TRANSFORMATIONS IN COLOMBIA- USA RELATIONS DURING SANTOS GOVERNMENT

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Abstract:

Colombia and the United States of America have sustained very close political relations during the last years, mostly within the Plan Colombia framework. The security dimension in those relations seemed to be the most important, being based on combat against drugs production and trafficking, and global terror. Nevertheless, they seem to be on a turning point, not saying that these countries seem to break their connections, but realizing there is a space left after the end of Uribe's administration and the beginning of Juan Manuel Santos' presidency. The aim of this paper is to describe in what those transformations consist, how is the bilateral agenda changing and infer if there is an actual shift on the foreign policy of these countries. This research is part of a larger agenda on Colombia's Foreign Policy after 2010, in which as some scholars suggest, exists a turning point of the country's foreign policy. Thus, it is hypothesized that there are both domestic and external constraints for these kind of repositioning and that they depend not only on Colombia's national security and regional insertion strategy, but also on America's interests as a Global Power on the region.

Key words: Colombian Foreign Policy, U.S. Foreign Policy, Juan Manuel Santos, South American Security.

During most part of the 20th century Colombian foreign policy was oriented by the Respice Pollum doctrine, according to which Colombia must seek the north for its insertion in the international system, thus, it had to be mediated by the strong connection with a major power. This is further described as a “dominant and historical characteristic of the Colombian foreign policy –with no big difference with the foreign policies of other countries in the region- the insertion is rational and depends on the first world range
power” (DALLANEGRA, 2012; 38). Due to this, Colombian foreign relations are strongly influenced by United States decisions and relations.

As it is well known, American strong influence in Colombia is not isolated from the Latin American political trends. As Tussie posits “When the Cold War came to an end Latin America stood alone as the only region where American influence remained largely uncontested” (TUSSIE, 2010; 26). This was true to several scopes of American foreign policy, including economics and hemispheric security. Evidence of it are the efforts towards a Free Trade Area Agreement (FTAA) and cooperation agreements for drug enforcement and terrorism combat (ZULUAGA et al, 2007). Nevertheless, Colombia has had an asymmetric long lasting relationship with the United States that outstands as one of the historical trends of its international relations (ROJAS, 2009; TICKNER, 2007).

However, during last two decades, changes in many of the region’s governments at ideological level have contested the American pre-eminence. On the other hand, Colombia’s government had been stable in its relations with the United States, as opposed to its neighbors directions. Instead, since 1999 both countries have signed several cooperation agreements and collaborated closely in the struggle against drugs and the resolution of the internal conflict.

From another standpoint, some observers have identified transformations in the Colombian foreign policy conduction since the 2010 government handover between Álvaro Uribe and Juan Manuel Santos. This makes the author question what is the state of the relations between the two countries and inquire the direction the bilateral relation is taking noting that no rupture is expected, but instead, differences and similarities between the two governments are aimed to be analyzed. The focus of the research is allocated on security issues since those are identified to be the most prioritary in the relation as well as in the Colombian foreign policy. This work is divided in three sections: in first place, we overlook the characteristics of American foreign policy towards Latin America; in second place, we analyze Colombian-American relations in historical perspective during the second half of the twentieth century; and thirdly, Colombian-American relations during the Uribe and Santos’ governments are described looking for inflections. These steps follow a historical-comparative perspective in order to infer the determinant factors that produced the foreign policy shifts observed.
American Foreign Policy Towards Latin America: An Overview

As Dudley Seers wrote in the 1960s:

Until 1959, Latin America had seemed safely within the sphere of American influence. It provided a chain of military alliances covering the Southern flank; its votes in the United Nations were usually available on critical issues; its materials and foodstuffs could be purchased by the exports of American manufactures; it was a secure field for American investors. This state of affairs had lasted for so long that it seemed part of the natural order, it was institutionalized in the Organization of American States. As was only to be expected in such circumstances, little attention was paid to the area. The State Department faced much more pressing problems in Europe and Asia, so only a small fraction of post-war foreign aid went to Latin America (SEERS, 1963; 201-202).

The prior could be the sight of a Global Power towards its colonies, somehow the relation was colonial in the sense of treating Latin American countries as sub-servants, raw material providers and exceptional allies when alignment is necessary. Seers refers to 1959 as a turning point as Cuban Revolution succeeded and Soviet influence over the hemisphere seemed realistic. Since then, American policy in Latin America has had different interventionist outlooks.

Alliance for Progress (AFP) (1961-19670) is example of that in the sense of providing aid in order to content the advance of communism in the Americas and keep most countries of the hemisphere under American influence through economic assistance in a Cold War logic. As stated by Fajardo, “AFP sought to encourage the adoption of anti-poverty policies that would increase the legitimacy of Latin American governments and thus prevent Communist revolution” (FAJARDO, 2003). At the same time, during the decades of 1960s and 1970s several coup d’etat were supported by U.S. military in Latin America, including Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Peru, among others. Interventions were a common place in many points of Latin America, such as the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua as well, not to count the later 1980s interventions in Grenada and Panama. Both actions responded to the conception of Truman Doctrine of Soviet and Communist restrain with different impacts in the political systems and societies all along the region (ZULUAGA et al, 2007).

Things seemed to change for Latin American- U.S. relations in the end of 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 1990s with the advance of re-democratization, the debt crisis and liberal reforms that provoked a shift from importation substitution industrialization to pro-market strategies on the economic dimension. Washington Consensus provided a framework to operate new alignments in economic and political affairs with Latin American countries. However, this fresh air did not imply a new forces
balance in the relation, on the contrary, Latin American foreign policies kept tightly close to North American domestic and international interests.

The end of the Cold War had a big influence in the way the United States responded to their international agenda. The strongest difference consisted on a worldview not divided into two economic, strategic or political blocks, but the preeminence of a Western Power as sole leader in the world.

Otherwise, in recent years, a left turn in many of Latin American governments set a challenge. As Castañeda informs: “Just over a decade ago, Latin America seemed poised to begin a virtuous cycle of economic progress and improved democratic governance, overseen by a growing number of centrist technocratic governments” (CASTAÑEDA, 2006: 28). This refers to the governments during the decade of 1990s when from Mexico’s Fox and Salinas, to Argentina’s Menem, passing through Brazilian president Cardoso were all synchronized on the same liberal market democratic reform wave, while crisis still hit the region as a whole. After that, contestation governments began to emerge as winners of clean democratic elections in several countries, counting with Chavez in Venezuela, Lula da Silva in Brazil, and Kirchner in Argentina, among some others. This meant a challenge for American policy-makers who were used to aligned-most politicians in Latin America.

Nevertheless, it had little impact in the United States, since America’s foreign policy pivot was somewhere else and despite the resurgence relations kept going with no big shocks. This also responded to the lack of insurgence demonstrated by the movements that took office in the last years, being very different to Colombia’s guerrillas or revolutionary government in Cuba. In addition, this responded to end of a communist threat to the United States with the end of the East-West confrontation in early 1990s.

Some other analysts also referred to that phenomenon as a “Washington’s lost in Latin America” (HAKIM, 2006). The author explains that, indeed, during the 1980s it was hoped that the democratic and market-oriented reforms in Latin America leaded to closer and cooperative ties between the U.S. and the region, which came to be true until mid-1990s. However, America lost interest in the region as post 9/11 challenges to its national security appeared. Issues such as drug trafficking, immigration and free trade have seemed to be the ones left in the agenda, but Latin American states, with few exceptions, do not seem likely to cooperate in those matters arguing that they would affect their autonomy and sovereignty.
In general lines, American foreign policy has been oriented by its exceptionalism and messianism. It is evidenced in the continuity of its beliefs, institutions, policies and practices since the 19th century in despite of changes in the international system and the increase of economic power and military capabilities since then (LOVEMAN, 2010). It is guided by the principle of unilateralism, which does not mean isolationism, but instead is understood as autonomy and armed neutrality (at least until World War II). The latest, derived from the vision that Americans have of the international system and their national identity.

All this to say that, as Loveman points, Latin America has served to the United States as:

A crucial element in the country’s relations with the rest of the world. Despite often-expressed disdain for the region and its peoples, America sought to construct and consolidate a bastion in the Western Hemisphere from which to execute an expanding global project. The nascent United States promulgated a doctrine declaring the Western Hemisphere a “separate sphere” from Europe […] Instead, the United States would create in the Western Hemisphere a bastion for republican institutions […] Spanish America and Brazil would become a laboratory for foreign policies that were later “exported”, with some tailoring, to the rest of the world as the United States became a global power […] Latin America’s importance also stemmed from construction of an American nationalism and political culture (LOVEMAN, 2010: 5)

In sum, what is stated above means that Latin American countries have been being used as experimental camp for several policies ranging from security concerns to economic interests and even the self construction of an identity image that devinclus the American nation from a shared colonial past with the rest of the Western Hemisphere by its own exceptionalism, as some postmodernists and post-colonialists theorists may suggest.

In other words, this is in part what Rojas (2009) intended to express by the quote “Global Empire’s Workshop” for the recent Colombian experience. American foreign policy has needed Latin America to become, and test itself to be, a global power. If indeed Latin America had an important role for American foreign policy during the Bush years, in the reproduction of a Cold War behavior pattern to combat global terror; during the Obama administration, influence in the region has been low and focus has been placed to the domestic crisis concerns.

Two pillars have directed what can be called as “Obama’s Doctrine”. First, that the United States is still the most powerful and wealthiest nation on Earth, but is only a nation and problems such as drug cartels, climate change, terrorism, or any other, cannot be solved only by one country. Second, that in the best times the United States of America
have represented a group of universal values: democracy, freedom of speech and religion, a society that allows people to accomplish their dreams and do not have a constant imposition from the government (BORDA, 2010).

Up next we will examine the Colombian case in recent years to see how has been the trajectory of Colombian-American relations, focusing on security concerns in both countries, trying to identify the determinants of this “(not so)special relation” and see how it is vinculated to a Latin American policy-oriented grand strategy.

**Colombia- USA Relations in Perspective: A (Not So) Special Relation**

In this section, we will refer to the trajectory of the Colombian-American relation during the second part of the 20th century until the first decade of the 21st century, when Álvaro Uribe has left his charge as President of Colombia. Starting with the Inter-American System (extended to the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, Inter-American Development Bank and such-like institutions), Plan Lazo and Alliance for Progress intervention-like policies and the impacts of such in the bilateral relations, examining after the Plan Colombia and its derivations for Colombia’s (and America’s) national security, and finally analyze the Uribe’s Democratic Security doctrine in connection with the American cooperation on the *Global War Against Terror* alignment.

*The Mid-20th Century: years of cooperation and alignment:*

To begin with the discussion presented above, Sandra Borda argues that Colombia was a second order priority for Washington’s agenda during the sixties and seventies. This, indicating that the involvement of the United States at the dawn of the Colombian conflict in its current facet followed the logic of the Cold War of Communism containment. Although, crisis in South East Asia (specifically Vietnam) made the U.S. government lose interest for Colombia. Also, after JFK death and the failure of AFP made Colombian elite lose faith in the American partnership (BORDA, 2012: 41). The priorities disagreement was from both sides and allowed Colombian government to have a more autonomous foreign policy until the end of the 1970s when Turbay’s government took a lead claiming for American assistance and intervention in the war against drug cartels and
guerrillas. It is also important to highlight that the AFP interventionism in Colombia, as in all Latin America, was guided by Rostow’s Modernization Theory ideas.

As stated by Rojas (2010), Colombia was the second largest aid receiver in the AFP framework (only after Brazil) and was the showcase of this program since a general instability environment was installed in the region due to military coup d’état, government shifts and policy paralysis in different countries throughout Latin America. The Kennedy administration then decided to focus the program efforts in those countries that offered some kind of stability and coniability to run the reforms proposed. She points out three main reasons for this: “inconditional partnership with the United States, political will to advance in the reforms, and the Washington need to show results of its foreign policy” (ROJAS, 2010). Differently to Brazil or Chile (where the main objective was to help Washington-close reform leaders to achieve or maintain power), in Colombia the main goal was to provide conditions to establish a healthy economy and overcome to poverty (TAFFET, 2007: 150 apud ROJAS, 2010).

Relation between Colombian and U.S. governments during the AFP years were not always the best, even when the Frente Nacional regime was stable. For instance, in the initial years under Lleras Camargo term (1958-1962) the relation was fluid and based on mutual trust despite the poor results, when Valencia (1962-1966) took charge US officials insisted that his performance was unfavorable to US interests. In the last two terms (Lleras Restrepo in 1966-1970 and Pastrana Borrero in 1970-1974) of the Frente Nacional coalition, realism and pragmatism were the main principles that oriented the relationship, whereas Colombians argued that their efforts, commitment and results should have been rewarded with aid without conditionalities and Americans were reticent to increase their aid support. Also, after JFKs death, FPA portrayed a more pragmatic style in the desire to avoid political agitations as Lyndon B. Johnson ascended to power (ROJAS, 2010; FAJARDO, 2003).

In addition, Leal Buitrago (1994) remembers us that during the years of the Frente Nacional the political leadership built and consolidated a political machinery for electoral reproduction, while the militaries took charge of an improvised defense policy with anticommmunist expressions product of the institutional tradition, the American Hemispheric Defense Policy, AFP, and South American National Security Doctrine. They were subordinated to the liberal democracy model with some depoliticization degree. During the sixties, some plans in the War Ministry (former Defense Ministry) such as Plan Lazo (1962), Plan Soberanía (1964) and Plan Andes (1968) would trace the
guidelines for political pacification and society integration (LEAL, 1994: 135-136). The prior to say that in beginning of the 20th century second half, bilateral relations between these countries started to have a closer interaction around the internal conflict and the uprise of revolutionary movements in Colombia, which were responded by joint politico-economic and defense strategies. As we can see, Colombia did not play a “special” role for the United States further to be the showcase of its intervention policies in Latin America, ceteris paribus, it was just “another country south of Rio Grande”.

*The Seventies, Eighties and Nineties: from “Relations Narcotization” to “Intervention by Invitation”*

As said before, Colombia was a second-degree priority for American officers during the sixties and seventies and guerrilla enforcement was not interesting for the State Department. However, at the end of the 1970 decade, drug trafficking became a major problem for domestic politics and cooperation with Colombia in order to combat its source became necessary. Since 1977, war against drugs consumed a large portion of resources, budget and attention from both countries (RANDALL 1992: 247 *apud* BORDA 2012: 43).

In Colombia, FARC experienced an expansion stage that accompanied the worst years of drug cartel offense and illegal businesses enlargement (PÉCAUT, 2010). In response, president Turbay (1978-1982) promulgated the *Security Statute* which increased the policive and warlike functions of security institutions. American president Jimmy Carter did not agree with such approach, however, when Ronald Reagan came into office commitment succeeded, automatic alignment was restored and drug trafficking became a major priority in the bilateral agenda. Both presidents then shared a vision of making front to the communist threat and, in Colombian case, linked it to drug dealing ever since as first priority for the US-Colombian relations. This is what is known as US-Colombia relations “narcotization” (PACHECO, 2012).

On the other hand, Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) took distance from the Turbay-Reagan approach to the internal security problems and their implications for bilateral agenda. His government avenue consisted in a negotiated peace process with insurgence, stronger cooperation in Central American conflict resolution initiatives, and a more autonomous foreign policy that *deinternationalized* the conflict (BORDA, 2012). Colombia played an important role during the Contadora process in the Latin American
international relations and its peace process during this time had strong support from different sectors, still, the drug cartels expansion represented a disadvantage for the policies pretended and the US conditioned aid was necessary to confront these concerns.

Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) had a more pragmatic view of the situation and his focus in security terms was not on guerrillas—with which the government kept negotiations—, but on repressing local violence and paramilitary emergence instead, product of the drug cartels confrontation whose political terror had the country out of control. The emphasis of his foreign policy, although, was on the internationalization of Colombian economy which was in crisis, same as the rest of Latin America. That represented a mid-range way between two traditions of Colombian foreign policy: on one side the *Respice Similia* doctrine by looking forward to close relations (especially economic ones) with similar profile countries and neighbors, and on the other side, the *Respice Polum* by cooperating tightly with the United States in terms of drug enforcement and terrorism confront. This way was followed and deepened by its successor, César Gaviria (1990-1994) (TICKNER, 2000; DALLANEGRA, 2012).

The end of the East-West confrontation brought new opportunities for Colombian foreign policy diversification as the United States moved towards strengthening partnerships in Europe and Middle East. Nevertheless, domestic politics in Colombia during Samper’s term (1994-1998) required to seek for a pragmatic dependent posture in order to acquire international legitimacy due to the governmental crisis of *Proceso 8000*\(^2\), while other topics in the international agenda suffered no alterations.

Gaviria and Samper had to maneuver the new regime changes proposed in 1991 constitution: some guerrilla factions demobilized and started engagement processes in the political system, while few changed in security policies and institutions. During the early 1990s, domestic scenario was somewhat complicated. Drug trafficking organizations did not seem to decrease in their attack against the state and the population, paramilitary violence started to expand all throughout the country, and guerrillas left kept growing and their actions became larger and more violent in response to direct paramilitary confrontation (PÉCAUT, 2010). Besides this crisis context, Colombia was almost

\(^2\) *Proceso 8.000* consisted on a judicial inquiry against president Ernesto Samper who was accused of receiving sponsorship for the elections held in 1994. This process weakened the president and Colombian state institutions, and allies legitimacy. Closer partners such as the United States distrusted and decertified the Drug Enforcement efforts. Samper never quit office although there were internal pressure for resign. Finally he was declared not guilty due to lack of proves. See: [http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/el-8000-dia-dia/27509-3](http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/el-8000-dia-dia/27509-3). Retrieved on January 26th 2014.
isolated from the international scene by the end of Samper’s administration. This surpass came as the end of the “special relationship” between both nations (BORDA, 2012).

In 1998, Pastrana was elected as president of Colombia having as main proposal a new peace process with guerrillas and the promise to bring back international dignity to Colombia. With Bill Clinton as president of the United States agreement was achieved to support Colombian efforts in combating terrorism, as the country did not have enough capacities to defeat its internal enemies. With that set, Colombian government started a strategy of military and political internationalization of its internal conflict and drug problematics (BORDA, 2012; SANTOS, 2010; TICKNER, 2007; FAJARDO, 2003). The result of this confluence was the *Plan Colombia*.

The plan had a domestic origin in the search for allies to find a multilateral exit to drug production and trafficking, the internal conflict, strengthen the Forces, the institutions of the state in all Colombian territory, and protect and repair the victims among other objectives (TOKATLIAN, 2001). In general terms, this cooperation agreement had major achievements in modernizing the military forces and combating drug production, although, social reform and guerrillas conciliation were a massive failure of the policy implementation.

The plan had a second version and extended until the government of Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) who came to office in a generalized turbulence and insecurity sensation as the FARC negotiation process had failed and violent attack events grew. This lead to a direct confrontation with the “terrorists” proposal, which was successfully aligned with the *Global War Against Terror* (GWAT) of G.W. Bush. This association strategy, vinculating guerrilla war and drug trafficking combat with international terrorist organizations, lead to what some analyst call “intervention by invitation” (TICKNER, 2007). All this said, the “special relation” is only valid for one side of the equation; this confirms the affirmation of being an asymmetrical bilateral relation, almost reaching the *coloniality*, as one could say. In the following section it will be discussed the role of Alvaro Uribe in the bilateral relation, the continuities inherited from his antecessor and changes displayed with the inauguration of Obama and Santos as presidents in the United States and Colombia respectively.

**Changes and Continuities in the Twenty-First Century: from Uribe’s *Seguridad Democrática* to Santos’ prosperity:**
The outset of the new century portrayed new challenges and opportunities for both countries. On the one hand, the United States commenced an offensive movement all around the world after terrorism threats to its national security emerged with the 9/11 attacks. On the other, conflict in Colombia only seemed to increase in intensity, as negotiation process with guerrillas did not demonstrated any progress.

Alvaro Uribe inaugurated as president of Colombia with a guerrilla combat and defeat speech, complemented with economic impulse due to regional crisis at the end of the 1990s and beginning of 2000s. Colombian foreign policy during the two terms under his administration was strongly conditioned to the serious challenges raised by the insurgent offensive and the domestic governmental response to them. This caused isolation from the rest of Latin America (RAMÍREZ, 2011). This policy also depended at large from the consequences and lessons learned from the previous administration (Andrés Pastrana) (ROJAS, 2006).

In general terms, Uribe’s foreign policy was only an appendix of his own domestic and security policy. His strategy deepened the internationalization of the conflict started by the previous government, although, the emphasis was not on its resolution, but in the military defeat of the insurgence or their capitulation, whatever came first. This showed a double morality from the government, since the latest was true for guerrillas, but paramilitary’s reintegration had several benefits that were not even in discussion for guerrillas demobilization (SANTOS, 2010).

The United States gave almost unrestricted support to this conflict internationalization initiative. The focus of his foreign policy –the appendix of the domestic politics security framework, as stated above- was then the search of allies for the security project, which he made it to frame as a “Democratic Security Policy”, the whole developmental plan had, then, security as it spine. With that said, and the international context of the GWAT (BORDA, 2012; ROJAS, 2009; ZULUAGA et al, 2007; SANTOS, 2006), it can be affirmed that Uribe assumed an energetic and active subordinated posture to Washington (TICKNER et al, 2003: 69).

Otherwise, strong influence of the U.S. in the Colombian domestic affairs raised fear in the region. By one side, it was already factible to have a spillover effect of the conflict over the neighbor countries; by the other, many of the countries in the region have had an autonomist turn in their foreign policies and felt directly threatened by the presence of American officers and troops in Colombia (DUARTE et al, 2005). This had a negative impact in the regional environment and the relations of an already isolated
Colombia with the South American countries, there were even verbal confrontation between presidents of these nations and the Colombian one. The search for allies did not seem to go further than the United States and its “northern” allies, following a dependent insertion pattern.

Further evidence of this unrestricted alliance is fostered by being the sole Latin American supporter to the Iraq invasion in 2003; efforts towards Free Trade (other of the priorities in American foreign policy) were made and a Free Trade Agreement was concluded by 2006, although it only went into effect by 2012 due to several human rights violations alleged by US congressmen who held the agreement back until there were no improvements in those issues. The icing on the cake of these “golden age” of unrestricted asymmetrical relationship was the US proposal to set seven military bases in Colombia, which caused an even greater discomfort among Latin American leaders and internal opposition. As seen, Uribe did not only continue the tight relations with the United States but also consolidated and deepened this asymmetrical “special relation” by many other ways.

In 2010, Constitutional Court in Colombia declared unviable an amendment that would allow Uribe to be re-elected for a third presidential term. The best option for continuing his programs, and to secure the consolidation of the Democratic Security policy, was the candidacy of the then defense minister Juan Manuel Santos.

*From Uribe to Santos: inflections in the Colombian foreign policy and the establishment of a “high level” dialogue with the United States.*

Surprisingly, Santos’ election proved to be more independent to the former administration than expected. In the race for presidency of 2010 Santos followed a propose program based on the consolidation of the past programs and did not show signals of differentiation with Uribe. Since his election and possession as president he exhibited new patterns of policy management, signs of it was the rapid efforts oriented to reconcile relations with Venezuela and Ecuador –aggrieved in the second Uribe’s term by different verbal confrontations with officials and the presidents, sovereign irruptions and troops mobilizations to the borders from both sides-, intentions to play a more active role in the South American international arena, diversify his partnerships and reduce the securitary dimension of its foreign policy, this is what Ramírez (2011), among other observers have called the “spin of the Colombian foreign policy”. The current policy evaluation
acknowledges a trend to *desecuritize* the foreign affairs, prioritize a commercial agenda, and seek spaces for leadership in the international arena (PÉREZ *et al.*, 2012).

In the domestic politics there were also differentiations on the approach of interrelations with the courts and congress, as also in the priorities of the policy agendas such as promises of improvements in the public education system, redistribute land, reduce unemployment and poverty, improvements in the infrastructure and productive structure, victims reparation, etc. (CHASKEL *et al.*, 2012). Both, form and content changes in the domestic and international policies are evidenced on the developmental plan *Prospetidad para Todos* (prosperity for everyone), in allusion to a post-democratic security plan that consolidated the past achievements and a proposition of next stage pacification strategy (ROJAS, 2013). In addition, new conversations looking forward to a peace negotiation with FARC has been started and showed realistic advances to the end of conflict. All this provoked discomfort with Uribe and his followers, producing great opposition, but he made it to manage a national support coalition with different sectors and parties in Congress.

The “special relation” with the United States had alterations as well as part of all those movements in the foreign affairs treatment. The *High Level Dialogue between Partners* established during several meetings in the first years of Santos’ government portray a diversified relationship that discuss topics beyond security like democracy and human rights, energy; and science and technology (ROJAS, 2012; RAMÍREZ, 2011). In addition, Colombia assumes a posture of equal partner and not an aid receptor alone. (RAMÍREZ, 2012).

Another factor that has shifted directions in the bilateral relation depended on the American foreign policy focus. Since his inauguration Obama has posed a

> Very mixed one [foreign policy record toward Latin America] in which rhetoric and good intentions have been challenged time and again by the realities of domestic and international relations and power politics. [...] The administration has been reset by problems larger than Latin American relations [...] Perhaps most importantly the United States has had to come to terms with the fact that it has limited capacity to dictate the course of events in Latin America. (RANDALL, 2013: 20-21).

In fact, Obama has had a hard time moving his foreign policy from a conflictive and interventionist to a more cooperative and well-intentioned one, and has reduced budget for foreign aid programs due to its economic crisis. For Latin America, it has meant a distant outlook in the treatment of regional affairs since US pivot is located in the Middle East and South East Asia. For Colombia it has not been different, although relations remain close.
For American officials, their tasks in Colombia were successful and the pacification model should be handed in its integrity to Colombian government. US embassy to Colombia has outlined an Strategic Development Initiative that aims to “nationalize” the programs developed under Plan Colombia, passing progressively full responsibility to the Colombian State. This responds to a nation-building approach to the post-conflict scenario (ROJAS, 2013).

This new approach has also been evidenced in the cooperation avenues developed by both countries into the intervention in other parts of the world. Since Colombia has proved to become an active partner of the US, and no more a threat to national or regional security, agreements to develop assistance for transnational organizations affected countries have been developed. As Diana Rojas (2013: 129) argues, those agreements, operationalized in the US- Colombia Security Cooperation Coordination Group (SCCG), has established a kind of outsourcing that allows American government to offer military cooperation to counties were American presence is polemic, mostly in Central America and Western Africa.

Another different standpoint has been evidenced in the discussion of the Drug Enforcement International Regime, in which Santos, among other Latin American leaders, have taken voice for this regime change and flexibilization. Drug trafficking and policies to combat drug related criminal groups has been a constant theme for cooperation between both countries for more than forty years and is still central part of the agenda. However, despite changes in domestic politics, the United States federal government remains reticent to change its drug enforcement policy (ROJAS, 2013).

In short, Juan Manuel Santos has revealed to be a more liberal and reformist president than expected and has made efforts in the direction of diversifying foreign policy in its topics and partners when compared to the prior administration, however, changes seem to be more rhetoric and go at a slow pace. Bilateral agenda is still securitized in its content, despite of attempts to go beyond. The relation remains rather asymmetrical and often unilateral, serving more American interests and initiatives than Colombian propositions.

**Final Thoughts: a not so changing spin**

Colombia has demonstrated to be a good laboratory for testing different intervention experiences, mostly in cases of asymmetric and irregular war, and as recent
cooperation for acting abroad has showed, is still a workshop for the global empire as suggested by Diana Rojas (2009).

Despite of the efforts from Santos to diversify and desecuritize Colombian international affairs, and bring the country back to South American politics arena, the asymmetrical dependent and securitized relation between the two countries remains strong although presents punctual actions, form, and at a lower level in content, changes, but association level and priorities remain almost unchanged. Also, those changes seem to be operating within Colombian bureaucracy even before Santos took office, the Foreign Policy Mission 2009-2010 (BORDA et al, 2011) commissioned to a large group of experts and observers proves this.

Dube and Naidu (2010) suggest by empirical work that interventions as the Plan Colombia during the 1990s tend to increase violence by strengthening armed non-state actors and undermines domestic political institutions rather than reducing it. This makes us question the real effect of counter-insurgence assistance as central theme in the Colombia-United States agenda in peace building and nation building, and how it has rather enlarged and prolonged conflict.

Also, we question the role that Colombian elite and society have played into setting the foreign policy, one that has historically preferred to establish its international relations by the dependence of a Major Power in the International System. Between times of full alignment as well as in those of autonomy and diversification of the relations, no sudden shocks are properly evidenced. So, on what does this “rational preference” take basis?

As conclusion, we evidenced three main determinants for the Colombian foreign policy so-called spin: at first, changes in American foreign policy during the Obama administration has set new challenges for Colombian officers to maintain a tight relation, consenting budget, programs and priorities impositions. Second, changes in Colombian politics have induced changes in the bilateral relation, the seek for diversification and more maneuver space, social reform, drug regime discussions, and a post-conflict panorama are evidence of this. Finally, changes in Latin American political arena, these countries perception about Colombia and their relations have stimulated the need for a more autonomous treatment of the foreign affairs in Santos’ administration.

At last, what we see is a perdurable coloniality of power logic in the relation. Colombian leaders look for external aid to operate internal and externally. The United States’ perceive Colombia as a not modern nation that needs its aid to modernize, reform
and overcome new times so it can become completely independent. It is clear that messianism, exceptionalism and unilaterality are principles of American foreign policy operationalized by interventionism in countries like Colombia. With few exceptions in time and space, this has also been true to other Latin American countries.

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