

ILLEGAL DRUGS, CONFLICT AND PEACE: PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

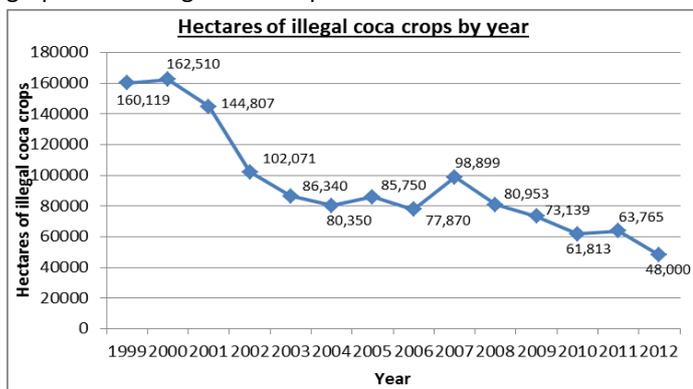
INTRODUCTION

On May 16, 2014, the Government of Colombia (GOC) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) announced an agreement on the solution to the problem of illicit drugs, the fourth of six points on the GOC-FARC dialogue agenda, and the third to be discussed during peace talks. The illicit drug point includes three sub-points: illicit crop substitution programs with community participation, prevention and public health programs, and the production and commercialization of illegal drugs. It was the first time in Colombian history that any issue related to drug trafficking was included in peace talks, which presents, according to some authors, both promise and challenges.ⁱ

This text contextualizes the agreement by summarizing the dynamics of illegal drug production; the agreement on illegal drugs signed by the GOC and FARC; different perspectives on the role of illegal drugs in the armed conflict; and conclusions and perspectives on the agreement and post-conflict.

ILLEGAL DRUG PRODUCTION IN COLOMBIA

Currently in Colombia, three types of illegal crops for illegal drug production are grown: coca (used to make cocaine), poppy (used to make heroine), and marijuana. The following graph shows illegal coca crops from 1999 to 2012.ⁱⁱ



Poppy crops have grown since the mid-1980s, but reached their height in the early 1990s and 2000s.ⁱⁱⁱ According to the UNODC, there were 298 hectares of poppy crops in 2013.^{iv} Finally, marijuana boomed in the 1960s, but certain indicators point towards an increase in production.^v

“A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF ILICIT DRUGS”

The fourth point on the general agenda of the peace talks between the GOC and FARC is the “Solution to Problem of Illicit Drugs.” Various policy shifts were agreed regarding the three aforementioned sub-topics of the agenda point. The agreement was based on certain conclusions, including that a lasting solution to the conflict must tackle drug trafficking; that the conflict was not caused by the issue of drug trafficking, but nonetheless there has been a relationship between them; and that poverty, State absence, marginality and criminal groups contribute to illegal crop cultivation.^{vi}

Regarding illicit crop substitution, the agreement proposes local level income generation and development projects,

with a dominating component of direct community participation in the design and implementation of said projects. Communities will have to eradicate their coca within an established timeline as part of the projects. The GOC and FARC will create a working group on demining, which will include information on the location of land mines as part of the crop substitution process.

Regarding prevention and public health, the GOC committed to creating the Integral National Illegal Drug Consumption Intervention Program, to help prevent consumption. Also, the National Illegal Drug Consumer Assistance System will be created as a rehabilitation system for drug users and addicts.

On the issue of drug production and commercialization, the GOC agreed to fight drug trafficking organizations, especially through institutional means. This includes strengthening anti-corruption measures, programs and institutions; improving the fight against money laundering; and creating new legal frameworks where necessary.

Finally, the FARC agreed to cut its ties to the drug trade, which the group used to finance their insurgency; and the GOC and FARC committed to clarify the connection between the drug trade and armed conflict through a commission.^{vii}

Countless authors analyze aspects of the relationship between the drug trade and armed conflict in Colombia. Three topics that dominate the discussion are summarized here: the greed-grievance debate; the issue of social orders; and why illicit crop growth has occurred in Colombia.

GREED VERSUS GRIEVANCE

‘Greed versus grievance’ refers to an academic debate regarding the motivations of armed groups throughout the world. Those who argue for greed state that armed groups are motivated by money, and not any ideological claim. This argument has been used in Colombia to describe the FARC. The general idea is that the FARC, due to their participation in drug trafficking, have only become interested in making money.^{viii} Wilkinson (2001) states of the FARC “it is clear that [drugs trafficking] has made them, both in reality and popular perception, little more than a branch of organized crime, decadent guerrillas rather than genuine revolutionaries, irredeemably corrupted by their intimate involvement with narcotraffickers and their cynical pursuits of huge profits from kidnapping and from their ‘protection’ of coca and opium production, processing and shipping facilities.”^{ix}

Others argue that the empirical and methodological foundations for the greed argument are problematic. Gutiérrez (2008) notes that the FARC do not pay recruits; castigate harshly cases of internal corruption in which individuals spend money from the guerrilla group on personal pleasures; and do not condone looting from civilians. These three tend to occur in greed-motivated armed groups.^x Others call the FARC a “hybrid” with both political and economic motivations, stating that despite their participation in the drug trade, the group still has political goals.^{xi}

THE SOCIAL SIDE OF DRUG TRAFFICKING

Some authors focus on how local drug trafficking and production have affected societies directly and/or indirectly. Some studies have focused on the lifestyle and local social changes associated with drug production. Ferro et al (1999) describe changes in consumption patterns, cultural practices and social norms in areas of coca and opium production. For example, young indigenous men began to buy the finest clothes possible; began to play soccer; stopped working in the community; and started drinking and smoking crack.^{xii}

Gustavo Duncan looks at how the money from drug production and trafficking changes society on a local level, and what that means for the continuation of violence. He notes (2009) how small towns whose economic dynamics depend on drug trafficking are structurally and socially apt to accept the control of an armed actor who controls and manages the drug trade. Over time, due to the money from drug production, the illegal armed actor gains power as the local economy comes to depend on whoever controls the trade. Duncan (2009) argues that, “negotiations or a military victory for the State mean the end of the armed actor, but not the transformation of a social order based on illegal armed actors or drug trafficking; the most probable outcome is that another armed actor assumes control...” (170).^{xiii}

The importance of this dependence is highlighted by Ricardo Vargas when he mentions that the coca-growing population of small towns in southern Córdoba was happy when a new armed actor appeared in 2007 in order to regulate the drug trade, much to the despire of traditional campesinos in the region.^{xiv} Journalistic reports have shown that towns that depend completely on the drug trade still exist in Colombia, in places like Guaviare and Putumayo, amongst others.^{xv}

THE ‘WHY’ OF COCA CROP GROWTH IN COLOMBIA

There is a plethora of arguments for why coca is grown in Colombia. Dion and Russler (2008) argue that a lack of infrastructure and State presence means that coca ends up being the most profitable crop.^{xvi} Ortiz (2003) argues the economic reforms in the 1990s impeded the ability of peasants to profitably grow legal crops, which led them to grow coca.^{xvii} Caicedo (2006) argues that peasants will grow coca when they believe the profits outweigh the risks, and it is a rational thought process. This decision is based on external factors such high transportation costs.^{xviii}

Fajardo (1989) describes the process in which a *colono* (a landless peasant who goes into the jungle, cuts down and burns the trees and creates a farm) is forced to migrate to a new part of the jungle to create a farm, which leaves him/her in debt and with no land title. The farm is then used for various years but the land becomes less and less productive, meaning lower income for and debt payments by the *colono*. The person who lent the *colono* money to start the new farm then kicks the *colono* off the land, usually to raise cattle; or an illegal armed group steals the land. The *colono* is then forced to repeat the process deeper in the jungle. The high prices of coca, though, meant that many *colonos* could stay on their land and pay off their debts.

Finally, Francisco Thoumi (2007, 2009) states that structural factors play a role in drug production, but they are far from sufficient to explain the phenomena. He points out that many countries have weak states, or little infrastructure, yet they do not have drug production. In Colombia, the main necessary factor is that there is no institution – be it the State, church, or society – strong enough to create norms or laws that restrict individual behavior. Thus illegal activities become legitimate in many parts of the country. In this environment, coca cultivation was an acceptable response to the socioeconomic environment in many places, despite being illegal and having negative effects on others.^{xix}

CONCLUSIONS

This text contextualized the GOC and FARC agreement on the “solution to problem of illicit drugs” by highlighting some of the main discussions on drug production and the armed conflict. A common opinion of many authors seems to be that the agreement will not completely rid Colombia of coca, but nonetheless is a step in the right direction.^{xx}

ⁱ Angélica Durán Martínez. “El acuerdo sobre drogas ilícitas: esperanzas y desafíos.” <http://www.razonpublica.com/index.php/conflicto-drogas-y-paz-temas-30/7636-el-acuerdo-sobre-drogas-il%C3%ADcitas-esperanzas-y-desaf%C3%ADos.html>

ⁱⁱ UNODC. (2014). “Colombia: Monitoreo de cultivos de coca 2013.”

<http://www.odc.gov.co/Portals/1/publicaciones/pdf/CO032052014-informe-monitoreo-cultivos-coca-2014.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Echandía Castilla, Camilo. (2006). *Dos décadas de escalamiento del conflicto armado en Colombia: 1986-2006*. Universidad Externado: Bogotá.

^{iv} UNODC. (2014). “Colombia: Monitoreo de cultivos de coca 2013.”

<http://www.odc.gov.co/Portals/1/publicaciones/pdf/CO032052014-informe-monitoreo-cultivos-coca-2014.pdf>. P. 66.

^v Ibid. P 70-71.

^{vi} GOC-FARC. “COMUNICADO CONJUNTO. LA HABANA, MAYO 16 DE 2014.”

<http://www.mesadeconversaciones.com.co/comunicados/comunicado-conjunto-la-habana-mayo-16-de-2014?ver=in>. The next four paragraphs are based on this text.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Collier, Paul. 2006. “Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy.” P. 9.

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~econpco/research/pdfs/EconomicCausesofCivilConflict-ImplicationsforPolicy.pdf>

^{ix} Wilkinson, Paul. 2001. *Terrorism versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response*. Taylor and Francis. P 19-20.

^x Gutiérrez, Francisco. 2008. “Telling the difference: Guerillas and Paramilitaries in the Colombian War.” *Politics and Society* 36(1): 3-34.

^{xi} Williams, P. 2008. “Terrorist Financing and Organized Crime: Nexus, Appropriation or Transformation?” in *Countering the Financing of Terrorism*, Edited by Thomas J. Biersteker and Sue E. Eckert, 126-149. London: Routledge.

^{xii} Juan Guillermo Ferro, Graciela Uribe Flor Edilma Osorio, Olga Lucía Castillo. 1999. *Jóvenes, Coca y Amapola*. Universidad Javeriana: Bogotá.

^{xiii} Duncan, Gustavo. 2009. “El dinero no lo es todo.” En *A la sombra de la guerra: Ilegalidad y nuevos órdenes regionales en Colombia*. P. 165-212.

^{xiv} Vargas, Ricardo. 2009. “Economías de guerra y control de territorios: ilegalidad y reconfiguración del poder en el sur de Córdoba y Montes de María.” En *A la sombra de la guerra: Ilegalidad y nuevos órdenes regionales en Colombia*. 213 – 293.

^{xv} See Los Informantes. 2014. “Charras de Boquerón, Guaviare, donde el mercado se compra con coca.” <http://losinformantes.noticiascaracol.com/charras-de-boquer%C3%B3n-guaviare-donde-el-mercado-se-1146-historia>. And IOM Report for USAID. 2013. “Putumayo: El qué y porqué de la situación humanitaria.”

^{xvi} Dion, Michelle L. and Russler, Catherine. 2008. “Eradication Efforts, the State, Displacement and Poverty: Explaining Coca Cultivation in Colombia during Plan Colombia.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 40(3): 399-421.

^{xvii} Ortiz, César Enrique. 2003. “Cultivos ilícitos y nueva ruralidad en Colombia.” *Cuadernos de Desarrollo Rural* 50: 144-167.

^{xviii} Caicedo, Carlos Jorge. 2006. “Expectativas racionales y persistencia de los cultivos ilícitos de coca en Colombia 1986-2003.” Universidad de los Andes CIDER.

^{xix} Thoumi, Francisco. 2007. “What Creates Comparative Advantage for Drug Production? Lessons from Colombia.” *Policy* 23(1): 16-21. And Thoumi, Francisco. 2009. “POLÍTICAS ANTIDROGAS Y LA NECESIDAD DE ENFRENTAR LAS VULNERABILIDADES DE COLOMBIA.” *Análisis Política* 67: 60-82.

^{xx} See, for example, Durán Martínez. Op Cit. And Juan Gabriel Tokatlián. “El acuerdo sobre drogas en La Habana: un moderado paso radical.”

<http://www.razonpublica.com/index.php/conflicto-drogas-y-paz-temas-30/7676-el-acuerdo-sobre-drogas-en-la-habana-un-moderado-paso-radical.html>