

LATEST TRENDS

President Petro's "total peace" initiative looks increasingly shaky. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident faction known as EMC splintered, with some sub-factions leaving talks with the government while others stayed at the table, plunging the negotiations into uncertainty. Meanwhile, Bogotá's discussions with the National Liberation Army (ELN) about a six-point peace agenda remain deadlocked and vulnerable to collapse.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

1 The EMC's break-up could fuel more violence along the Pacific coast

EMC splinters that walked away from talks will likely stage more attacks on police, military and civil institutions, including by using car bombs and other asymmetric means.

Military operations against EMC fronts now outside the talks will likely intensify.

Fighting among rival FARC dissident groups, including EMC sub-factions as well as the Segunda Marquetalia, could worsen. Tensions are high in Guaviare, Nariño, Valle de Cauca, Huila, Putumayo and Caquetá departments and could spread into Tolima and Quindío as well.

Government negotiations with the EMC sub-factions that chose to continue talks look set to continue but are increasingly precarious.

TO WATCH Growing instability in the Pacific coast and southern Amazon regions, which are home to the EMC's richest and most belligerent blocs; slow, easily reversed progress at talks with remaining factions.

Potential Consequences

Stepped-up hostilities between EMC sub-factions and the military, and among rival sub-factions, risk growing instability and harm to civilians caught in the crossfire.

Factions outside the talks are hitting military and civilian targets more often and tightening their social control of rural communities. They could mount high-profile attacks that cause numerous civilian casualties.

2 Negotiations with the ELN are vulnerable to collapse

The ELN's central command will likely keep participating in peace talks; but it will be wary of attack by other armed groups, likely affecting its approach to talks.

Some local ELN branches may consider separating from the central command in hopes of holding their own discussions with authorities (as in the case of the local Front Comuneros del Sur in Nariño, which left in May).

The government hopes to encounter a stronger ELN consensus platform for peace negotiations, now that the insurgency has completed its internal VI National Conference (to which the government was not invited).

TO WATCH Progress of the Nariño dialogue between authorities and local armed groups including the Comuneros del Sur; ELN's targeting of civilians.

Potential Consequences

Despite pledging to stop attacking civilians, the ELN has signalled its intention to restart kidnapping for ransom. It will also likely remain linked to other abuses, including armed strikes, social control, restrictions on mobility and extortion.

Fragmentation of armed groups could accelerate throughout Colombia, including within the EMC and ELN. The fracturing adds to a confused situation for civilians, who must often pay protection money to several actors and are at risk of harm if they run afoul of any group's attempt to impose social control in their community.

3 Gaitanista Army of Colombia (EGC) expansion threatens broader peace efforts

The armed criminal group EGC (previously Self-Defence Gaitanista Forces of Colombia), which remains outside the scope of talks, will likely keep positioning fighters for further expansion into ELN and EMC territory.

To rein in the EGC, security forces will likely work harder to capture its leaders, seize drug shipments and attack its tactical positions

TO WATCH EGC expansion into drug smuggling corridors along the Pacific coast; gold mining areas in Bolívar, Antioquia and Cesar; and possibly Catatumbo in Norte de Santander, home to the most coca crops, coal mines, palm oil production in the country and migrant crossings on the Colombia-Venezuela border.

Potential Consequences

Expansion into these areas would allow the EGC to dominate the corridor running from the Venezuelan border across the Atlantic coast and down to the Pacific coast, an enormous strategic prize. If it succeeds, it could influence ELN and EMC calculations about whether to make disarmament agreements with the government.

Incursions into these areas will likely fuel displacement and/or restrict the movement of thousands of civilians.



Flashpoint

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