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## **THE ECUADOR-COLOMBIA BORDER: HISTORICAL LINKS, CURRENT EVENTS, AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES**

**A Writenet Report by Judith Walcott  
commissioned by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,  
Emergency and Technical Support Service**

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## Acronyms

AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – United Self-Defence Units of Colombia
BIZ	Border Integration Zone
CAN	Comunidad Andina – Andean Community
Combifron	Comisión Binacional de Frontera – Binational Border Commission
CVICE	Comisión de Vecindad Colombo Ecuatoriana – Colombia-Ecuador Neighbours Commission
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional – National Liberation Army
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
Interpol	International Criminal Police Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
ONIC	Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia – Colombian National Organization of Indigenous Peoples
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States (of America)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## **Executive Summary**

In contrast to their history of cordial cross-border exchange, recent events in Ecuador and Colombia have put both interactions between governments and social and economic relations between citizens under strain. After an air raid and armed incursion by the Colombian military on 1 March 2008 crossed into Ecuadorian territory to target the FARC guerrilla, killing 25 people, signs of regional and hemispheric strain became apparent. A number of Latin American nations came to the defence of Ecuador's sovereignty and territorial integrity, employing a language of international law, while the United States supported Colombia in its efforts to defend itself against "terrorists". Despite the intervention of the Organization of American States and other international bodies and states in negotiating a reconciliation between Ecuador and Colombia, relations between the two governments remain tense. The breakdown in relations has extended to citizens on the ground, causing worrying effects for Colombians in situations of danger and violence in Colombia, as well as for the hundreds of thousands of displaced Colombians living in Ecuador, and for vulnerable Ecuadorians living in the border region.

High levels of poverty and an historic deficit of state services and infrastructure have already served to make the border a vulnerable zone. Dollarization in Ecuador and civil conflict and narco-trafficking in Colombia have collided in this space to produce ever-widening gaps between citizens and the state, and among citizens themselves. Examination of historic interconnections and more current relations between Ecuador and Colombia, on social, economic, and political levels, shows how dynamics in the border region have changed over the past decade, and helps explain the current situation of diplomatic tension between formerly friendly neighbours.

The danger remains that political problems between Ecuador and Colombia could obscure serious humanitarian issues, and that the cooperation necessary for social projects and economic ties on the border will continue to break down, leaving border populations more susceptible to violence, displacement, and the coca economy. Historic cross-border ties between friends, relatives, and nearby communities are being severed daily by government restrictions on border crossings and flows of commerce. Without the political will to maintain these key connections on the border, and to make sure that social protections are in place for the most vulnerable inhabitants of the region, the diplomatic conflict threatens to degenerate into a more serious humanitarian situation on the border.

# 1 Introduction

In contrast to a history of cordial cross-border exchange, recent events in Ecuador and Colombia have put both international relations between governments and social and economic relations between citizens under strain. An air raid and armed incursion by the Colombian military on 1 March 2008, which crossed into Ecuadorian territory to target the FARC (Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrilla, killed 25 people. After this event signs of regional and hemispheric strain became apparent. A number of Latin American and other nations came to the defence of Ecuador's sovereignty and territorial integrity, employing the language of international law, while the United States supported Colombia in its efforts to defend itself against "terrorists".

This paper explores historic interconnections and more current relations between Ecuador and Colombia, on social, economic, and political levels, to show how dynamics in the border region have changed over the past decade. This helps explicate current events at the border and in the region, as well as possible consequences for vulnerable populations in the area. The first part of the paper examines the background to current relations between Ecuador and Colombia, including the geographic and demographic composition of the border region and cross-border interactions between border populations. The changing nature of border realities is examined in the following section, exploring not only the effects of the Colombian conflict and Plan Colombia on the border region, but also how dollarization has influenced the area. Government relations and more recent events on the border, including the incursion mentioned above, are then considered to show the evolution of cross-border diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Colombia, as well as the growing importance of the region and regional bodies in peacekeeping. Using this information as a starting point, possible threats to cross-border economies, binational and regional government relations, and border populations are then analyzed.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Geographic and Demographic Composition of the Border Region

Ecuador and Colombia share a 586 km long border across three diverse regions: the coast, the highlands, and the Amazon. The Ecuadorian provinces of Esmeraldas on the coast and Carchi in the highlands, as well as part of Sucumbíos in the Amazon, border the Colombian department of Nariño. Sucumbíos also borders the Putumayo department in Colombia. Border populations include *mestizos*, people of mixed Spanish and Indian descent, Afro-descendants, and indigenous peoples. Biological and natural diversity on both sides of the border is great, as both Ecuador and Colombia are classed as "mega-diverse" by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, a United Nations Environment Programme agency. In contrast to the human and environmental richness of the border, both the Ecuadorian and Colombian border regions often present lower indices for development compared with the rest of their respective countries.

Ecuadorian academic and national security expert César Montúfar notes that the Colombian and Ecuadorian border regions "share similar levels of institutional development, public infrastructure, and social conditions. These areas are poorly

served by public services, and social indicators are consistently low compared to the rest of their respective countries. Judicial and security institutions do not occupy the entire territory of either country.”<sup>1</sup> Development needs on Colombia’s southern border are closely related to the historic absence of state institutions in the region, which have been exacerbated by geography (more than 60 percent of Colombia’s border regions are covered by dense jungles, which have hindered the construction of a transportation infrastructure and limited the presence of state institutions<sup>2</sup>) and the presence of armed conflict between the Colombian military and other groups, which will be discussed in more detail later. Taking into account Colombia’s five borders (with Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela), per capita income in Colombia’s twelve border departments is 23 percent lower than national average.<sup>3</sup>

Across the border in Ecuador, roads and infrastructure in the border region have historically been poor, and poverty is widespread, especially in the coastal and Amazon regions. Ecuador’s greatest challenges in general are to remedy the exclusion and inequality that confronts the majority of the population, reflected in the low coverage of basic social services, widespread poverty, and the limited management capacity of institutions.<sup>4</sup> However, these factors are “particularly relevant for Ecuador’s northern border zone”.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the relatively small border population has meant that the area is not considered strategically important in terms of votes; therefore, state infrastructure and development initiatives are often directed toward more highly populated areas or locations that are seen as having greater economic potential.

In both countries, the historic absence of the state, as reflected through inadequate infrastructure, institutions, and the provision of basic goods and services, has created situations of endemic and intergenerational poverty for much of the border region.

## **2.2 Cross-border Relationships**

Relations between Ecuadorians and Colombians have historically been friendly, based on mutual exchange, free transit, and cooperation, although their exact nature varies according to region.

The coastal border zones have historic connections based on common Afro-descendant ancestry. Afro-descendant populations on both sides of the border have seen themselves as one group with a common descent. In recent years, links between the Ecuadorian city of Esmeraldas and the Colombian city of Tumaco, which both

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<sup>1</sup> Montúfar, C., *The Colombian Conflict and the Risk of a Regional Human Rights and Humanitarian Crisis: A Perspective from the Ecuadorian Northern Border*, Washington: Inter-American Dialogue, July 2005, p. 21

<sup>2</sup> Crow, J.A., *The Epic of Latin America*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p. 805

<sup>3</sup> International Crisis Group, *Colombia’s Borders: The Weak Link in Uribe’s Security Policy*, International Crisis Group Latin America Report, No. 9, Quito, 23 September 2004, p. 1

<sup>4</sup> Sistema de las Naciones Unidas en el Ecuador, *La frontera norte del Ecuador: Evaluación y recomendaciones de la misión interagencial del sistema de las Naciones Unidas en el Ecuador*, Quito, July 2004, p. 16

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*, p. 8

have large Afro-descendant populations, have been revitalized, including the evolution of a common literature and the growth of small-scale development projects.

In the highlands, cross-border relations have mostly been of a commercial and kinship nature, with integration facilitated by the Pan-American Highway, which runs through the Andean region. There have also been historical connections between indigenous Awa communities that live on the western slopes of the Andes, spanning both the Ecuador and Colombia border in parts of Carchi and Nariño. In addition, the connections between communities in and around the Ecuadorian city of Tulcán in Carchi and the Colombian city of Ipiales in the Nariño department, and beyond, have been habitual, strong, and active, and an important part of daily life in the zone. Prior to the year 2000, many Colombian small businesspeople and citizens crossed the border to Ecuador on a daily or weekly basis to buy supplies or goods for their stores or for personal use, as items were more competitively priced in Ecuador. Ecuadorians also crossed the border frequently to Colombia to buy clothing, shoes, and electronic goods, to visit friends, or to worship at the important religious site of Las Lajas. The dynamism of border connections in the highlands have changed in recent years, however, owing to decreased competitiveness of Ecuadorian products, changes in immigration laws, and increased insecurity in the zone.

In the Amazon, indigenous communities straddle the Ecuador-Colombia border. The Ecuadorian province of Sucumbíos is home to indigenous Cofán, Siona, Secoya, Quichua, and Shuar communities, as well as *mestizos* who migrated to the area during the oil boom of the 1970s and 1980s. Across the border in Putumayo live indigenous Muráís, Ingas, Quichuas, Pastos, Awás, Paeces, Emberá, Sionas, Muinanes, Yanakonas, Kamentzá, Koreguajes, and Cofanes. Historically, the border itself was treated as a non-entity until the onset of petro-colonization in the 1970s when the exact demarcation of territories and zones became a more significant state project. Over the past decade, aerial spraying campaigns, narcotrafficking, and more generalized violence have affected Putumayo and Sucumbíos to a disproportionate degree along the Ecuador-Colombia border, at times weakening previously strong ties among the inhabitants.

As the following section will reveal, the nature of cross-border relationships has changed in the past decade with the continuation of Colombia's internal conflict, and the initiation of Plan Colombia.

### **3 Border Realities**

The situation of violence in Colombia is the oldest in Latin America, and the humanitarian crisis there is the largest in the Western Hemisphere. While these issues have caused undeniable spillover effects for Colombia's neighbours, border realities have also been affected by Ecuador's decision to dollarize its economy, which immediately changed the flow of commerce on the border. This and other effects from Colombia's war and Plan Colombia are explored here.

#### **3.1 The Effects of Dollarization on Border Flows and Economies**

Ecuador's decision to use the US dollar as its currency changed the balance of trade between Ecuador and Colombia and border dynamics between the two nations. Ecuador formally adopted the US dollar as its economic currency in 2000, under

President Jamil Mahuad, only the second independent country (after Panama) to do so. Leading up to this were several economic shocks, and continued political instability in Ecuador. The El Niño weather phenomenon caused severe flooding in parts of Ecuador in 1997 and 1998, leading to agricultural losses and infrastructure damage.<sup>6</sup> In addition, a drop in worldwide oil prices in the same years caused sizable shortfalls in Ecuador's oil revenues. Compounding Ecuador's already large fiscal deficit, in 1999 the country was nearing hyperinflation, with prices rising nearly 30 percent per month, while its national currency, the *sucre*, suffered severe devaluation; these factors contributed to a default on external loans that year. In addition, President Mahuad was facing political challenges from the army, an increasingly active indigenous movement, and a fragmented parliament. Dollarization, as opposed to pegging the national currency to the dollar as Argentina did, was seen as both a stop-gap measure in response to the short-term fiscal crisis, and a long-term remedy for an unstable economy, as well as a way to change domestic focus from political to economic issues.<sup>7</sup>

Immediately after dollarization, Ecuador became less competitive relative to Colombia, and experienced higher unemployment due to increasing costs of production and a change in the direction of tourism and commerce.

**Bilateral Export 2000-2001, in millions of dollars<sup>8</sup>**

Direction of commerce	2000	2001	Variation
Ecuador to Colombia	259	286	11.7%
Colombia to Ecuador	462	691	49.6%
Commercial deficit for Ecuador	-203	-405	199.5%

Dollarization immediately caused the vast majority of Ecuadorians to become poorer; dollars no longer bought as much as *sucre*s, the previous Ecuadorian currency, did, in spite of inflation. This led to increased Ecuadorian migration across the border to Colombia and abroad, often to Spain. Coinciding with Plan Colombia, the effects of dollarization had an immediate and important impact on the border region, causing Ecuador's northern border populations to become even more vulnerable to the coca economy across the border in Colombia.

**3.2 Plan Colombia and the Colombian Conflict**

Both the Colombian conflict and Plan Colombia have had far-reaching consequences, not only for Colombians, but also for Colombia's neighbours across its borders. Conflict in Colombia began during a period known as *la violencia* (the violence), between 1946 and 1966, caused by local-level fighting between two political parties. The conflict expanded to official and semi-official government-led violence, during

<sup>6</sup> Vos, R., M. Velasco, and E. de Labastida, *Economic and Social Effects of El Niño in Ecuador, 1997-1998*, Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, October 1999

<sup>7</sup> See, Solimano, A., *Crisis and Dollarization: An Overview*, in P. Beckerman and A. Solimano, *Crisis and Dollarization in Ecuador: Stability, Growth, and Social Equity*, Washington: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2002

<sup>8</sup> Centro Andino de Estudios Internacionales, *Diagnóstico de la frontera Ecuador-Colombia, Andean Community Statistics*, Quito, June 2002, p. 37



which the armed forces and professional killers began to massacre peasants and those who disagreed with the government. This, in turn, led to the formation of guerrilla resistance movements. The FARC, formed during this time, originally associated with the Communist Party of Colombia and Marxist philosophy. As the FARC has grown in strength, it has become increasingly involved in illicit activities, such as arms trafficking, kidnapping and extortion, and the production of cocaine, as a means of financing its war, and has engaged in systematic violence against civilian populations. This has led to the formation of right-wing paramilitary groups, organized by cattle farmers and others, to confront the FARC's violence. However, in practical terms, the paramilitaries, or the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – United Self-Defence Units of Colombia), and the two guerrilla groups, the FARC and the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional – National Liberation Army), are all vying for control of territory in southern Colombia, terrorizing and displacing local populations.<sup>9</sup>

Within this setting, “Plan Colombia” was originally drafted in 1998 by Colombian President Andres Pastrana, calling for alternative development and the manual eradication of coca plants as solutions to the growing violence between the Colombian military, the FARC, and right-wing paramilitaries, as well as to stop the spread of the growing and processing of coca. However, the “Plan Colombia” that was implemented by the United States in 2000 focused primarily on a military strategy to confront armed conflict, as well as on lowering the domestic supply of cocaine in the US by targeting production in Colombia through the aerial spraying of coca crops. While Plan Colombia has an economic element that stresses expanding neoliberal policies and decreasing state welfare support, and also calls for social development to provide alternatives for coca growers and armed militants, the vast majority of the more than US\$5 billion in aid that the US has disbursed to Colombia since the 1990s has been allocated for military and security spending.<sup>10</sup> Plan Colombia and the related Andean Regional Initiative have recognized the effects of events in Colombia for Colombia's neighbours, providing some degree of funds for other countries in the region to develop their own security and anti-drug strategies.

Ecuador is arguably Colombia's most vulnerable neighbour and has suffered profound effects from both Colombia's internal conflict and Plan Colombia. Problems on the border include drug-related violence, increased rates of crime, kidnappings, the forced migration of Ecuadorians from their homes, effects on human health and the environment from the aerial spraying of coca that drifts across the border, and food insecurity. There have also been incursions both by Colombian armed forces and by Colombian insurgents into Ecuador's territory and airspace. Ecuador, as a main recipient nation of Colombian refugees, has been put under increasing stress as its already fragile infrastructure and economy strain to accommodate the incoming Colombians.

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<sup>9</sup> Rabasa, A. and P. Chalk, P., *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability*, Washington: RAND Corporation, 2001

<sup>10</sup> Romero, S., Settling of Crisis Makes Winners of Andes Nations, while Rebels Lose Ground, *New York Times*, 9 March 2008; Youngers, C. and E. Rosin (Eds), *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy*, London: Lynne Rienner, 2005; Livingstone, G. with J. Pearce, *Inside Colombia: Drugs, Democracy and War*, Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2004

### 3.3 The Coca Economy

Colombia's southern border region, and to a lesser but still important extent, Ecuador's northern border region are sites for narcotrafficking and the coca economy. According to the Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey, undertaken by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime and the Colombian Government, in 2005 more than two thirds of the world supply of cocaine came from Colombia.<sup>11</sup> Much coca cultivation and processing takes place in Colombia's border regions, encouraged by the humid climate and often dense jungle or high mountains that help to conceal plants. Colombia's border regions also have access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans for the transit of drugs.<sup>12</sup>

Ecuador has an important role in the transit of cocaine and its precursor chemicals. In 2003, 43 metric tonnes of cocaine were seized in Ecuador; 38 million metric tonnes were taken in 2006.<sup>13</sup> Five FARC chiefs and a number of important guerrillas have been detained in Ecuador and deported to Colombia since the start of Plan Colombia; one of these was Simón Trinidad, the most senior FARC leader arrested thus far. Although Ecuador is not considered a coca-growing nation, between January 2005 and January 2006, the Ecuadorian Army found 15 hectares of illegal coca crops in Carchi, Sucumbíos, and Esmeraldas. Precursor chemicals for the processing of coca also move through Ecuador; the Army captured a weekly average of 5,000 gallons of white gasoline, used to process cocaine in Colombia, in the Sucumbíos border zone. An additional 20,000 gallons per week leave Ecuador for Colombia.<sup>14</sup> Other, often related, security problems on the border include money laundering, contraband, and the trade of arms and munitions.

Despite efforts at the aerial eradication of coca crops, which were greater than ever in 2005, production in Colombia increased eight percent over the previous year.<sup>15</sup> Reports have concluded that coca spraying is not working to eliminate the supply, but rather is displacing the crop to other regions. In fact, manual eradication of coca in Bolivia and Peru first displaced coca to Colombia; within Colombia, aerial interdictions in the Putumayo department have displaced the crop to the neighbouring Nariño department. There is a call for alternatives to spraying that involve addressing the demand for cocaine, and finding viable economic alternatives for those engaged in the coca economy.

The aerial spraying of coca is perhaps the most controversial aspect of Plan Colombia, as health and human rights groups claim it has damaged human, animal, and environmental health, and led to the destruction of more jungle to plant coca in what

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime and Government of Colombia, *Colombia Coca Cultivation Survey*, Vienna: UNODC, June 2006, p. 3

<sup>12</sup> International Crisis Group, *Colombia's Borders*, p. 10

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Government of Bolivia, Government of Colombia, Government of Ecuador, and Government of Peru, *Coca Cultivation in the Andean Region: A Survey of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru*, Vienna: UNODC, June 2007, p. 12

<sup>14</sup> No solo las FARC irrumpen. Drogas y refugiados también, *El Universo* [Guayaquil], 12 February 2006, pp. 8-9A

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime and Government of Colombia, *Coca Cultivation Survey*, p. 3

is commonly known as the “balloon effect”. Residents across the border in Ecuador have claimed that chemical “drift” from the spraying has crossed the border and destroyed legal crops and harmed human health, leading the Ecuadorian government to repeatedly call for a suspension of spraying within 10 km of the Ecuadorian border.<sup>16</sup> In spite of this request, Colombian President Álvaro Uribe and the United States government believe that aerial interdictions are a key strategy in addressing the spread of the coca economy. As a result of continued spraying and over seven years of unsuccessful diplomatic requests, on 31 March 2008, Ecuador filed suit at the International Court of Justice in The Hague against the Government of Colombia to restrict or stop the aerial spraying of coca within 10 km of the border. It is also seeking a declaration that Colombia violated Ecuador’s sovereignty and territory through the spraying, as well as compensation for damage caused by the spraying. According to Ecuador’s Foreign Minister, María Isabel Salvador, as a result of information gathered through the Ecuadorian Scientific Commission’s work on the effects of coca spraying on Ecuadorian people and environment, continued aerial spraying constitutes a grave violation of Ecuadorian sovereignty and a violation of international law “which prohibits a state from causing harm to the population”.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.4 Militarization of the Border and Incursions**

Because of heightened insecurity and narcotrafficking on the border, the Ecuadorian government has increasingly looked to the armed forces to improve military intelligence in the region, leading to greater military presence and associated infrastructure and equipment on the northern border. In 2000, there were only 700 members of the military on Ecuador’s northern border.<sup>18</sup> Six years later there were ten times as many.<sup>19</sup> These soldiers are distributed in control points along the northern border and participate in territorial and aerial patrols. However, many individuals in the border region believe the presence of the Ecuadorian army leads to more reprisals from illegal armed groups from across the border; as a result, they would prefer a minimal army presence.<sup>20</sup> There are still only two official state checkpoints on the Ecuador-Colombia border: the Tulcán-Ipiales crossing in the Andean region, and the Lago Agrio-San Miguel crossing in the Amazon, although there are numerous “unofficial” border crossings between the two countries. The Ecuadorian emphasis has been on securing the northern border through entrance restrictions and border controls; several official entry points have been closed, and since August 2004 all Colombians crossing the border are required to provide a document confirming they have undergone a criminal background check.<sup>21</sup> They could previously enter Ecuador with only a national identity card.

In spite of increased Ecuadorian military and police forces on its northern border, and stricter controls for border crossings, the entry of Colombian insurgents into

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<sup>16</sup> Walcott, J., Spraying Crops, Eradicating People, *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Winter 2003

<sup>17</sup> Environment News Service, Ecuador Sues Colombia to Stop Anti-Coca Herbicide Spray, 31 March 2008, <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/mar2008/2008-03-31-05.asp> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>18</sup> Costosa soberanía norte, *El Universo* [Guayaquil], 12 February 2006, p. 1A

<sup>19</sup> No solo las FARC irrumpen

<sup>20</sup> Centro Andino de Estudios Internacionales, Diagnóstico de la frontera Ecuador-Colombia, pp. 31-2

<sup>21</sup> *Idem*, p. 28

Ecuadorian territory has been frequent and habitual. The FARC's role in kidnappings, arms trafficking, and the drug trade, both within Colombia and in neighbouring states, attest to the fact that it is not a peaceable group. However, FARC presence in neighbouring countries has been slightly ambiguous. They often use Ecuadorian territory as a place of rest and relaxation, periodically crossing the border to escape from constant battle in Colombia. In some cases, the FARC and paramilitaries serve as unofficial arbiters for local disputes, or providers of basic goods and services for citizens in areas that are little served by state presence.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, these relationships are primarily forged out of necessity rather than choice, and put local populations in dangerous situations, as the FARC, paramilitaries, and Ecuadorian military may all seek information from the same individuals, leading to reprisals from the other groups.

The Colombian military has also repeatedly crossed the border, both on foot and by plane, to engage in counter-insurgency operations in Ecuador, leading to protests by the Ecuadorian state against violations of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. In fact, since 2005 there have been 17 incursions by the Colombian army into Ecuadorian territory.<sup>23</sup> For example, a number of villagers in the El Frailejón region of Carchi, two kilometres from the Colombian border, claimed that the Colombian military confronted FARC guerrillas in Ecuadorian territory on 25 December 2005 in an armed conflict that lasted more than an hour and a half.<sup>24</sup> A further event took place on 28 January 2006, when three Colombian helicopters and one aeroplane flew into Ecuadorian territory over the San Miguel River in Sucumbíos. Colombian President Uribe called the incursion "involuntary", and asserted that guerrillas had launched attacks against the Colombian army from Ecuadorian territory. Former Ecuadorian Chancellor Francisco Carrión denied this accusation and said that "we have to take measures for the defence of sovereignty and the respect of the inviolability of our territory".<sup>25</sup> He also reiterated Ecuador's policy of non-intervention in the armed internal Colombian conflict, and stated that he believes the Colombian state "does not exercise an effective control" on its southern border.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.5 Refugees and Displaced Persons

There is a close link between insurgent and military clashes in Colombia and the flow of refugees and other displaced persons to other countries in the region and worldwide. Some three million Colombians have been internally displaced by the conflict;<sup>27</sup> hundreds of thousands of others have fled across borders. According to Philippe Lavanchy of UNHCR "Colombia has the most dramatic refugee situation in the hemisphere".<sup>28</sup> Since 2000, according to UNHCR, more than 45,381 people have

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<sup>22</sup> *Idem*, p.33

<sup>23</sup> Saavedra, L.A., Ecuador's Northern Border: The FARC, *Latinamerica Press*, 19 March 2008, <http://www.latinamericapress.org/Summ.asp?lanCode=1&couCode=8> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>24</sup> El Ejército colombiano incursionó en Carchi, *El Comercio* [Quito], 28 December 2005, pp. A1-A2

<sup>25</sup> Ecuador supera impasse con Colombia, *El Norte* [Ibarra], 9 February 2006, p. 13

<sup>26</sup> Ecuador pide a Colombia actuar ante actividades ilícitas, *El Norte* [Ibarra], 10 February 2006, p. 13

<sup>27</sup> Q & A: Colombia's Civil Conflict, *BBC News Online*, 27 February 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/americas/1738963.stm> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>28</sup> No solo las FARC irrumpen

applied for refugee status in Ecuador; only 14,300 have been accepted. An additional 250,000 Colombians living in Ecuador are in need of protection; the majority of these people have not applied for refugee status due to fear, lack of knowledge about the process, or because they live in isolated zones.<sup>29</sup> In February 2008, the Ecuadorian Minister of Internal and External Security, Gustavo Larrea, called for permanent international assistance to help hundreds of thousands of refugees and undocumented Colombians in Ecuadorian territory.<sup>30</sup>

There has been a widespread belief by Ecuadorian authorities and often many citizens that “Colombian immigrants are responsible for public insecurity in Ecuadorian cities or belong to Colombian illegal organizations looking to carry out activities in Ecuador”.<sup>31</sup> Ecuador has thus classified immigration as a security problem, and many Ecuadorian citizens point to the strains migrants bring to an already weak economy and poor social, educational, and health infrastructure in Ecuador. However, many arriving displaced persons belong to extremely vulnerable populations; women and children, who comprise a sizable share of arriving displaced persons in Ecuador, are at increased risk of human trafficking and forced recruitment into prostitution rings.<sup>32</sup> In addition, according to ONIC (Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia – Colombian National Organization of Indigenous Peoples), although only two percent of Colombians are indigenous, along with Afro-Colombians and peasant communities they comprise almost half of those who have been displaced by conflict.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to external displacement, there has also been internal displacement within Ecuador as a result of increasing violence and a culture of fear. Thousands of Ecuadorian *mestizos* who have resided in Sucumbíos for three to four decades, as well as some indigenous communities, in 2002 began to move to other provinces or locations further south within Sucumbíos because of the presence of insurgents from across the border, fear of insurgent presence, or harmful effects from the aerial spraying of coca.<sup>34</sup> Internal displacement within Ecuador is an issue that has been obscured by the larger issue of refugees and displaced persons arriving daily from Colombia; as they already have Ecuadorian nationality, and often family connections in other provinces, many displaced Ecuadorians are not counted or considered as such.

### 3.6 Analysis of Border Realities

High levels of poverty and an historic deficit of state services and infrastructure make the border zone a vulnerable space. This is exacerbated in Colombia by the presence of decades-long internal conflict, narcotrafficking, violence, and a culture of fear. The

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<sup>29</sup> Los refugiados colombianos buscan insertarse en la sociedad, *El Comercio* [Quito], 24 June 2007

<sup>30</sup> Ecuador pide ayuda internacional para asistir a refugiados colombianos, *El Universo* [Caracas], 12 February 2008

<sup>31</sup> Montúfar, p. 27

<sup>32</sup> Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Caught in the Crossfire: Displaced Colombians At Risk of Trafficking*, New York, March 2006

<sup>33</sup> American Friends Service Committee, *Indigenous People in Colombia*, Factsheet, Philadelphia, n.d., <http://www.afsc.org/colombia/learn-about/Indigenous-Colombians.htm> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>34</sup> Walcott, J. Nowhere Left to Run: An Indigenous Ecuadoran Perspective on Plan Colombia, *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Winter 2003, p. 58

regionalization of these issues, as well as the effects of dollarization on cross-border relations, has led to complex and dangerous spillover effects for Ecuador. Moreover, many portions of the Colombian-Ecuadorian border are controlled by paramilitaries and guerrilla groups, and the region is full of clandestine roads and border gates facilitating drug, precursor chemical, arms, and explosives trafficking. As a result of these conditions, human development and the protection of social and economic rights are weak, especially for the most vulnerable populations in the border region, including Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples, women, and children. These issues help make “northern Ecuador particularly vulnerable to human rights problems; in fact, no other region in Ecuador presents such a serious challenge for human development and the protection of rights”.<sup>35</sup>

## **4 Governmental Relations and Recent Events on the Border**

Until 1998, Ecuador’s foreign relations were largely concentrated on conflict on its southern and eastern border with Peru. Meanwhile, Colombia was embroiled in internal civil war that was encroaching ever closer to the nation’s capital of Bogotá, and was focused on gradually opening up relations and the economy to commerce with the United States. However, the regionalization of the Colombian conflict and Colombia’s civil war, and the important spillover effects in Ecuador, have served to put diplomatic relations between the two countries under increasing strain.

### **4.1 Ecuador-Colombia Governmental Relations (pre-2006)**

Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru were once part of the same Spanish colonial territory, Gran Colombia, which dissolved into separate states and parts of separate states after independence in 1830. Since then, disputes over ownership of various parts of the border between Ecuador and Peru have resulted in at least 34 episodes of military confrontation between the two countries.<sup>36</sup> Ecuador and Colombia, on the other hand, have generally had very good relations. According to Socorro Ramírez, director of the Institute of Political Studies and International Relations at the National University of Bogotá, in previous centuries, Colombia and Ecuador have repeatedly engaged in diplomatic exchange over such issues as land and maritime border delimitation with cooperation and a relationship of “good neighbourliness”.<sup>37</sup> One exception was in the early part of the twentieth century during the height of Ecuador’s border conflict with Peru. Ecuador secured the Muñoz Vernaza-Suárez border treaty with Colombia in 1916 in an attempt to consolidate a secure border in the north, ceding land in the Caquetá and Putumayo regions to Colombia. However, in the Salomón-Lozano treaty of 1922, Colombia ceded part of this territory to Peru; the intent of Ecuador to gain security in its northern border failed, as Ecuador became fenced in by Peru in the north as well as the south. As a result, Ecuador temporarily suspended diplomatic relations with Colombia in 1925.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Montúfar, p. 25

<sup>36</sup> Simmons, B.A., *Territorial Disputes and Their Resolution: The Case of Ecuador and Peru*, Peaceworks, No. 27, Washington: The United States Institute of Peace, April 1999

<sup>37</sup> Conflicto colombiano e inestabilidad política ecuatoriana cambiaron relación, dice académica, *El Comercio* [Quito], 21 April 2008

<sup>38</sup> Ayala Mora, E. *Ecuador-Perú: Historia del Conflict y de la Paz*, Quito: Fundación El Comercio, 1999, pp. 22-3

Throughout most of the rest of the twentieth century, relations between Ecuador and Colombia were of a friendly, if disinterested, nature. This disinterest in regional integration changed in the past decade, as Ecuador and Colombia have tied in treatment of their shared border zone to the Andean Community's (CAN – Comunidad Andina) definition of Border Integration Zones (BIZs). The Andean Community was founded in 1969 by Bolivia, Chile (which withdrew from the CAN in 1976), Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru with the signing of the Cartagena Agreement, to improve standards of living “through integration and economic and social cooperation”.<sup>39</sup> According to Luis Alberto Oliveros, the Coordinator of the Andean Community Border Integration and Development Projects Bank, borders have been given prominence in the Andean Community since 1987 when the Quito Protocol amended the Cartagena Agreement with a new article on “the importance of national borders and their priority for Andean integration”.<sup>40</sup> The Andean Community's Integration and Border Development Policy (Decision 459) was approved in May 1999 in an effort to strengthen and consolidate regional integration processes. In 2001, Decision 501 established the framework for Border Integration Zones as “territorial areas located on the borders of adjacent Andean Community Member Countries, in which policies will be adopted and plans, programs, and projects will be executed jointly...to boost their development”.<sup>41</sup> BIZs were established to include “economically and socially depressed areas in both countries”, and are zones where “the legal, administrative, and functional conditions to be promoted will boost the productive and commercial capacity and the cultural wealth of the people living there”. BIZs are financed bilaterally through subregional, regional, and multilateral bodies.<sup>42</sup>

The Ecuador-Colombia BIZ includes three strategic areas for development – the Pacific region, the Andean region, and the Amazon region – and has been strongly tied to the efforts of another binational initiative, the CVICE (Comisión de Vecindad Colombo Ecuatoriana – the Colombia-Ecuador Neighbourhood Commission). The CVICE was created through presidential decree on 20 June 1989 to promote integration, cooperation, and development, and was restructured on 28 November 2002, with the goal of giving it more dynamism and functionality, with an emphasis on the Andean Community's Border Integration Zone in southern Colombia and northern Ecuador. In recent years, the CVICE, supported by the Andean Community and the Ecuadorian and Colombian governments, has designed a Binational Development Plan to implement programmes along the Ecuador-Colombia border to meet basic needs, strengthen coordination among local institutions, and enhance regional integration as a means of solving the problems of the populations in the Border Integration Zone.<sup>43</sup> The Plan has a regional vision, and relies heavily on

<sup>39</sup> Comunidad Andina, *Brief History*, Lima, n.d., <http://www.comunidadandina.org/ingles/quienes/brief.htm> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>40</sup> Oliveros, L.A., *The Concept of Borders in the Context of Andean Integration and Its Future Development*, Lima: Comunidad Andina, February 2002, <http://www.comunidadandina.org/ingles/documentos/documents/borders.htm> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>41</sup> Comunidad Andina, *Border Development*, Lima, n.d., [http://www.comunidadandina.org/ingles/fronteras/border\\_integration.htm](http://www.comunidadandina.org/ingles/fronteras/border_integration.htm) [accessed May 2008]

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>43</sup> Montúfar, p. 29

international support for funding. The Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the CVICE took place in Quito in April 2006 to discuss projects such as binational electricity interconnections, strengthening of environmental development, programmes for disasters and emergencies, networks of state schools, a management plan for hydrographical river basins, and the implementation of the Binational Centre of Culture and Tourism. While the Andean Community Border Integration and Development Projects Bank agreed to fund two of the projects,<sup>44</sup> by 2007 the remaining eleven projects still did not have funding in place.<sup>45</sup> Before these projects could be implemented, political tensions between Ecuador and Colombia led to the suspension of the Binational Development Plan.

In addition to the CVICE, which works on socio-economic issues and development, Ecuador and Colombia have cooperated through Combifron (Comisión Binacional de Frontera – Binational Border Commission), which integrates military officials and diplomats on both sides to analyze current events on the border. Combifron is in charge of evaluating, coordinating, and supervising military and police policies for border security to avoid border incidents. Combifron has also been suspended in recent months, after diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Colombia deteriorated.<sup>46</sup>

The experience of CVICE and Combifron illustrate how, although Ecuador and Colombia have for the most part had cordial and consistent diplomatic relations, binational projects are difficult to coordinate, and their success is closely allied with the political will of the countries involved. The World Bank Independent Evaluation Group's report on cross-border cooperation found that "regional programs can help address...problems and opportunities – which countries cannot handle efficiently on their own – by building and sharing knowledge, coordinating large-scale investments, harmonizing policies, and integrating services". However, "the multicountry nature of such programs makes them complex to design and implement, and requires considerable confidence and trust among participating countries".<sup>47</sup> In spite of the difficulties of coordination, Ecuador has used regional and multicountry mechanisms to express concern about spillover effects from Colombia's war and narcotrafficking near and across the border region. Starting from the early 1990s, Ecuador called attention to these issues at every meeting of the CAN during the decade.<sup>48</sup>

Under Colombian President Álvaro Uribe, who has been in office since 2002, and a succession of Ecuadorian presidents, cross-border relations have generally remained consistent up until 2007, with a few exceptions. In 1999, under President Jamil Mahuad, the United States negotiated a 10 year lease of an Ecuadorian military base in the port city of Manta as a "forward operating location", a strategic base for

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<sup>44</sup> Aprobado el Plan, *Diario Hoy* [Quito], 26 April 2006

<sup>45</sup> Los roces, *El Comercio* [Quito], 3 April 2007

<sup>46</sup> Colombia pide que se reactive la Comisión Binacional, *El Comercio* [Quito], 23 April 2008

<sup>47</sup> World Bank, Independent Evaluation Group, *The Development Potential of Regional Programs: An Evaluation of World Bank Support of Multicountry Operations*, Washington, 2007, p. 3 <http://go.worldbank.org/D3JOY4U1L0> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>48</sup> Hey, J.A.K., Ecuador: Foreign Policy on the Brink, in F.O. Mora and J.A.K. Hey (eds.), *Latin American and Caribbean Foreign Policy*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, p. 194



military operations that carry out surveillance flights monitoring the growing and processing of coca in Colombia as well as actions by paramilitary troops. This lease was not approved by Ecuador's National Congress, as stipulated in the Constitution, but rather was "ratified" by the Commission for International Matters in Congress.<sup>49</sup> Around 100 flights per month leave from Manta to survey the Pacific for drug-traffickers. Manta has elicited much protest from Ecuadorians, many of whom believe it serves to draw Ecuador into the US domestic issue of drug abuse and Colombia's internal civil war, and threatens Ecuador's sovereignty.<sup>50</sup> It is unlikely that the lease will be renewed in 2009 due to overwhelming Ecuadorian protest over its use of national space. In addition to Manta, in 2004, under President Lucio Gutierrez, Ecuador was accused of having a conciliatory policy toward the United States and Colombia, and supporting Colombia's stronger security policy across the border by increasing border controls and military and police presence in the border region.<sup>51</sup>

For the most part, until 2007, Ecuadorian government policy has been to react to events across the border in Colombia, as well as spillover effects at home, with a policy and discourse of sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-intervention, and non-involvement in the internal affairs of Colombia. Colombia and the US, on the other hand, have requested more involvement of the Ecuadorian state as a counterpart to counterinsurgency operations and drug interdiction efforts in Colombia. Colombia's "democratic security" strategy, with a primary concern for recovering control of territory, has often flouted international borders in pursuit of illegal armed insurgents, requesting cooperation from its neighbours in pursuing such actors. Colombia's security strategy combines military force, including modernization of the armed forces, along with specialized training from the US military, with social programmes. However, while this policy has had success displacing FARC from Colombia's major cities, and demobilizing an important percentage of armed actors, it has driven insurgents deeper into the jungle and often to more remote areas of Colombia, where kidnapping and narco-trafficking operations continue, largely unabated.<sup>52</sup>

Ecuador and Colombia have always had a porous and lively border, called a *frontera viva* in the vernacular; however, by the end of 2006, the nature of the relationship both between Ecuadorian and Colombian people and between their respective governments was changing. Colombian policy continued to disregard Ecuador's insistence on non-intervention and territorial sovereignty on the issues of aerial coca interdictions and incursions. Social problems related to Plan Colombia and the Colombian conflict continued to affect many ordinary Ecuadorians in their daily lives. In Ecuador at the end of 2006, populist leftist leader Rafael Correa won the presidency on a platform of economic relief, political sovereignty, and regional

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<sup>49</sup> Rodas Chaves, G., *El Plan Colombia: análisis de una estrategia neoliberal*, Quito: Abya Yala, 2004, p. 61

<sup>50</sup> Romero, S., Ecuador's President Purging Top Military Leaders over Ties to US Intelligence, *New York Times*, 21 April 2008

<sup>51</sup> Montúfar, pp, 26-8

<sup>52</sup> Aviles, W., *Global Capitalism, Democracy, and Civil-Military Relations in Colombia*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2006, pp. 136-40

integration, showing the majority of Ecuadorians were ready for a change in government and foreign policy.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4.2 Escalation of Events on the Border (2007-Present)

When Rafael Correa took office in early 2007, diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Colombia began to change course from previous administrations as Correa took a harder stance against perceived infringements on national sovereignty. In the years prior to his election there were a number of incidents which generated letters of protest to the Colombian government, mainly spurred on by Colombia's decision to continue aerial spraying of coca close to the Ecuadorian border, and repeated incursions by the Colombian military into Ecuadorian territory, but none degenerated into diplomatic impasse.<sup>54</sup>

The Colombian military has long treated the border zone, including parts of Ecuadorian territory, as a "zone of precaution and threat to security" breaking international conventions of territorial sovereignty, as well as bilateral conventions, to cross Ecuadorian territory in the pursuit of insurgents.<sup>55</sup> Again on 2 November 2007, five Colombian helicopters and aeroplanes flew into Ecuadorian airspace in the community of Yanamaru in the Amazon province of Sucumbíos, 320 km northwest of Quito, in the middle of combat with insurgents. After this event, then Ecuadorian Minister of Defence, Wellington Sandoval, proclaimed that Bogotá does not exercise sovereignty over its border; instead, he said that "Ecuador borders not with Colombia, but with the FARC or the ELN". Sandoval warned that "we will have a frontal combat against all terrorist forces that operate in the whole country".<sup>56</sup> The government of Rafael Correa broke from the traditional government response of sending letters of protest to the Colombian government, asserting that Ecuador will tolerate "no other abuse from Colombia".<sup>57</sup> Although Correa considered Colombia to be a "brother country", he said that "even among siblings, there can also be abuses".<sup>58</sup>

Within this atmosphere, when the Colombian military carried out air strikes, followed by ground attacks, on members of the FARC within Ecuadorian territory on 1 March 2008, Correa's response was unlike that of previous Ecuadorian administrations. The attack, which killed 25 people, including the FARC's second in command, Raúl Reyes, a chief negotiator for the release of FARC hostages and a member of its secretariat, as well as one Ecuadorian FARC member, and three visiting Mexican students, was immediately denounced by Ecuador and other countries in the region. Colombia claimed it was in "hot pursuit" of the armed insurgents, justifying its

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<sup>53</sup> Tamayo G., E., Ecuador escogió la ruta del cambio y la soberanía, *América Latina en Movimiento*, 27 November 2006, <http://alainet.org/active/14701%E2%8C%A9=es> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>54</sup> El país protesta por la incursión en Sucumbíos, *El Comercio* [Quito], 30 March 2007

<sup>55</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung en Colombia, Programa de Cooperación en Seguridad Regional, *Relaciones Ecuador-Colombia: Situación Vecinal Colombo-Ecuatoriana*, Santo Domingo, January 2008, pp. 4-5, <http://www.fescol.org.co> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>56</sup> Ecuador limita al norte con las FARC: Wellington Sandoval, *El Comercio* [Quito], 12 November 2007

<sup>57</sup> Colombia no responderá a últimas declaraciones de Correa, *El Comercio* [Quito], 11 April 2007

<sup>58</sup> Ecuador y Colombia se distancian más, *El Comercio* [Quito], 6 April 2007

crossing over into Ecuadorian territory; however, Correa claimed that most of those killed were asleep and were found in their pyjamas.<sup>59</sup>

A diplomatic crisis between Ecuador and Colombia soon followed, as Ecuador, along with Venezuela, sent troops to the border and cut off diplomatic ties with Colombia. Within Ecuador itself, the event led to major changes in the defence and military. After Correa found out that Ecuadorian intelligence officers had been tracking Franklin Aisalia Molina, the Ecuadorian FARC operative who was killed in the incursion, and sharing information with Colombian forces and US military advisors, but not with the Ecuadorian government, he called for a restructuring of Ecuador's intelligence agencies to weed out CIA involvement. The minister of defence, army chief of intelligence, and army and air force commanders were all dismissed. Colombia's claims that it had found key documents on three laptop computers in the FARC camp, linking both Ecuador and Venezuela to the FARC, have also caused disquiet in the region and internationally. Although the contents of the computers are currently being verified by Interpol, Colombia claims they contain several damning pieces of evidence. This includes information and photos of Ecuadorian security minister Gustavo Larrea meeting with the FARC. The photo that was published of this alleged meeting in Colombian newspapers has since proved to be of the secretary general of Argentina's Communist Party, not Larrea, but Larrea himself has admitted to meeting with the FARC in recent months to negotiate the release of hostages at the request of Correa. According to Colombia, documents also suggest that the FARC donated US\$100,000 to Correa's presidential campaign, and have links with María Augusta Calle, a member of Ecuador's constitutional assembly.<sup>60</sup> Uribe also claims files on one of the computers show that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez donated US\$300 million to the FARC through public contracts and money laundering, and that he received a personal gift of US\$150,000 from the FARC during his imprisonment in 1992 after a failed coup attempt. There are also suggestions that Chávez was willing to help the FARC acquire weapons from international sources.<sup>61</sup> Until the contents of these computers are independently verified, Ecuador and Venezuela urge that the above claims should be considered with scepticism.

### **4.3 Regional Response to Conflict**

As suggested above, Venezuela under the leadership of Hugo Chávez has taken an active part in what many consider to be a bilateral conflict between Ecuador and Colombia, sending 10,000 troops to its own 2,200 km long border with Colombia, and breaking off diplomatic ties with Colombia. Chávez said that Venezuela would engage in war with Colombia if similar incursions were to take place in Venezuelan territory,<sup>62</sup> which, like Ecuador, also has FARC and ELN operatives who cross the border with regularity. The relationship between Colombia and Venezuela, which are major trading partners, was previously cordial; at one point, Chávez even acted as a mediator between the Colombian government and the FARC to secure the release of

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<sup>59</sup> Romero, S., Crisis at Colombia Border Spills into Diplomatic Realm, *International Herald Tribune*, 4 March 2008

<sup>60</sup> Labanca, A., Official: Laptop Reveals Ties to Ecuador, *Miami Herald*, 27 April 2008

<sup>61</sup> De Córdoba, J. and J. Solomon, Chávez Aided Colombia Rebels, Captured Computer Files Show, *Wall Street Journal* [New York], 9 May 2008

<sup>62</sup> Romero, S., Regional Bloc Criticizes Colombia Raid in Ecuador, *New York Times*, 6 March 2008

hostages. Not long after, however, Uribe began to question Chávez's impartiality and terminated his role.

As Colombia has drawn closer to the United States through Plan Colombia and a concerted military and drug interdiction effort, as well as a proposed free trade agreement, Chávez has emerged as leader of the "new left" in Latin America through his "Bolivarian" movement, a social and political movement based on the beliefs of Simón Bolívar, who sought to unify Latin America in the early nineteenth century. Correa and Bolivian President Evo Morales, as well as Fidel Castro, Cuba's former head of state, are seen as key allies in this movement. Colombia and the US have questioned Chávez's stance on the FARC, especially after Chávez held a moment of mourning on national television for Raúl Reyes, who he considered "a good revolutionary".<sup>63</sup> Chávez has also called for the FARC to be recognized as legitimate "belligerent" actors with protections under the Geneva Conventions, instead of as "terrorists", the term favoured by the US and Colombia. However, as the relationship between Colombia and the United States has grown stronger, the role of US foreign policy in Latin American affairs has lost legitimacy in the eyes of other Andean and Latin American governments, causing a cleavage to develop between the two camps. This is reflected in some of the regional reaction to Ecuador and Colombia's diplomatic crisis.

Nicaragua, which has its own historic conflict with Colombia related to ownership of three small Caribbean islands, under President Daniel Ortega protested against Colombia's violation of international law, and broke off diplomatic relations with Colombia following the incursion into Ecuador.<sup>64</sup> Peruvian President Alan García called violations of Ecuador's sovereignty "unacceptable". Chile's President Michelle Bachelet lamented that "Ecuador has been assaulted". The Bolivian Foreign Relations Ministry said violations of national sovereignty are "unjustifiable". Mexican President Felipe Calderón called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Argentina's foreign relations department expressed worry over "what is evidently a violation of the territorial sovereignty of a country in the region". Brazil's presidential envoy Marco Aurelio García said the events in Ecuador have an "influence on regional destabilization" and "non-interference cannot mean indifference".<sup>65</sup>

The above responses show that reaction from Latin America has largely been to condemn Colombia's actions and violations of Ecuador's sovereignty, and to affirm principles of international law. The United States, on the other hand, has supported Colombia's strike against the FARC.<sup>66</sup> Led by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the US proposed a "flexibilization of borders" during recent visits to Chile and Brazil, which would allow the Colombian military to confront groups like the FARC outside of its territorial borders. This proposal was rejected by Brazil as being contrary to Article 21 of the Organization of American States (OAS) Charter, which states that

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<sup>63</sup> World View Divides Andean Neighbours, *BBC News Online*, 3 March 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/7274209.stm> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>64</sup> Reuters, Nicaragua's Ortega Condemns FARC Commander Killing, 2 March 2008

<sup>65</sup> Suggett, J., Latin American Governments Condemn Colombian Attacks, Defend Territorial Sovereignty, *venezuelanalysis.com*, 3 March 2008, <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/3229> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>66</sup> Kraul, C., Colombia Crisis Appears To Be Easing, *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 2008

the territory of a state is inviolable and “it may not be the object, even temporarily, of military occupation or of other measures of force taken by another State, directly or indirectly, on any grounds whatever”.

Brazil, which favours regional cooperation and the development of a regional defence network, has played a key role in diplomatic relations during the crisis, along with the OAS. Analysis in 2003 found that Ecuador only used the OAS sparingly as a foreign policy instrument, missing “important opportunities to enhance its voice through the hemisphere’s principal diplomatic organization”.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Ecuador often preferred to work through the Andean Community and bilateral organizations on regional and binational issues in previous years. However, during the 2008 diplomatic crisis, Ecuador explicitly called on the OAS, and the Rio Group, a 19 member regional body comprised of continental Latin American states, to condemn Colombia’s actions. At an emergency meeting held by the OAS on 4 March 2008, the OAS did not go as far as to “condemn” Colombia’s actions, although it did state that the Colombian incursion violated Ecuadorian sovereignty. It also agreed to conduct a fact-finding mission led by Secretary General José Miguel Insulza later in the month to verify the events that took place during the incursion.<sup>68</sup> At the previously scheduled 7 March 2008 meeting of the Rio Group Summit in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, diplomatic relations between Ecuador, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Colombia were ostensibly restored after Uribe apologized for violating Ecuador’s sovereignty, while condemning the terrorist actions of the FARC, and leaders from all of the countries involved shook hands. The final decision of the Rio Group was to renounce violent or armed solutions to conflict, and to accept Colombia’s apology to Ecuador and commitment never to repeat such an incursion on Ecuadorian territory again.<sup>69</sup>

At the Twentyfifth Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Organization of American States, held on 17 and 18 March 2008, the OAS approved a resolution ratifying the 7 March declaration of the Rio Group Summit. All 34 member countries, with the exception of the United States, approved the resolution, which registered Colombia’s apology for the acts that occurred and assured that such acts will never be repeated again in any circumstance. It reaffirmed the Charter principle that the territory of a state is inviolable.<sup>70</sup> Although Ecuador originally called for the OAS to “condemn” Colombia’s actions, it considered the OAS “rejection” a diplomatic victory.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Hey, p. 201

<sup>68</sup> Organization of American States, OAS Secretary General To Head Commission That Will Propose Formulas for Bringing Ecuador and Colombia Closer Together, Washington, 5 March 2008 (press release), [http://www.oas.org/OASpage/press\\_releases/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-067/08](http://www.oas.org/OASpage/press_releases/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-067/08) [accessed May 2008]

<sup>69</sup> Venezuela, Misión Permanente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela ante la Organización de los Estados Americanos, *Declaración de la XX Cumbre de Grupo de Río Santo Domingo, República Dominicana, 7 March 2008*, <http://www.venezuela-oas.org/Declaraci%C3%B3ndelaXXCumbredeGrupodeR%C3%ADo.htm> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>70</sup> Kraul.

<sup>71</sup> MercoPress, Ecuador and Colombia Express Satisfaction with OAS Resolution, 18 March 2008, <http://www.mercopress.com/vernoticia.do?id=12917&formato=html> [accessed May 2008]

Although Correa and Uribe shook hands at the Rio Group summit in early March, Correa has since refused to restore diplomatic relations with Colombia. According to María Isabel Salvador, Ecuador's foreign minister, "what Colombia did on March 1 has totally shattered the trust that Ecuador placed in Colombia, and it's now Colombia's turn to demonstrate that his [President Uribe's] word is valid and regain the trust that has been lost".<sup>72</sup>

## 5 Outlook and Forecast for the Border Region

### 5.1 Economic Effects

As major trading partners, Colombia and Venezuela have a total of US\$5 billion in bilateral trade; Ecuador and Colombia, meanwhile, have US\$2 billion in trade.<sup>73</sup> However, cross-border flows of commerce were immediately affected during the heart of the diplomatic crisis, as the economic exchange upon which many border populations depend for their livelihoods was suspended in certain key areas in order to stop contraband and tighten controls at borders. In Venezuela, only perishable food items were allowed to cross the border from Colombia until diplomatic relations with Colombia were restored,<sup>74</sup> while the Ecuadorian provinces of Carchi and Sucumbíos have been affected by recent economic controls imposed on the transit of goods such as rice, flour, milk, and oil across the border to Colombia.<sup>75</sup> Small businesspeople in Colombia often cross the border to purchase these products in Ecuador to sell for a small profit back in Colombia; many are unable to do so under the new state policy, which is officially aimed at stopping contraband, but also includes products which are not considered as "protected" under Ecuadorian law. However, these controls also hurt businesses in Ecuador that depend on Colombian customers, and affect historic cross border relationships of exchange.

In addition to these more immediate effects from the diplomatic crisis, there are also long-term issues of structural poverty that continue to affect populations on both sides of the Ecuador-Colombia border. In fact, recent findings of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization indicate that rising food prices worldwide are threatening to cause social unrest among the poorest and most vulnerable populations; Ecuador is one of the Latin American sites most at risk.<sup>76</sup> Critics have pointed out that the diplomatic crisis between Ecuador and Colombia has served to obscure other, more important issue, that are often the priority of Ecuadorian citizens rather than the Ecuadorian government, such as unemployment, poverty, and food prices.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Contreras, J., Diplomatic Dances: Ecuador's Foreign Minister Discusses the Regional Standoff over Colombia's Cross-border Raid on the FARC, *Newsweek*, 25 March 2008, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/128972/> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>73</sup> Romero, Regional Bloc

<sup>74</sup> Reuters, Venezuela-Colombia Trade Sputters amid Regional Row, 5 March 2008

<sup>75</sup> En Tulcán se restringe la venta de productos a los colombianos, *El Comercio* [Quito], 24 April 2008

<sup>76</sup> United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, Pressing Global and Regional Issues: Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative, [paper presented at the] Thirtieth Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean, Brasilia, Brazil, 14-18 April 2008, <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/013/k1480e.pdf> [accessed May 2008], p. 5

<sup>77</sup> Reuters, Ecuador's Correa Facing Ire over Colombia Dispute, 23 April 2008

A renewed focus on the CAN's border integration zone between Ecuador and Colombia may be useful to revitalize cross-border relationships between people and governments, and to address the needs of Ecuador's populations that are most vulnerable to food shortages and social conflict. However, border economies require, at least to some extent, the cooperation of the governments of each country involved to lower trade restrictions and enable free or freer transit across borders. The diplomatic impasse between Ecuador and Colombia will make both of these issues more difficult.

## 5.2 Political Effects

The suggestion that the diplomatic impasse between Ecuador and Colombia will escalate into a Latin America-wide war at this point is unlikely. However, the growing cleavages between on the one hand Colombia and the United States and on the other the rest of the Andean region are becoming more important, and may forestall unity and cooperation in the area. According to the *Andes 2020* report, the severity of Colombia's internal conflict, combined with its size, importance in the narcotics trade, economic influence, and the borders it shares with three other Andean states, means that success in moving the country toward peace could shore up democracy and security in the entire region.<sup>78</sup> This suggests that Colombia's involvement in regional organizations and initiatives in the future is necessary, making the full restoration of diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Colombia an important goal.

In addition to political breakdowns between Ecuador and Colombia, the role of Venezuela as a potentially destabilizing force in the future of the Andean region has been identified as a threat.<sup>79</sup> The Colombian and US governments are using evidence from the seized FARC laptop computers, which has yet to be independently verified, to back up their argument that Venezuela is a supporter of terrorists and a dangerous force in the region. While Ecuador and Bolivia are important strategic allies to Venezuela, other countries in the region have made a point of distancing themselves from Chavez's rhetoric and action on the Colombia issue, minimizing the threat of a more regionalized conflict between Venezuela and its supporters and Colombia.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps more likely than the possibility of regional conflict, the actions of the OAS, the Rio Group, and to a certain extent the Brazilian government, have suggested an important future role of regional organizations and states in maintaining hemispheric security and peaceful diplomatic relations in Latin America. This is an important result for an area that has largely been subject to US and international mediation in disputes in the past.

Despite the importance of regional bodies in brokering official reconciliation between Ecuador and Colombia, overcoming the diplomatic impasse requires political will and cooperation on a bilateral, binational, cross-border level. While diplomatic relations

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<sup>78</sup> Christman, D.W., J.G. Heimann and J. Sweig, *Andes 2020: A New Strategy for the Challenges of Colombia and the Region, Report of an Independent Commission Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations Center for Preventive Action*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2004, p. 3

<sup>79</sup> The War Behind the Insults, *The Economist*, 6 March 2008; De Córdoba. and Solomon

<sup>80</sup> Peace in Our Time, on the Box, *The Economist*, 13 March 2008

between Ecuador and Colombia still have not been fully restored, neither are they currently at breaking point. On the positive side, Ecuador's and Colombia's amicable historical relationship may prove important in brokering future diplomatic peace. The restoration of longstanding political ties through the CVICE and Combifron could prove an important first step in renewing historical ties between the two governments should Ecuador agree to reinstate both commissions. A revival of the goals and outlook of the CAN's border integration zones may also help to overcome the current diplomatic problems and provide a broader perspective for cross-border difficulties.

### 5.3 Social Effects

There is a fear that government attention following the diplomatic crisis will focus on security and militarization to the exclusion of a long-term social development strategy for the border region that addresses the existing and serious deficits in healthcare, education, sanitation facilities, and other basic services and infrastructure on the border. As Julia Sweig recently testified to a US House of Representatives Subcommittee Hearing on the Crisis in the Andes, shared problems in the border region, which include poverty, inequality, weak state institutions, corruption, ethnic cleavages, and porous borders, present the perfect breeding ground for FARC, ELN, and paramilitary presence and the cultivation of coca.<sup>81</sup> Ongoing diplomatic impasse between Ecuador and Colombia threatens to further destabilize the relations between and among border populations, and to cause further humanitarian crisis among refugees, displaced persons, and other vulnerable populations.

Cesár Montúfar notes how Ecuadorians' image of Colombians has changed in recent years "shifting from a perception of a naturally ingenious and hard-working people to a stereotype of dangerous individuals associated with illegal activities and a source of insecurity in the country".<sup>82</sup> Indeed, many Ecuadorians have begun to associate Colombians with insecurity, terrorism, narcotrafficking, and prostitution, losing previous feelings of solidarity with them.<sup>83</sup> There is fear that Colombian refugees and displaced persons will face increased xenophobia and social exclusion in Ecuadorian society as a result of the diplomatic crisis. Although the Ecuadorian government has said their conflict is with the Colombian government and not the Colombian people, the message may not filter down to all levels of society. The recent lynching of two Colombians (one of whom had refugee status in Ecuador) in the coastal province of Manabí in Ecuador after an assault and murder of a local businessman attests to rising levels of xenophobia and violence against Colombians in Ecuador.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to the possible mistreatment of existing Colombian refugees in Ecuador, there is the threat that Colombia's ongoing military efforts against the FARC will create further situations of insecurity and violence, and lead to more people seeking refuge across the border in Ecuador. Many of these potential refugees are especially

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<sup>81</sup> United States, Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, *Crisis in the Andes: Testimony by Julia E. Sweig*, Washington, 10 April 2008, <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/swe041008.htm> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>82</sup> Montúfar, p. 24

<sup>83</sup> Entrevista con Gardenia Chávez: 'En Ecuador hay xenofobia contra el colombiano', *El Comercio* [Quito], 25 April 2008

<sup>84</sup> Gobierno rechaza racismo y xenofobia: Fernando Bustamante, *El Comercio* [Quito], 16 April 2008



at-risk populations. According to a recent press release by the TransAfrica Forum, out of the three million already displaced by conflict in Colombia, almost one million are Afro-Colombians.<sup>85</sup> Afro-descendants in Colombia, and indeed across the border in Ecuador, are often victims of endemic racism, and frequently present lower indices for development as compared to other populations.<sup>86</sup> Indigenous peoples, women, and children, are also particularly vulnerable populations.

Ecuador's increasingly militarized border could also lead to further internal displacement of Ecuadorians who, without secure land titles in many cases, may find that they have lost their livelihoods if and when they choose to return home. There is also a strong possibility that the increased militarization of the border could further alienate and harm existing FARC support networks among Ecuadorian populations in the border region. According to Ecuadorian international relations expert Carlos Espinosa:

The Ecuadorian army is likely to intensify its control of the border to exclude FARC. That may lead it to pressure FARC's support networks among the border population...Human rights groups on the border would probably not raise an outcry if there is more pressure on informants, since they tend to focus on Colombia's actions more than on the behaviour of the Ecuadorian military.<sup>87</sup>

There is thus the possibility that these internal effects for Ecuadorians could be obscured when looking at broader issues of migration from Colombia. However, internal displacement in Ecuador should be a growing concern and subject of study for the Ecuadorian state and international observers, along with the possibilities of further external displacement, and increased xenophobia within Ecuador.

## 6 Conclusions

There is a danger that the current political unrest between Ecuador and Colombia could obscure serious humanitarian issues, and that the cooperation necessary to maintain social projects and economic ties on the border will continue to break down, leaving border populations more susceptible to violence, displacement, and the coca economy. Cross-border ties between friends, relatives, and communities in many cases have been severed by government restrictions on border crossings and flows of commerce. While the threat of a regionalized war is at this point minimal, without the political will to maintain key connections on the border, and to make sure that social protections are in place for the most vulnerable inhabitants of the region, the diplomatic conflict between Ecuador and Colombia threatens to degenerate into a more serious humanitarian situation on the border.

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<sup>85</sup> TransAfrica Forum, Transafrica Forum Urges the Colombian Government To End Cross-border Military Attacks and Say No to Free Trade Agreement, Washington, 5 March 2008 (press release), [http://www.transafricaforum.org/documents/ENDCOLOMBIASMILITARYATTACKS\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.transafricaforum.org/documents/ENDCOLOMBIASMILITARYATTACKS_2_.pdf) [accessed May 2008]

<sup>86</sup> Saavedra, L.A., Nowhere To Run, *Latinamerica Press*, 27 April 2008, <http://www.latinamericapress.org/article.asp?IssCode=&lanCode=1&artCode=4656> [accessed May 2008]

<sup>87</sup> C. Espinosa, Coordinator of International Relations, Universidad San Francisco de Quito. E-mail interview, 24 April 2008

In general, there is a need for sustained attention to the social consequences of the war in Colombia, and the direct connections between military actions, FARC and paramilitary incursions, and displacements – including those that are internal to Colombia, those that cross the border into Ecuador, as well as the more obscure issue of internal displacement within Ecuador itself. Priority needs to be given to the most vulnerable groups affected by the conflict, including Afro-descendants, indigenous communities, women, and children, who are often particularly distanced from the state socially, politically, and economically. There also needs to be the diplomatic will to maintain cross-border flows and to make sure the conflict does not degenerate any further to a personal level between Ecuadorian and Colombian civilians, and create more xenophobic and nationalist backlash against refugees and other migrants who are seeking entry into Ecuador. Development projects on the border, especially those social development efforts geared at helping at risk populations, in many cases require or would benefit from more cross-border cooperation and coordination. However, Colombia's focus on military, security, and drug interdiction goals to the exclusion of social projects, as well as Ecuador's desire not to be involved in what it views as Colombia's "internal problems" create an atmosphere of disunion on the border, and the failure of social projects to cooperate regionally and across the border on issues that are often very similar for both Ecuador and Colombia.

Ecuador and Colombia need to find a middle ground to overcome their diplomatic crisis. This needs to involve, at least to some degree, Colombia's respect for Ecuador's territorial sovereignty, and Ecuador's recognition that increasingly regionalized problems require broader commitments and engagement on the part of the Ecuadorian state, at minimum in terms of social and economic effects for vulnerable border populations, rather than a non-interventionist dialogue. Only through the reinstatement of diplomatic relations, and concerted bilateral and regional efforts to attenuate the effects of conflict on the most at-risk border populations, will further deterioration of the humanitarian situation on the border be averted.

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