How can we explain the multiple sources of foreign policy decision making in Colombia and beyond? This article starts with an overview of foreign policy analyses in Colombia and finds that previous studies overestimate the power of presidents to create, define, and decide over foreign policy options. The article goes on to offer a model of analysis that contemplates different actors and relations among them to explain the mechanisms that shape foreign policy in the country. In order to initially explore the convenience of this model, the article explores two key episodes of recent foreign policy decision-making in Colombia and finds that multiple actors from other levels in the executive, from other branches of government,
and from the civil society have participated in the outcomes of foreign policy in different ways. These actors have been able to set the agenda for contemplating foreign policy issues, frame the ways challenges and opportunities are understood, and served as irreplaceable instruments to make choices viable.

Most analyses of Colombian foreign policy, in line with most recent IR academic literature in Latin America, have been atheoretical (Borda 2012, Tickner 2012), with a descriptive scope and little effort for incorporating analytical developments from other regions of the world or sustaining a conversation with foreign policy studies elsewhere.

Instead, Colombian foreign policy studies tend to describe general patterns of the foreign relations of particular administrations, and note the continuities and shifts implemented in each presidential period, and challenges each one has faced (see Cardona, Tickner, Borda, Ramirez, Pardo, Tokatlian, Bagley). Common themes of these studies include the bilateral relation with the United States, relations with neighboring countries, the international dimensions of the internal armed conflict, human rights, and drug trafficking.

These studies often claim that the sole main actors of foreign policy have been the presidents, who they portray explicitly or implicitly as exercising autonomous and exclusive control power over foreign policy matters. Other actors, such as foreign ministers, advisors, and other government officials are seen as implementators of policy, rather than agents in its construction. Actors outside the government, such as the legislative, private firms and business lobbies, high courts, NGOs and the like, do not usually feature as sources or shapers of foreign policy, and only seldom they appear but as external agents who might enter in
consideration when presidents make decisions, without taking any of the decision-making centrality away from them.

Global foreign policy literature has long called for a wider understanding of the different sources of decision-making, even before but most importantly since Allison's models offered two complementary frameworks for studying decisions beyond the rational choice model that centered on the supposedly lonely decisions made by presidents. The organizational model shifted the focus from what presidents might want to the existing capacity of government agencies to carry out plans and policies. These agencies, more than just implementators of policy, play a key role in defining and limiting the set of options available, even before a decision is made. The bureaucratic model asked scholars to dig even deeper into the actual bargaining, power politics, interests, and actors within the country, who struggled to have their vision and goals reflected in foreign policy. The resulting decision, far from a rational and isolated choice from the president, was better understood as an outcome of such bargaining, very often far from the original preferences of any of the actors.

More recent contributions have continued to argue in favor of a more comprehensive analysis of the multiple sources of foreign policy decision making. Mintz, for example, argues that "most foreign policies emanate from diffuse sources of power" (FPDM 6) and thus should be studied as the outcome of complex interactions between different actors in different levels of government and others outside government.
The traditional presidential model: rational choices judged \textit{a posteriori}

Most studies of Colombian foreign policy, and Latin America in general, assume explicitly or implicitly a rational choice model for studying decision-making. According to this model, foreign policy choices reflect national interests, or the interests of national leaders. Decisions are made in isolation from other sources of decision making, and most choices are defined by exogenous situations not shaped by relevant actors worth of incorporating into the analysis.

A fundamental problem with this framework is that it works backwards in its argumentative logic, and is not suitable for explanation. Once decisions are made, foreign policy analysts using this model look back and ask what are the interests that the decision-maker would have been seeking to maximize with the final choice, and claim those interests "explain" the decision. However, this logic does not explain the mechanisms that worked in the process of making the decision, nor it is capable of understanding complexities in the process. Other than in cases where an unitary actor chooses between fixed alternatives to maximize its interests, which is rarely the case, this logic is too simple for capturing any form of bargaining, domestic political pressure, internal institutions, or the way different actors create, limit, and give meaning to the alternatives that are ultimately to be chosen from.

When the current literature on foreign policy decision-making in Latin America claims that presidents are ultimately in control of foreign policy, for which they have produced the
label presidentialism, it is inadvertently avoiding to dig deeper and study the multiple sources of decision-making, and the role of other actors in shaping the outcomes we are trying to explain. It fallacious to use a framework that assumes that leaders make rational choices in isolation, and from it conclude that they do. A different, richer approach must be constructed for foreign policy analysis in Latin America.

The model of presidentialism assumes that presidents make decisions and every other actor only implements the decision. Such assumption obscures the fact that other actors, both in the foreign policy apparatus and beyond, play critical roles in the various stages of foreign policy decision-making. Many contribute information and frameworks for understanding both the problem and the possible solutions; other present obstacles for decisions that affect them; while others offer additional remunerations in favor of decisions that benefit them; institutional actors, such as courts, can restrict foreign policy with limitations around the legality of decisions or decision-making processes. In sum, there is a rich fauna of actors and relationships among them to explore in the deep ocean of foreign policy decision-making.

**A multi-source decision-making model:** outcomes, not rational choices

How do leaders make choices? A poliheuristic theory of decision, developed for foreign policy analysis by Mintz et al (1997), offers a framework for studying the process and sources of decision-making. Heuristics are “judgmental shortcuts, efficient ways to organize and simplify political choices, efficient in the double sense of requiring relatively little
information to execute, yet yielding dependable answers even to complex problems of choice." (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991, 19). A poliheuristic theory of foreign policy understands decisions as a two-stage process, where multiple sources of information and advice intervene to shape a leader’s decision. In the first stage, leaders use cognitive-based heuristic strategies to narrow down the infinite and overly-complex world of alternatives to a limited set of possible solutions to the problem at hand. In the second stage, decision-makers evaluate the limited set of alternatives according to analytic, expected utility, or lexicographic rules of choice seeking for evidence about the risks and possible rewards of each choice (Mintz and Geva 1997; Mintz et al. 1997; Redd 2002).

In the first stage, leaders usually narrow down alternatives by using a few critical criteria, instead of considering every possible aspect of every possible choice. Criteria include “variables such as the importance of the decision, the reversibility of the decision, the need to justify one’s views to an audience or constituency,” among others (Suedfeld and Tetlock 1992, 55-56; Reed 2002). In the second stage, politicians evaluate the surviving, or constructed, alternatives based on the political aspect of decision-making. Choices are compared depending on “measures of costs and benefits, risks and rewards, gains and losses, and success and failure in terms of political ramifications above all else” (Mintz et al. 1997; Reed 2002).

The key political dimension of every choice is domestic politics (Reed 2002, 337). Very few foreign policy choices involve only political considerations of international nature, if any.
Even the decisions that solved the Cuban Missile Crisis, where an external enemy threatened the very existence of the United States, were marked by considerations of domestic politics (Allison). And as one moves further away from survival threats and critical security concerns, the ramifications of decisions in the realm of domestic politics become more and more critical for foreign policy decision-making. Above all, leaders avoid decisions that may hurt them politically or threaten their political survival (Anderson 1983; Mintz and Geva 1997, 84; Reed 2002, 337).

Traditional theories of international politics argue that leaders make decisions as if they were rational agents seeking to maximize the national interest (Allison XX, Waltz 1979, XXXXXX); as a number of other approaches rightly do (Putnam, Allison, Bueno de Mezquita, Cooley), poliheuristic theory shifts the focus away from the mythical state-as-maximizer to human leaders with their own political interests and domestic challenges. Following this theory, decisions are not evaluated in terms of how they serve an abstract national interest, but in terms of the political survival of leaders. Beyond the state as an unitary actor, the role of advisers and domestic political actors in shaping the leader’s perception of alternatives and their political risks is thus a critical component of the analysis of foreign policy decision-making.

Domestic political actors are thus of major importance for foreign policy decision-making, as they are the players that affect the domestic politics considerations of leaders when choosing a course of action. These actors affect the domestic political consequences of decisions by rewarding or punishing leaders. Advisors, on the other hand, play another major role in the two stages of poliheuristic decision-making, in their role as brokers of information and
instruments to construct and make possible different choices in foreign policy. Foreign ministers, security advisors, and other officials shape the way information is presented, prioritize items on the agenda, and offer insights into the first stage of decision making where alternatives are narrowed.

Other actors, such as business associations, powerful firms, and NGOs all play a role in setting the agenda for elected leaders, and increase the rewards or punishments associated to each foreign policy alternative (Bitar 2007, Sikking and Keck, Sikking, Risse and Ropp 1999). Domestic institutions, such as the legislative or high courts can interfere in foreign policy, even if constitutionally this policy area is restricted to the executive. Legislatures can change the laws and regulations that govern foreign policy, and high courts, when independent, can rule against the legality of particular decisions by the president of the foreign ministry. As democratic institutions strengthen in Colombia, their role in foreign policy is becoming more prominent as veto players and shapers of decision-making (Bitar 2015, chapter 6).

The following sections offer a first outlook at the usage of this approach to Colombian foreign policy. Three major episodes of recent Colombian foreign relations serve as testing grounds for a multi-source model of foreign policy decision-making. Ultimately proving the capacity of this model to account for every case of decision-making is beyond the capacity and scope of this article, but the foundations for further application are formulated.

**Fixing the relation with Venezuela**
One of the main achievements of the current Santos administration in Colombia has been re-establishing diplomatic relations in the best possible terms with Venezuela. While the government of Venezuela is widely criticized for its human rights record and disastrous economic measures, a working relation with its principal neighbor has always been necessary to foster Colombia's security, trade, and regional cooperation.

Relations between Colombia an Venezuela came to their worst moment during the Uribe administration, when trade was suspended, ambassadors recalled, and security problems worsened, from Venezuela's preparation for war after Colombia carried a non-authorized military operation in Ecuadorean soil, to FARC presence and support in Venezuela, and recurrent smuggling and crime through the border.

Current accounts of the process of restoration of the bilateral relation with Venezuela highlight Santos's efforts to build up foreign relations based on new opportunities and not in past grievances (many of which he himself encouraged as minister of defense). Socorro Ramirez (2011), for example, praises Santos's commitment to turn the page from his predecessor, Alvaro Uribe, and cement stronger and more fruitful relations with Colombia's neighbors. However, a closer look to the complex story of this episode reveals other actors and their role in shaping every stage in Santos's decisions and the possibilities for success.

The key actor in this story is Maria Angela Holguin, current foreign minister of Colombia, who worked as Colombia's ambassador to Venezuela during the Uribe administration, before relations between the two countries went astray. While in
Caracas, Holguin established strong trusting relations with members of the Venezuelan cabinet, including then foreign minister Nicolas Maduro and his successor Elias Jaua. Holguin clearly separated herself from the Uribe administration while working as ambassador to the United Nations, when she resigned in protest to Uribe’s clientelistic appointments in Colombia’s embassy in New York. She further distanced from Uribe when she declined the embassy in Paris, and instead went to work as a close advisor to the vice-president. This series of decisions against Uribe allowed her to maintain excellent relations with diplomats in the rest of the region, while the Uribe administration increased its rhetoric and actions against Venezuela and Ecuador, and relations deteriorated.

With Santos already elected, Holguin was decisive not only to encourage better relations with Venezuela and Ecuador, but also became the instrument through which this rapprochement worked. Her personal relations with the critical officials in those countries, her understanding of the interests of these governments, and the trustworthiness she had established, were significant mechanisms through which the improvement of relations could be shaped as a foreign policy option and eventually succeeded. Anecdotally, she confessed that while relations were improving between Santos and Chavez, she would receive a daily call from Maduro or Jaua, asking her to clarify any statements against Venezuela, usually made to appease the domestic political opposition to granting concessions to the recently antagonist regime. Her words usually sufficed.
Holguin was instrumental in both the first and the second stages of poliheuristic decision-making. She was able to present rapprochement as a viable option to president Santos, and her own experience and personal connections served as an assurance of the likelihood of success.

Apart from Holguin, private business interests were able to put the Venezuela relation on the agenda of the coming president Santos. While Venezuela used to be a major market for Colombian exports until 2008, trade virtually stopped and has only recovered to a third of its previous levels (Semana 2014). This has impacted negatively the Colombian economy in general but more than anywhere this has been a major problem for Colombians living near the border. Other countries have replaced Venezuela destinations for Colombian exports, notably China and India, but the producers in the border where most affected by the deterioration of trade relations between the two countries. The reduction of trade has affected them on one part, but most importantly, Venezuela refused to pay outstanding debts to Colombian producers in the border for products already traded. Santos's deal with Chavez for the improvement of relations addressed as a major point in the agenda the repayment of more than USD $800 million in trade debt. The decline of the Venezuelan economy has increased the likelihood of delays in debt payments, which has contributed to a more active participation of Colombian business interests in Santos's relation with Venezuela, most notoriously Avianca's pressure to recover a monthly bill of USD $12 million for aviation services in Venezuela (Eltiempo 2014).
The failed agreement for US military bases in Colombia

In 1996 Ecuador’s new president, Rafael Corea, informed the United States that the agreement for the lease of the Eloy Alfaro airbase in Manta would not be extended beyond 1999, when the initial lease terms expired. The United States started to search for alternative options in neighboring countries, fearing the loss of Manta would diminish its capacity to oversee drug-trafficking and other illegal activities in South America's Pacific. Surprisingly, several countries in the region, including Panama, Colombia, and Peru, offered to host US personnel and operations in a similar base in their territories (Bitar, 2014).

Peru and Panama eventually did not start formal negotiations, but Colombia started a high level discussion with the United States, seeking to open seven US military bases in the country. The wording and language used in those negotiations was extremely sensitive, since both governments sought to avoid using terms like "US military base" or "international treaty." The term "bases" has always been negative in Latin America, as major anti-imperialist sentiments abound in the region, and Latin Americans are specially concerned about US military interventionism. Thus, the agreement used the term "Cooperative Security Location" instead of bases. The term "international treaty" was also avoided, because international treaties are required by the Colombian constitution to be ratified by Congress. President Uribe feared an open discussion in Congress would create unnecessary political debate, which could be
harmful for him and would open the gates for all sorts of politicization (Cooley 2008). The Colombian negotiators insisted that this agreement had to be worded as an extension of previous military cooperation agreements, thus not requiring a separate treaty for the bases.

The agreement was negotiated in secret, and contained a “track II” addition, in which the Colombian government demanded an anti-aerial defense system and the promise of continuous supplies provision in case of an international conflict in the borders of Colombia. This was all directed to increase Colombia’s position in the eventuality that war broke with Venezuela (Bitar 2014).

In 1999 the agreement was signed by both governments despite a major regional crisis that exploded after Hugo Chavez learned about the agreement. Chavez saw the presence of US military and operations in seven Colombian bases as a threat to his country and to Latin America’s stability. Other countries in the region expressed their concern, including Brazil, and several weeks of tensions were only appeased after President Obama himself made assurances to Latin American governments that the bases would not be used to undermine their security (theguardian.com 2009).

In that same year, before the agreement was implemented, several Colombian human rights NGOs brought the agreement before the Constitutional Court for a revision of its legality. The Colombian government assured Washington that the agreement was safe, trusting that the court would continue to treat security cooperation agreements as extensions of previous treaties and not as treaties on their own, therefore not requiring legislative ratification.
The court, however, found that the agreement contained significant new commitments for Colombia, particularly those related to legal protections for US personnel. The court did not rule that the agreement was illegal, as the petitioners had hoped, but instead declared it “nonexistent” since it had not been ratified by congress.

The decision came as a new president, Juan Manuel Santos, was taking office. Santos was Uribe’s minister of defense, and participated directly in the bases agreement. Santos, like Uribe, shared the preoccupation for sending the agreement to congress and decided not to insist in the bases by sending it to open discussion in the legislative. At the time, Santos had started the process of rapprochement described in the previous section, and pushing for the revival of the agreement in Congress would have alienated Chavez and damaged once again the bilateral relation.

The Colombia constitutional court acted as a domestic independent actor that modified the choices available for the government to pursue its foreign policy goals. As such, the decision not to open the bases in Colombia has to be seen as a bureaucratic bargaining outcome, and not as a decision made by an all-mighty leader isolated from domestic constrains and pressures.

The model of poliheuristic decision-making is useful to analyze this episode. The court’s decision, thus, narrowed the choices for the government to either send the agreement to open debate and likely politicization in Congress or burying the agreement and finding alternatives, like informal access to Colombian bases for US operations (Bitar 2014). The outcome was the cancellation of the agreement, even after it was signed.
Was this the result of a one-step calculated rational decision by an unitary state? Certainly not. This outcome was the result of the capacity of domestic political institutions to restrict the decision-making power of the executive. The court's decision modified the alternatives available in the stage one of decision-making, leaving the rational calculation of political cost in the hand of the president for stage 2. Santos considered that the political cost of reviving the agreement was too high, and left it perish even when he was one of its key authors and preferred to face the consequences of breaking Colombia’s commitment with the United States.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this paper are consistent with analytical foreign policy studies in the United States and elsewhere. Foreign policy analysis has shifted from the study of decisions made by presidents to a more in-depth analysis of the actors involved in foreign policy decision-making. This analysis pays more attention to the domestic process of construction of viable alternatives, their costs and benefits, and the instruments to make them successful. Multi-level mechanisms of foreign policy-making are the relevant focus of the analysis, instead of all-mighty leaders or abstract units like the "state" making isolated decisions.

The literature on foreign policy has established that leaders need to survive politically, and foreign policy decisions serve this domestic purpose as well (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). Thus, considerations about the consequences of foreign policy decisions on domestic politics, and vice-versa, have started to populate International Relations theory in the last decades (Kissinger 1966, Rosenau 1967, Hughes 1978,
George 1980, Risse-Kappen 1991, Fearon 1998, Nye Jr et al. 2012). Putnam notoriously argued that domestic politics and international relations are “inextricably entangled,” and that state-centric theories do not account for these linkages (Putnam 1988). The findings in the case of Colombia are also consistent with Alexander Cooley’s theory of base politics. Cooley builds on Putnam’s two level games and Bueno de Mezquita’s logic of political survival to help explain when leaders in host nations would support or contest US occupation of military bases in their territories. The risk of politicization that prevented the bases in Colombia was also a key factor in many other basing negotiations, from Kirgizstan to Japan and Italy (Cooley 2008).

This paper has sought to broaden our understanding of foreign policy decision making in Colombia, by moving beyond the traditional model of presidentialism that is abundant in Latin American accounts. The two cases presented as preliminary evidence for a multi-source model of foreign policy analysis indicate that other actors beyond presidents are critical in the two stages of decision-making. These actors participate in the first stage by creating, constraining, and giving meaning to the alternatives that presidents can choose from. In the second stage these actors participate by assigning pay-offs to the decisions made by presidents, particularly the political costs of making decisions that affect them. Also, these actors participate in the later stage by providing the instruments to make decisions viable.

As a result, it is clear that the analysis of foreign policy gains richness and validity when multiple sources are considered, and their interactions guide the study of decision-making.