of that. So, they have incentivized the idea of these illegal activities in Colombia creating these torches.

And third is migration. I think President Duque will go to history for his humane and brave decision of offering a TPS to those Venezuelans that were running on fear and on hunger. But let's be realistic, every time you provide such a benefit, you get, in our case, 2.3 million people, which is 5 percent of Colombian population. If in this country, 5 percent of the U.S. population will come it's almost 20 million people. You get major political troubles when you get 5,000 people a month. Imagine if you were to get 20 million people. You know, that's very dramatic. It's costly economically. It's costly politically. It's a security problem. But as you are an expert in security, it becomes a perfect, you know,

channel to infiltrate and establish individuals that when riots come, can be the organizers and the major, you know, instability sources.

And the final element that we have had in the years is COVID. Unfortunately, COVID has been very dramatic worldwide. Even here I have seen it everywhere. In every country incumbents are being taken away. It's not Colombia, it's the whole democratic world. Maybe that's why dictators are becoming tougher than ever because they know that after COVID, societies are, you know, getting angry. Well, you know at some point, we had five million unemployed and, you know, frustration with all the other elements.

Let me end with this. Good news is where we are today, 2022, the month of August starting next week. We became and had one of the greatest economic rebounds in the whole world. As we speak, Colombia may be or actually the numbers for the second quarter demonstrate that Colombia is the better performing GDP growth in the Western Hemisphere. As you're speaking of recession here, Colombian economy for the second quarter is growing 8 percent. So, it's very impressive the legacy that, you know, is going to happen.

Vaccination rates are one of the best in the world these days, you know, getting to nineties, 90 percent. So, it's very good what is going on in that front. And about infrastructure, you know, for the past 10 years, Colombia was able to invest in its infrastructure and those infrastructures are being now open as we speak. And the next administration when they come, they will find this endowment. So, let's hope and wait they can prosper --

MR. O'HANLON: Right.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: -- and continue to grow out of that.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. That was very helpful, very thorough way to lay the foundation. Now, I'd like to turn to Vanda too, if I could, take the same kind of big picture question to start. I'd like to segue ultimately with you into the policy discussion of what the options are for the incoming Petro administration. But first, how do you see where we are at this moment in Colombia, as well as the U.S.-Colombia relationship?

I should say I think most people here know Vanda Felbab-Brown well. But she is one of the most courageous and brilliant field researchers in the world and has done a lot of her work in Latin America. Colombia has featured heavily in her first and other books. And she's done a great deal of research here at Brookings and elsewhere on non-state actors, including criminal gangs and narcotics trafficking organizations. So, she's thought very hard about these problems, as well as studying Colombia itself in great detail. So, Vanda, I know you've got a lot to share and please help us complete this foundation of history.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, Mike. And it is a privilege and delight to be having this conversation with you, Mr. Ambassador. And thank you for your service to Colombia and to the U.S.-Colombian relationship.

You know, I very much share your view that Colombia is a very strong U.S. partner and that has indeed spanned many administrations. Even at times where there were substantial agreements, dissatisfaction in either country with what the other was hoping policy would be that has indeed spanned different changes in administration. And I think this will also last as for the first time now, or at least for the first time in many decades, we are seeing a leftist government of incoming President Gustavo Petro to arrive in the leadership, presidential leadership position in Colombia, with some policies he clearly articulated promised to be a change from what policies have been up to now.

And I think you're absolutely right that the foundation of the strength of the relationship truly lies in bipartisan support with some of the priorities you outlined. But I would also add with bipartisan support that goes beyond simply the governments. There is strong interest in Colombia in the Washington policy community in the United States. There are groups like Washington Office on Latin America and Mr. Adam Isacson in the audience here with us today who have been enormously committed to promoting justice, human rights, better opportunities for people and doing so very courageously. And so, Colombia is privileged in having steady focus from Washington and steady commitment.

You know, in my view we are in a fascinating moment of opportunity. It is very healthy for

a country to be able to break out of decades of electing the same type of leaders and elect a new leader. At the same time, there is also tremendous amount of uncertainty. And I would say there are indeed also tremendous amount of challenges and difficulties.

2022 so far and prior to that 2021, have been steadily the most violent years since 2016, when the FARC peace deal was signed. No doubt it's still far better than at the various heights of the civil war in Colombia. But we are seeing steady growth of the number of armed groups. Whether they are criminal groups, whether they are insurgent groups, groups like the ELN, a long-standing guerilla, as well as various FARC dissident groups, Second Marquetalia, are robust and growing partially because they can enjoy safe havens in Venezuela about which you spoke. But also, because Colombia continues to fundamentally struggle with one element of security that it has struggled for many decades, which is when it succeeds in clearing and perhaps even holding a territory, it struggles in building up the security conditions that would eliminate the opportunities for armed groups and as well as for illegal economies.

Which is the second element. There is now tremendous disappointment among many sectors of Colombia society with the FARC peace deal even as certainly incoming President Petro and his key opponents committed themselves to upholding the peace agreement. Anyway, the peace agreement is wisely enshrined in law. There is no easy way to just go away from it. The real issue is though how it is implemented.

And the struggles have been enormous. You spoke about the massive budgetary issues that all along had been part of the challenge. The budget that was approved or that was envisioned along with the agreement in 2016 was for 15 years heavily assumed there would be significant contributions from abroad to fund many elements of the social agenda, and didn't, in my view, really fully tackle the enormity of the project. The budget as it existed even in this most optimal scenario, was vastly inadequate, frankly, and the 15-year framework, in my view, was insufficient.

And so, really to get at delivering just the funding alone, let's not even for a moment talk about the content of the policy, just the funding alone, a very fundamental reckoning needed to happen in Colombia about not just sharing of political power like with the party that came out of the FARC, but

investing resources through changes and taxations. And they continue to be enormous struggles. So, the tax base still is vastly inadequate for what it would take to really move to the equity, social justice, rebuilding, rural development that the deal promised.

So, there are different satisfactions with the deal. In the first place, let me start with security. I already mentioned that security has been deteriorating steadily. There are many dimensions to it. FARC dissident groups like the Second Marquetalia persisting, other insurgencies. The enormous struggle, the enormous power and strength of groups like the Otoniels, also known as the Gulf Cartel, as just recently demonstrated in their shutting down, effectively, 12, one-third of Colombia, the subdepartments, one-third of Colombia after the extradition of their leader, Otoniel, to the United States in June of this year. And many other groups on the right side whether they are called paramilitaries, neo-paramilitaries, post-paramilitaries, bandas criminales.

And a new dimension and a very significant and complicated one, also the presence of the Sinaloa Cartel in Cali. A second dimension of insecurity is the significant pressure on various leaders, social leaders, and some of the FARC demobilized members. And I should say one of the successes of the deal has been that there are 14,000 perhaps demobilized FARC of the vast majority of FARC fighters have stayed away from the battlefield. Perhaps 3,000-4,000 are now back on the battlefield in one group or another.

But even those that have stayed out of the battlefield have been facing threats to their security. Maybe some 300-400 have been killed as have the same number of social leaders that have been killed. Groups like the Gulf Cartel have played very strong role in the elections trying to prevent people from voting for supporters of then candidate Gustavo Petro. Other groups like ELN shut down security. So, the security picture is complicated. One set of disappointments.

Second set of disappointments is the unmet expectations of the social justice, social inequality redressing that the peace deal promised. And that has two dimensions. It has the rural dimension and the fundamental disappointment with building legal livelihoods instead of coca, the resurrection of forced coca eradication, and the political anger this generates, and the alienation once

again of coca farmers from the government. But also, just the lack of progress in legal livelihoods. Again, something that I think all along there were vastly unrealistic expectation about how it would be implemented and what it would take. But nonetheless, the reality is that this has withered almost fully during the past four years.

On the other side, there is also vast dissatisfaction with poverty, social inequality, lack of social progress compounding by COVID, but way preceding COVID in the urban spaces. And this goes well beyond the conflict dynamics related to the FARC peace deal. It's a much more complicated urban picture. And so, you have this big pressure now on incoming President Petro of both dealing with a very complex security picture that has always been elusive for Colombia to move to some effective building of the base of security, but also this big dissatisfaction in the rural areas and the big dissatisfaction in the urban areas.

MR. O'HANLON: Vanda, let me pick up on that if I could and ask you to offer any recommendation you might have in a policy area or two to the incoming Colombian administration and/or the United States, as it seeks to be supportive of Colombia and do its own part to try to foster a stronger relationship and to deal with the challenges you've just described. I'm not asking for a full range of policy recommendations because I'm sure we're going to bring in the audience soon and there will be a lot of questions on specifics.

But just to kickstart that process, if you could offer one or two thoughts. And then Mr. Ambassador, I'll turn the same question to you afterwards although I realize you don't want to give too much advice to the president-elect. But maybe you can give advice to Washington on where we could be even more supportive in the relationship. But, Vanda, if I could begin with one or two big ideas you might think should at least be considered seriously at this juncture.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, I think that the incoming administration in Colombia is fortunate that the Biden administration is in power in Washington. President-elect Petro, President Petro in nine days, 10 days --

MR. O'HANLON: Right.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: -- has clearly committed himself to really focusing on the rural development. He has disavowed forced eradication of coca. That issue alone will be a challenge in managing Washington. And would be potentially poisonous explosive to mix my metaphors during an administration like the Trump administration that put enormous pressure on Colombia to beef up, intensify eradication.

Plus, the Biden administration in its various key strategic planning documents, the strategy on dealing with drug policy issues has not been preoccupied with eradication, has emphasized human rights as a key element of any drug policy, and has spoken about the strong emphasis on a legal development. So, there is a unique moment which doesn't mean there won't be any challenges and that Washington will not expect some of its traditional measures of progress on drugs, but nonetheless I think it's a good moment. This issue could be just a poison pill if the administration lined up in a different a way.

I also believe that the Biden administration will be very responsive to really focusing on the rural development. And there is good funding, hardly sufficient funding. Ultimately, Colombia must fund its own social contract, must fund its own redistribution.

The real challenge, however, is that the problems of the rural development, the problems of security are enormous. It's not just a matter of erroneous policies. It's a matter of enormously difficult policies with enormously complex time spans. The complex relationship between what investment needs to be done on the ground in terms of the social development to enable security, but also what level of security there needs to be to get any legal livelihoods going. It's impossible to have robust legal economy where violence continues to be.

You know, we can get into some details in my -- I'll just highlight a few. In my view, there could be really productive dialog to think about how to start building at least areas in Colombia where security is focused on the security of people. Where there is constant holding that it's not just sort of limited presence, key strategic response, but then pulling out. I think there are opportunities to talk about how to do interdiction in ways that both reduce the flow of cocaine, but also do not produce new forms of

violence by simply fragmenting groups.

I think there are opportunities to talk about the impact of the Sinaloa Cartel in Cali and how those could be prioritized and what kind of targeting strategies this would produce. I think there are enormous opportunities in other fields like the environmental agenda, the energy agenda.

Incoming President Petro has strongly committed himself to a green economy and climate. Something that he will struggle to implement because of the importance of oil in the economy, and because of these enormous demands that many social groups will be putting on him from groups in the urban spaces to the rural spaces everyone will want now to be funded. So, it will be hard to move the agenda. Nonetheless, the green agenda climate key importance for the Biden administration opportunities to talk their environmental issues and deforestation.

I don't want to suggest in any way that there are easy answers to any of these issues. These are enormously hard policies, an enormously difficult complex policy environment. Ultimately, they will only be successful if Colombia does find the will to do its own reckoning about equity. To do its own fundamental commitment that the areas that have so long been excluded continue to suffer will be brought in, but it's not easy.

MR. O'HANLON: Mr. Ambassador, I want to turn the same question to you. And thank you, Vanda, for those very helpful comments and big ideas. But I also want to recall, Mr. Ambassador, that when you were kind enough to bring me onto a U.S.-Colombia alliance working group a few years ago, I remember a briefing in which you pointed out that, yes, Plan Colombia had made a big difference, but it was very specific and finite and limited in what it did. And most of the resources that were needed for Colombia to institute and carry out a new security strategy, Colombia provided itself. There were certain things that you asked us with helicopters and a couple other technical areas of support, as I recall.

And that sort of, to me, was a nice example of how collaboration can work. It's not like you're asking the United States for the preponderance of funding for any given security or developmental program. But Colombia's been very careful and very smart in thinking about what specific requests it can make that it really needs help with. So, I guess I make that observation in turning the floor back to you

thinking about this next phase in the U.S.-Colombia partnership. I know you want to handle this with a light touch. But if there are any areas where you see some big ideas worth looking at, I'd love to hear your thoughts.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: Thank you, Mike. Well, it's always good to listen to Vanda because she's thoughtful and, you know, she can package a wonderful set of ideas in a broad view in a very nutshell. Listening to Vanda, one thing that comes to my mind is one of my previous presentations here like five years ago when one of the things that I told was, and this is a little bit of what I will bring again, the challenge we have is to really be effective in the field.

I have to tell you, what I feel proud of from the time I've been in service is of the teams that we have worked with that have been able to really transform and do things. Because there is a major distance between goodwill and ideas and execution and solutions. And, you know, that's really, you know, the thing that I will tell the incoming administration or any administration or any, you know, group of thinkers in Washington as we are here or in another part of the world, you know, it's how to execute and really how to really provide management and evidence that you changed things.

And when I go back to that point again, what I will tell you is that unfortunately, as I said before, I somehow foresaw part of the failures that we were going to have. And I knew it because, you know, thinking that just because we stopped going after crime and hoping that they were in goodwill, that was going to really be the solution for our problems, but it was not. It was not. Very far from that. And in the country now we have these very well described scenarios by Vanda which is very confusing and very full of many players that are very difficult now to handle.

Now, on what you mentioned, a few things to comment. One, historically, or at least for the past 10 years, 15 years, of course the main effort of our security and social development is Colombia. So, to give you a number, it's around 95 percent of budget that goes for either security or social activities come from the Colombian taxpayer. The Colombian people is our budget.

The United States is a great contributor. And the most important thing is the strategic capacity that it has to enhance areas of execution or areas of technology that we simply do not have, and

the logistics. Those elements are really the gamechangers that the important, but limited funding that Colombia gives to -- U.S. gives to Colombia, just to remind you, there's around \$500 million per year. That's, you know, the check. You compare that to what happened in Iraq, Afghanistan, or any of these major events where the U.S. was supporting and it was less than a day, this is what we get for a full year.

And second, I always bring the conversation to the point of why the U.S. should continue to fund Colombia. And on this I'm even speaking for the good of the next administration, the next administration needs the U.S. funding, and needs the U.S. support. And I hope that support can be kept. Why is that? First, because we are friends, because we are like minded, because we have these 200 years of history, but also, because it's in the benefit of the United States of America. And, you know, if I put the conversation in Washington terms, that's a real reason. Because consumption happens here and because the stability in a country like Colombia defines part of the stability of the whole Western Hemisphere. So, it's in the U.S. interest to keep an eye on to that.

There is another element that has not been discussed today and, you know, I probably will leave it for a future conversation, but I would like to touch some lines. This time is different. We are in a middle of geopolitical struggle. There is global power competition that simply was not there three or four years ago. And what is going on right now in the whole planet, in my view, is that there are these events of competition happening almost in every corner of the planet. Latin American is not an exception. Latin America is right now in the middle of a competition between U.S. influence and other players' influence.

And you cannot, you know, craft any policy without, you know, stating the importance of what I'm saying or what it means. Because unfortunately, it's not that, you know, simply one country doesn't want to be franchised with the U.S. or not, it's who is behind them, and what are the consequence strategically for the years to come. And even if we want to be successful in some policies as the ones that Vanda described, it is not easy when you have others trying to annoy or to deny the success of those policies.

So, it's more difficult, more complex. In Colombia during the year 2021, we were able to

prove and show evidence together with U.S. agencies that Russian disinformation was happening in the country. It was not theoretical. It was not an idea. It did happen. So, it means that there are players that made this scenario even more complex than what it used to be.

So, I just wanted to highlight that because the region is under strong competition. And by the way, probably the U.S. thought since the moment leading up to today that the region always was being under threat, and especially during the Cold War or during the Nazi Era in which, you know, they tried to influence this part of the world. So, the U.S. was able to work jointly with the countries and with governments and we put them out.

But in this time, this time is different. Most of the countries do not feel the level of engagement, or connection, or political relation to the United States and probably they feel maybe even other relations stronger. That's a new thing. And that's something that is going to make things even difficult in Colombia and in other parts. And something I believe is important.

Finally, about things that, in my opinion, need to be watched or can be crafted as policies from the U.S. First, on the climate change agenda, let's remind that, you know, frankly speaking, the new government has spoke about that platform but it's the current administration that is the country has advanced the most on that agenda.

You know, people can like it or not because, you know, it's the current administration or not, but a few things are facts. Number one, Colombia has increased the protected areas more than any other country in the Western Hemisphere. Number two, in an agreement with Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, and Chile, we have created the largest protected maritime area in the world. And what is the intention of that? Probably the fisheries from other parts of the world do not come to our territories and, you know, wasted the wealth and the foundries there.

But in addition to that, about energy transition. I think Colombia has been one of the most responsible countries on energy transition. And that policy needs to be continued. First, we have oil and coal and as we are in 2022, let's not forget the world is demanding oil and coal. It's not good news because probably it's coming out of crisis and war, but the world needs energy, and we have it. So, we

better provide it because that's good for reducing inflation worldwide, and that is good for somehow using our production in order to create the resources that maybe we need for all kinds of policies that has been discussed.

But second, in order to finance energy transition, you need tons of money. You don't move into energy transition just by, you know, declaring you're angry with, you know, cars and gasoline. No, no, no. You need to create solar plants. You need to create aioli plants. And by the way, if you want to store that energy, you need batteries. If you want batteries, you need mining. And that mining needs to be very well crafted. This is not just things that happen out of nowhere. Colombia has advanced in that front.

We moved from zero percent on non-traditional renewables energy production to 14 percent in our matrix. So, that's the kind of real things that happen. And I believe that's the kind of activities that need to be done in the years to come.

Migration is another issue. We've seen day by day growing numbers of migration and even Colombians coming to the U.S. How are we going handle that? Well, if we can keep our democracy as it is, if we can keep, you know, the respect for opposition as we have, if we can keep the armed forces that we have and even enhance them so they can confront the security challenges we have, and of course, if we can advance in economics and social indicators that open and create more space for more people. But that's the case of Colombia. Probably it's the case of every country if you don't want to see this migration crisis that is going on worldwide. So, that's another strong recommendation.

MR. O'HANLON: Very good.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: And finally, there has been a kind of nearshoring that has become a debate, you know, because nearshoring originally it probably was from the Trump administration. So, now they don't like the name, so they want to use it like friend-shoring or ally-shoring or other things. What it means in practical terms is, look, Latin America is here, and Colombia is here. And we are the perfect spot for many industries that can come from different parts of the world and be

established in Colombia or in any other country of Latin America.

But what do we need for that? Three kinds of efforts from the United States. The first one, infrastructure investment. So, even for the efficiency of U.S. industries, it's good to have good infrastructure in Latin America. So, funding that infrastructure even with U.S. companies is positive because it reduces costs in our region.

Second is allocation and English as a second language. As much as we have skilled labor that can communicate in English, we can do digital activities. We can do, you know, other kind of production for the American markets and European markets. And finally, I think it's about promoting this regional engagement. So, you were asking for policy for the U.S., I think those could be useful for the U.S., but with a big social impact and economic impact in Latin America, and somehow in the geopolitical strategy that requires to be more thoughtful today than ever before.

MR. O'HANLON: Wonderful. We've got about 15 minutes for your interventions now and questions. So, why don't we take a couple at a time. And you could pose to one or the other or both, as you wish. My preference would be one question per person, however, from you just so we have time for a number of folks. But let's see who wants to kick it off, please. We'll start here in the fourth row and maybe take these two. Yes, please, ma'am.

MS. BARRAGE: Good morning and thank you very much. I'm Alexandra Barrage. My mother is from Barranquilla. So, I've been following -- I had been following the election with great interest. My question for the panel is what do you see as the future for the moderate voices of Colombia? So, I was interested to learn that Sergio Fajardo received about 4 percent of the vote. How do you see the moderate voice moving forward? Will they play a role in this new administration and any thoughts on that?

MR. O'HANLON: Great, thank you. And please, over here for the next question. Right here, thanks.

MS. MONCHAR: Hi. So, my question is for Ambassador and I'm Laura Monchar (phonetic). I'm from Venezuela.

MR. O'HANLON: Great.

MS. MONCHAR: And my question is as a consequence of the new leftist government elected in Colombia, how do you envision the relationship between the U.S. and Colombia changing and as a consequence the relations between the U.S. and Latin America as we know that Colombia has served this kind of role?

MR. O'HANLON: Do you want to start with one or both of those and then go to Vanda?

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: All right. I'll do both and Vanda, I'm sure, will have views that are very important. I think having all kinds of views in our democracy is critical. And you know if the current administration can be recognized for, you know, our democracy can claim is that they were -- have, you know, they have access to power and they have been elected through our democratic system. So, it's very important right now to keep all the voices in Colombia, but to protect that opposition as our current laws and our current system provides. I think that's critical.

In the countries that have failed in the region, and I will use names. Nicaragua, in which they had an election in which all the presidential candidates were in jail. Or Venezuela, in which they do elections when the president likes or not, but, you know, his opposition is under threat, in jail, or in exile. That you cannot call democracy. And I don't expect, and I think that should never happen in a country like Colombia. But awareness of those voices and having a role is very important.

By the way, the name you mentioned is a very respectful person. You know, and I will not say how far or close I am politically, but I can tell you that he's a decent, respectful voice and Colombia needs those kinds of decent and respectful voice to participate, to enlighten, and to criticize, you know, in the right way. So, I hope that, you know, him and others can be players for the good of the country at the end and for the success of our nation and the protection of our democracy.

About the U.S.-Colombia relationship to the future, as I said, I want to be respectful to the next administration. I think there's an incoming designated ambassador. By the way, he's someone that I have a very high respect for him. He's a good person. He's a decent human being and he has been a balanced leader. And I'm sure he will here trying to take the relationship at the peak that we have put it

and probably want it to even increase it or, you know, have it stable.

It's a fact that if, you know, Colombia stops being this country that contributes to regional stability, it will be problematic for Colombians, for Venezuelans, but for the region. And that's something to watch in the time to come. But I don't want to make predictions. And let's hope that, you know, those who are now responsible for the government and the policy will be able to behold this.

I told Mike that, you know, some months from now I'll be around, and I'll be talking to our friends here in Washington and to, you know, all community to tell when we see that things are going well, I will be happy to say it. I will be very honored to just signal, look, this policy is creating an effect, that's a good idea, et cetera. But if in case we see something that, you know, puts the country at risk on any means, I think it's fair to discuss about it. For now, I want to be optimistic and hopeful.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Vanda.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Let me reiterate Ambassador Pinzón's crucial comments. That it is absolutely imperative for Colombia to protect the voices of people across the political spectrum and truly protect socially those and freedom of expression.

We are in the moment where there is a conjunction of tremendous polarization in Colombia coinciding with tremendous polarization worldwide in our society, in the United States, in many other parts of the world, but also, geopolitical polarizations. Russia, as Ambassador Pinzón mentioned, has adopted a fully anti-American, if opportunistic policy, in the Americas. But also, a policy that centers in its basic anti-American thrust by amplifying, exacerbating, creating callous dissention, disorder, polarization in many countries in the region.

At the same time, we have seen the election of a wide set of leftist leaders in the Americas, some of whom are strongly aligned with Russia, like in Nicaragua, like in Venezuela, others that have far more nuanced views, others that are principally nationalists, such as President Lopez Obrador in Mexico, but have strongly embraced Russia despite its egregious invasion of Ukraine.

And so, Colombia will be navigating this much more complex geopolitical environment that is even more made complex by the role of China in Latin America, which in many ways has far more

influence, far more leverage, and is far more significant player than Russia, despite Russia's nefarious activities. And China's role in Latin America is complex. It's complex for those countries. It's hardly all just the purchase of primary commodities. And it's complex for the United States.

Incoming President Petro will need to be building policies but finding some ways to build political consensus for them. That's elusive in our country. It's elusive in many countries. And it has long been elusive in Colombia as well. And it will be difficult. During legislative elections, his party, the historic pact, won the polarity of seats in the senate, came the second in the lower chamber of the Colombian parliament, on the congress. But nonetheless, for all sort of general reasons, even with the support of the green party also on the left side of the political spectrum, he faces a tied and divided legislature.

And so, a lot of the success of his ideas will be not only about the intrinsic effectiveness and correctness in what they envision to do, but about whether he will be able to build enough political support to implement them and to keep them going. This has been enormous challenge in Latin America over policies however good or bad often last for two years, three years, maximum four years and get discarded. And many in administration simply takes the approach that whatever the prior did was all wrong and throws it completely out without really looking whether there were any reasons and if there was anything of value in those policies that should be preserved.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. We have time for one last round. So, let's see, we'll go here, please, to the fourth row, and then over here to the front row, and then we'll have to wrap it up there I'm afraid.

MR. ISACSON: Thank you so much. It was great to listen to both of you. I'm Adam Isacson from WOLA. And I just want to talk about, you know, Colombia's agricultural frontier zones. Sort of the very marginal areas where maybe 10 percent of the population lives, where all the coca is, the armed groups, a lot of this is border zones too. Vanda talked about rural development and Ambassador, you talked about going security first.

I would note that, you know, Diego Molano, General Zapateiro, the head of the army, these were really security first guys, but it didn't really work. High value targeting seemed to work, but

territorial control didn't. So, could you comment on what should happen differently in agricultural frontier, you know, beyond the last military checkpoint zones in this new government in the light of the fact that Petro, if you look at sort of the blue-red electoral map of Colombia, the places that voted overwhelmingly for Petro were these very marginal areas. This is his base. Social movements in this area are his base. So, they can probably reach down very deeply if they want to and if they have the resources to do so.

So, if you were sitting down, and I know we're not supposed to advise the next government, but if you were sitting down with the new defense team and the new, you know, Palaso de Narino team, what would you advise them to do differently in these ungoverned areas and to what extent would Chapter One of the Peace Accord, rural reform, serve as a framework for them?

MR. O'HANLON: Wonderful, thank you. And then final question here in the front row.

SPEAKER: Oh, thank you, Dr. Brown and Ambassador. So, my question is for Ambassador, Mr. Ambassador, so, in your point of view, is the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia consistent during the Trump and Biden administration or if there is a huge gap?

MR. O'HANLON: Fascinating. So, why don't we start with you, Vanda, and I will give the Ambassador the last word for whatever you'd like to say on the first question.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, I am not surprised to hear that Adam is asking one of the toughest questions and one that he, himself, has done tremendous amount of thinking. As long as the security policy remains a very temporary deployment, strategic hits in any area, whether marginalized or closer to residential, big residential, big city areas, this will be inadequate.

At the same time, there are just realities of how much territory is in that "marginal", highly insecure state. I think that incoming President Petro will need to find a way to build an honest positive relationship with the military forces, which might not be so easy. It might take some time to get to that. And that neither party hopefully coming in with a view that the opinions or advice that are being given are being given with ill intent, but really listening to what's feasible, what is a fantasy, what needs to change, and be willing to recognize what has not worked. Both difficult for both parties potentially.

In my view then, we are really back to what you have studied, Adam, many times and

that we have seen in Colombia many times, deciding where to concentrate forces. So, the reality is that the extent of the insecure area is so large that there is simply not enough force in Colombia to effectively deploy, stay, hold, and hold long enough for building across the space. So, we are back to is the consolidation plan going to have 10, 9, 13, 17 areas. And when Ambassador Pinzón was the Secretary of Defense Minister of Defense in Colombia, he had --

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: Looks like you two know more than I, you know. It's like you're the experts and, --

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: He has been grappling with those.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: -- you know, what we did was --

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: He has been grappling with those.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: -- learning from you guys that know so much.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: So, but I think the issue is really how to prioritize areas and then think how those ink spots, pockets if you want to go back to the old lingo, can be connected and can be connected to areas of strategic viability. A strategy economic viability that will then have a bridge, a continuous space of both security and viable economic development. Because the other dimension of it is it's not just insecurity that's keeping those areas marginal. They are marginal economically because they don't have markets, legal markets, because they are far away from viable processing plants. Because they are infrastructure poor for a whole other set of reasons, none of which is a five-minute proposition or in my view, a five-year proposition to fix.

And so, then incoming President Petro will face a problem that many leaders around the world face. His electoral base both in the rural and urban spaces will be asking we want justice now. We want resources now. But he will have to say I only have so much money to deliver to someone. And if the pressure is to give everyone a little bit, what do you want community? A bridge. What do you want community? A school, a clinic. We will be repeating the same challenges that bring some easement, some easing other, but they don't really ever transform into sustained security.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Mr. Ambassador.

MR. O'HANLON: And sir, over to you for that same question and --

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: Thank you, Vanda.

MR. O'HANLON: -- anything else you'd like to conclude with.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: No, well, I think every line you mentioned is very true. But I, you know, I have to come back to your question, Adam, because you and I have talked for years and you know because you came to my residence some time ago and I told you, the current government has 80,000 men and women less in the military and the police than we had when I was the Minister of Defense. And I told you that. And why that's important because that explains why for all these years, because this ideal world of the agreement that was going to end every problem that, you know, many have supported with maybe goodwill, the result is that we have weakened the capacity of Colombian state to provide the only thing which really were advancing strongly, which was security.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: What is the current number of the security forces?

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: You know if you add everybody, it's like 390,000.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: That's both police --

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: Police and military.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: -- and military, 300,000.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: My time, my last day, 470,000. So, in a period of five, seven years, we lost like 90,000 people. How do you control territory? With presence. And how you protect social leaders, it doesn't matter if they are from former FARC or, you know, if they are from whatever the group, socially one? With presence. Because that presence is the one that denies the presence of other actors. And by the way, can even react to protect lives.

That was some of the things that we lost as part of that process that I tried to describe at the beginning. So, frankly speaking, that's the first thing I will tell them, look, we have lost thousands of men that were useful to guarantee that social policies were even necessary to be around.

Why did it happen? Well, there are many reasons. Some thought that this whole

concept of the peace dividend that you said all right we don't need that anymore so, we will use these costs. Maybe the economic downturns that we have seen from, you know, the cycle of commodities worldwide that was true up to a year, but you know, for five years that was true.

So, I'm not trying to portray anybody for that. But what I'm trying to say is these are real things that weaken our capacity to protect people and to guarantee that the social policy that you well describe and, you know, that we have been discussing about that and I think there is an agreement on that. USAID has a very strong knowledge on that. Well, it is not going to be successful if we don't have the resources and the security. So, that's my point one.

About the rural areas of Colombia, I remember reading 30 years ago as a student of economics, how our country was meant to be one of the greatest agricultural powers of the world because we are very proud to have this wonderful set of land. And that's a question I have for me, but for every leader of Colombia, why we haven't been able to make it? Why still we have, and we know that we have that potential. We have water. We have land. And we have areas in which we can really expand our crops. But we're not there yet. And every strategy that comes to Colombia sees that we haven't done that.

About the coca is more, you know, a view. The difference between coca and any other crop is that coca grows everywhere. You know, unfortunately for us, you know, that can grow wherever. Other crops, especially if you want to take them to the market and have some sophistication require certain qualities, certain techniques, certain technology, and of course, infrastructure to make those products to the markets in an efficient way. And that struggle we will continue to confront. And that's why the cross between security and the agricultural sector in Colombia is important.

Final line on that is there is a major conversation that is starting to happen in Colombia, but it's something that needs to be watched. And I think here in Washington, people like you, Vanda, and others will have to think through on all this and all of us. I'll keep doing this and probably later I will give my own thoughts. But do we really solve the problems of crime and violence in Colombia by not going after crime and violent organizations? That's a question I think we need to keep for ourselves.

Because apparently some ideas are coming to the point that we're so tired of doing this. Or we are, you know, we think that they have some justification for what they're doing but let's stop going after them. And let's include everybody. And now the bad guys are good guys, and whomever, you know, declares it was a victim of them, suddenly becomes a bad guy.

Is that the society we were meant to build? And I think, you know, that's going to be an important discussion in the years to come. I have my own views and, you know, in a different time and hopefully here, Mike, --

MR. O'HANLON: Good.

AMBASSADOR PINZÓN: -- I will come and bring that. To your question, I think historically, there's a strong alignment on U.S. foreign policy. Presidents are different and congresses are different, and they have their views, and they have their tone and their approaches. But in general terms, I can tell you after 20 more years of being in the middle of U.S.-Colombia relationship, that it has been relatively steady among different administrations.

And I know some people here in Washington because of the things that you saw would like me to say, well, it's totally different. Yeah, I maybe share some of the things that you don't like, you know, as many of you or that you like, depending. But the general policy has been strong and steady in Colombia. And my recommendation is let's keep it that way because it's useful for Colombia. It's useful for the United States. And it's useful for the region. More importantly, you know, for the people.

There are millions of Colombian Americans, Mike, more and more in influential positions. More and more part of American society. And part of our relationship is really based onto that, you know. When I said that other -- I heard, you know, that well, other powers will come into Latin America, and they will take the region. It thinks it's going to be very difficult. They can influence. They can bring money. But the relationship is based on culture, values, and people. So, Colombians are here, and they are Americans. And, you know, they will have forever their ties and connections to our country. I think it's important to see it.

MR. O'HANLON: That's a great note to finish on. Mr. Ambassador, Vanda, thank you

very much and thank you all for being here.

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