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COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA: A TENSE RELATIONSHIP HAS HOPES FOR COOPERATION

Sarah Pearce



Introduction

The deposition of King Ferdinand VII and the disappearance of the Spanish monarchy in 1808 provided the necessary momentum for Venezuelan-born Simón Bolívar to lead the Spanish colonies in South America to pursue independence. In order to have a strong unified force to fight against Spain, Bolívar united present-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama under a single nation called Gran Colombia in 1819. Although Bolívar hoped that Gran Colombia would be maintained after the independence movement, difficulties soon emerged that caused Venezuela to declare independence in 1831. Ever since the dissolution of Bolívar's Gran Colombia, Colombia and Venezuela have experienced tensions that have led them to the brink of war.

Immediately following the dissolution of Gran Colombia in 1831, conflict originated between Colombia and Venezuela over land and maritime boundaries and border disputes. These

territorial conflicts continued into the 1980s, but the nature of tensions between Colombia and Venezuela changed with the election of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in 1998. Chávez's ambitious plan of becoming the leader of a unified Latin American region (similar to Bolívar's Gran Colombia) caused him to support Colombia's most prominent guerilla group, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). Chávez supported the FARC because they considered themselves followers of Simón Bolívar, the original leader of the independence and unification movements in South America. However, his support for the FARC's activities created intense security concerns within Colombia and along the Colombia/Venezuela border. In addition, Chávez's goal of a united Latin America conflicted with Colombia's alliance with the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Colombia allowed the United States to set up military bases in its territory in order to help fight guerilla and drug activity, a move Chávez considered a violation

of Venezuelan sovereignty that would inhibit his plans of a united region of solely Latin American countries. These conflicts led to a freeze in diplomatic relations and an arms race that caused preparations for war.

In this article, I examine the shared history of Colombia and Venezuela under Gran Colombia as groundwork for analyzing both the historical tensions and current conflicts that have arisen since the dissolution of Gran Colombia in 1831. Despite the historical territorial disputes and the tensions emerging after the election of President Chávez in 1998, I claim that it is unlikely that war will erupt between Colombia and Venezuela. Both countries have recently begun to realize the benefits of cooperation, and although tensions may remain due to domestic political concerns, cooperation will prevent any permanent rupture of relations.

The Shared History of Colombia and Venezuela

The relationship between Colombia and Venezuela dates back to Spanish explorations of the 1500s. With the goal of improving Spain's influence over its colonies in South America, the Bourbon regime created the New Kingdom of Granada in 1717, combining present-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama. However, the Venezuelan-born General Simón Bolívar recognized Spain's weakness following the deposition of King Ferdinand VII in 1808 as a ripe time to lead an independence movement throughout all of South America. After failed attempts to liberate his home territory of Venezuela in the early 1800s, Bolívar sought a military alliance between Venezuela's neighboring territories that would be similar to the New Kingdom of Granada established by the Bourbon regime. He believed that the independence of one territory depended on the liberation of another, such that joining the territories of Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama into a military alliance was necessary to ending Spanish rule (Safford and Palacios, pp. 56, 105). Bolívar successfully unified the territories in 1819, calling it Gran Colombia. This union, believed by Bolívar to be a crucial step in fighting for independence, would also provide him with a large enough territory to successfully defend against future foreign invasions.

From the initial creation of Gran Colombia, however, Bolívar maintained an attitude of doubt about its long-term survival (Collier, p. 59). Gran Colombia was successful in liberating South American territories from Spanish colonial rule, and both Venezuelan and Colombian army camps answered to Bolívar as the Supreme Commander of both armies during battle. However, after independence was achieved, conflicts of representation and national identity replaced the militaristic unity previously felt during the struggle for independence (Bushnell, p. 50). For example, competition occurred soon after independence between the lawyers in Colombia and the military officials in Venezuela over who would have the authority to rule Gran Colombia. In Colombia, the lawyers and legislators resented the burden of the violent and dominant Venezuelan military on the national budget, while the Venezuelan military officials criticized the Colombian lawyers and legislators for enjoying the fruits of the military's hard work (Safford and Palacios, pp. 115–16). In addition, the heterogeneous masses that existed within each territory of Gran Colombia, such as the *pardos*¹ of Venezuela and the *mestizos* of Colombia, made the formation of a single Gran Colombian “national identity” impossible, because each population found its nationality within its home country (Lynch, pp. 219–20). As Bolívar admitted, “The south hates the north, the coast hates the highlands, Venezuela hates Cundinamarca”² (Lynch, p. 218). This obvious lack of cohesion within the republic of Gran Colombia proved a serious barrier to its survival.

Perhaps the most important division between Colombia and Venezuela, however,

¹Pardo is another term for mulatto, or of mixed white and black descent. This is in contrast to mestizo, which refers to mixed white and Indian descent (Lynch, p. 342). The differences of ethnicity between these groups created difficulty in combining them to form a single national origin or national identity.

²Cundinamarca is one of the 32 departments plus the Capital District by which Colombia is organized. Cundinamarca surrounds the Capital District, which contains Colombia's capital, Bogotá. The reference to Cundinamarca in Simón Bolívar's quote refers to the capital region in Bogotá that ruled over all of Gran Colombia during its existence from 1819 to 1830.

stemmed from the placement of the capital of Gran Colombia in Bogotá, Colombia. The sheer size of Gran Colombia made Bogotá nearly inaccessible to Venezuela, which robbed Venezuelans of adequate physical representation in the capital. In addition, the constitution drafted by Simón Bolívar in 1821 denied individual territories from exercising discretionary power over internal affairs, requiring that all decisions be referred to Bogotá. Venezuelans soon came to regard Colombian politicians as foreign masters and themselves a colony, because Bogotá was the center of offices and opportunities for both the bureaucracy and public works programs (Lynch, p. 220). It was not long until José Antonio Páez, commander-general of Venezuela, began to receive support for his open resentment of Gran Colombia's political structure. Despite Bolívar's desperate attempts to maintain Gran Colombia, Páez used his support within Venezuela to lead a separatist movement, culminating with Venezuela's secession from Gran Colombia in 1831 (Safford and Palacios, pp. 117–29; Lynch, pp. 226–30).

The dissolution of Gran Colombia created immediate challenges for the previously united territories. One of the greatest challenges was the establishment of territorial boundaries (Safford and Palacios, p. 132). Because national identity had been established within each territory as opposed to a united Gran Colombian identity, questions of territorial boundaries also inherited a struggle for power and pride within the region. Venezuela was especially eager to reassert itself in the region because the people in Venezuela, in particular the military, felt as though they had been robbed of representation under the central government of Gran Colombia. Venezuela and Colombia competed over three primary territorial disagreements following the breakup of Gran Colombia: recovering territory lost by Venezuela during a series of treaties signed after the dissolution of Gran Colombia, maritime boundary disputes, and illegal activity along the shared borders between Colombia and Venezuela (Child, 1985, p. 59). These territorial disputes continued into the 1980s, as both countries continued to compete for power and influence in the region.

Territorial Conflicts

Recovery of Lost Territory

Territorial conflicts were common in South American countries during the colonial times, when boundaries were loosely defined in the core regions because European settlers were more attracted to peripheral coastal lands. As a result, when South American colonies began fighting for independence, confusion quickly arose over the loosely defined borders in the core of the country (Child, 1985, p. 9). The countries united under Gran Colombia were particularly affected by these loosely defined borders, as independence was won when Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama were considered one territory. The breakup of Gran Colombia, therefore, created great uncertainty over boundaries and initiated tensions between Colombia and Venezuela.

After declaring independence from Gran Colombia, both Venezuela and Colombia sought to ease the ambiguity over territorial borders with the Treaty of Pombo-Michelena in 1833. While the treaty was ratified by Colombia, Venezuela refused to sign it, regarding the provisions of the treaty as an unacceptable loss of territory (Anderson). The two countries then requested assistance from King Alfonso XII of Spain in 1881, and an arbitration agreement was created in 1891 that primarily addressed unsettled boundaries in the Guajira Peninsula (the most northern tip of South America [Figure 1], located in northern Colombia and northwestern Venezuela, which extends from the Gulf of Venezuela and from the Caribbean). Colombia and Venezuela agreed to a joint commission to supervise the execution of the arbitration made by the Spanish Crown, but inaccurate maps and difficulty in locating the physical designations of the boundary lines led both countries to reject the treaty (Anderson). Colombia and Venezuela then enlisted the help of the Swiss Council in 1916, which created a final arbitration in 1932 that upheld the Spanish Crown's original agreement.

While the boundaries between Colombia and Venezuela were lawfully determined by the Swiss Council's arbitration in 1932, domestic pressure from groups and leaders in Venezuela pushed for an extension of

Figure 1

Guajira Peninsula and the Gulf of Venezuela



Source: Briceño as reproduced in Anderson and ESRI World Countries 2011 (with special thanks to Scott Rutzmoser, Lehigh University).

Venezuela's boundaries. For example, in his 1980 address to the Venezuelan Congress, President Luis Herrera Campíns pledged to recover territory that was lost in the 1932 arbitration (Ewell, p. 295). In addition, Venezuelan military officials, such as Major Pérez Tenreiro and López Sánchez, also spoke out in the 1980s about the recovery of lost territory. Both of these military officials referred to the power and prestige that Venezuela enjoyed under the leadership of Simón Bolívar to aggressively urge Venezuela to gain back territory that had been given to Colombia during the 1932 arbitration. The definition of territorial boundaries continued to penetrate Venezuelan politics in the last decades of the twentieth century, which created hostility and competition between Colombia and Venezuela (Ewell, pp. 307–8).

Maritime Boundaries

The second territorial tension between Colombia and Venezuela originating from the dissolution of Gran Colombia in 1831 was disputes over maritime boundaries and the later importance of securing energy resources from the Gulf of Venezuela. Located at the northernmost frontier between Colombia and Venezuela, the boundaries of the Gulf were supposedly settled in the 1941 Treaty on Border Demarcation and Navigation of Common Rivers

(see Figure 1). However, issues, such as sub-soil rights and extensions of territory, were of little concern in the 1940s, as the potential for petroleum reserves had yet to be discovered in the area at that time. Despite lack of concern for resources, Venezuela still felt that the treaty was overly generous to Colombia and encroached on Venezuelan sovereignty, provoking the Colombian foreign ministry to respond in 1952 by renouncing all claims to the islands in the Gulf in order to appease Venezuela's complaints. However, by 1965, oil companies from the United States had requested concessions in order to explore the Gulf of Venezuela, igniting an interest by both Colombia and Venezuela to reconsider the "delimitation of the marine and submarine areas" between the two countries (Birken). After numerous violent incidents by both countries to exercise sovereignty in the Gulf, it became clear that the struggle for oil resources in the area would cause a longer and more serious competition. The nationalization of the Venezuelan oil industry in 1976 placed even greater importance on Venezuela's ability to secure its sovereignty in the Gulf, as its growing dependence on oil revenues required a secure supply of resources (Bell et al., p. 362). Maritime boundary disputes between Colombia and Venezuela over sovereignty of the Gulf of Venezuela have gone unresolved and continue to cause competition between the two countries.

Development of Frontier Regions

While the intensity of some conflicts on the borders between South American countries is minimal, because these areas are empty and unpopulated, the development and growth of the frontier between Colombia and Venezuela have caused considerable tension. The indigenous people who settled in Colombia's frontier regions bordering Venezuela numbered around 23,000 by 1930. Although this population accounted for less than one percent of Colombia's total population of close to eight million, the interaction with the Venezuelan people bordering this region was significant. Colombia's frontier regions were physically isolated from their government and city center by the Andean mountains, which meant that the Venezuelan people living on the border of the Colombian frontier exerted more influence over these regions than did the Colombian government. For example, Venezuelans living on the frontier, who established Arauca City in Colombia in the late eighteenth century and promoted the development of cattle ranching and commerce, threatened public order with the flow of Venezuelan refugees and fugitives into the Colombian frontier during Venezuela's civil wars and repressive regime of Juan Vicente Gómez in the first quarter of the twentieth century (Rausch, pp. 128–34). The free flow of people and livestock across the Colombia/Venezuela border eventually led to activities, such as illegal immigration, smuggling, and guerilla activity in the twentieth century, all of which have increased tension between Colombia and Venezuela.

Illegal immigration by Colombian citizens into Venezuela saw its peak in the 1970s, when Venezuela was experiencing an economic boom due to rising oil prices. It is estimated that by the end of the 1970s, 1.5 million undocumented Colombians lived and worked illegally in Venezuela (Child, 1985, p. 154). While Venezuela was experiencing economic growth and a higher standard of living than Colombia in the 1970s, the economic crisis of the 1980s caused xenophobic feelings towards the Colombian immigrants in Venezuela and created hostility between the Colombian and Venezuelan governments. In addition, Colombian guerillas have been responsible for causing tensions between Colombia and Venezuela along the border regions. Since the 1980s, kidnapping and drug

trafficking have become attractive methods by which Colombian guerilla groups earn money. Aside from drugs, other items, such as gasoline, food, and arms, are also smuggled between the border regions both by guerilla groups and residents of the border regions ("Venezuela/Colombia: Border Tensions"). These activities are serious threats to the security of both Colombia and Venezuela and have aggravated present-day relations between them.

Beginnings of the U.S. Relationship with Latin America

In addition to territorial disputes between Colombia and Venezuela, ideological differences began to emerge over the role of the United States in South America. Simón Bolívar's creation of a military union with Gran Colombia in 1819 first ignited ideas about a mutual defense system involving the rest of the hemisphere. Efforts by Bolívar at the 1826 Congress of Panama to unite all Latin American countries into a collective security organization began to spark interest from the United States. Inviting Mexico, Central and South America, Haiti, and Santo Domingo to a conference in Washington in 1889, the United States laid the groundwork for an Inter-American Military System (IAMS). A series of conferences and treaties followed, establishing political and military security systems between the United States and Latin America, such as the Rio Treaty in 1947 and the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1948 (Child, 1980).

Despite the creation of the IAMS, the reluctance of Latin American countries to join the system was detected as early as the Lima Conference held in 1938. Although Argentina was the biggest opponent, many other Latin American countries were concerned about an intervention by the United States that could "open the door to constantly expanding U.S. penetration into their [Latin American] affairs" (Child, 1980, p. 22), which came true during the U.S. military interventions in Panama and Haiti of the last decade of the twentieth century (Gott, p. 185). Furthermore, problems were identified immediately after the creation of the IAMS, as the United States was either unable or unwilling to supply adequate weapons to Latin America. For example, while the Lend-Lease Act of

1941 provided the legal mechanism for the United States to provide weapons, the practical needs of the U.S. military prevented it from offering an adequate supply of weapons to Latin America.³ Furthermore, although the Inter-American Military Cooperation Act of 1946–1947 permitted the United States to sell surplus weapons to Latin America throughout the interim period of 1948, the volume and types of weapons came nowhere near what was expected. These incidents left Latin American leaders hesitant to join a security alliance with the United States (Child, 1980, pp. 34, 95). Loss of confidence in the United States came to a head in the early 1980s, when the OAS failed in its peace-keeping responsibilities during the 1982 Falklands War, when the United States sided with Great Britain over Argentina in that dispute. After the Falklands War, Venezuelan military officers proposed the idea of moving the Inter-American Defense Board from Washington, D.C., to the capital of Venezuela, Caracas, in order to decrease U.S. influence in the area (Child, 1985, pp. 10–12). This proposal highlighted Venezuela's distrust of U.S. influence in Latin America and would be the origin of future tensions between Venezuela and Colombia, as Colombia has recently allowed the United States to have a greater presence in Latin America through Plan Colombia and the Defense Cooperation Agreement (discussed later).

Tensions at the Turn of the Century

Although territorial conflicts shaped the relationship between Colombia and Venezuela throughout the twentieth century, the nature of conflict changed and heightened with the election of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in 1998 and his Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement goals. Chávez began his campaign for a Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement as a polit-

ical cell among military officials in the 1980s, in which he identified himself with Simón Bolívar to garner support for a united Latin America. Bolívar had attempted such unification during the 1826 Congress of Panama, but the dissolution of Gran Colombia and Bolívar's death destroyed this vision. Chávez inherited Bolívar's dream more than a century later and received enough support for his Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement to win the presidential election in 1998. His goal was to place Venezuela's own city center of Caracas at the heart of a united continent (Gott, p. 13). He pushed for Venezuela to take the lead on all issues of integration: establishing economic integration by creating a Latin American currency and solidifying political integration by convening a *congreso anfictionico*, a congress of all Bolivarian states, in Venezuela's capital of Caracas (Gott, pp. 184, 189). Chávez also used Bolívar's name to pursue additional policies, such as integrating the armed forces into society through a plan called "Plan Bolívar 2000" and proposing to change Venezuela's official name to the "Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela" (Gott, p. 143). However, the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement created tensions between Colombia and Venezuela in two major areas: Chávez's support of Colombia's most powerful guerilla movement, the FARC, and Chávez's opposition to Colombia's relationship with the United States.

Role of the FARC in Creating Tensions

The FARC was founded in 1966 by Communist Party leader Manuel Marulanda, but its roots can be traced as far back as the 1930s. Regional armed movements were first formed by peasants in the Colombian countryside as a response to the harsh working conditions imposed on them by the coffee plantation owners in the 1920s and 1930s (Vargas). These movements developed into self-defense organizations with leftist roots during the period of *La Violencia*,⁴ as peasants formed armed units in order to flee from political violence ("FARC"). The Communist Party was able to consolidate the armed peasants and incorporate guerilla activity into the self-defense units to create the FARC in 1966. The initial intentions of the

³The major priorities of the United States during the early 1940s were to offer Lend-Lease aid to Britain and to supply itself with adequate military weapons. These priorities became especially acute in 1941 just after Pearl Harbor, as the U.S. War Department advised that "the great demands for military equipment resulting from Japan's attacks have made it practically impossible to find anything [weapons] for the immediate or even reasonably prompt delivery to Latin American Republics" (Child, 1980, p. 34).

FARC were to use the support base of the peasants to seize political power. In 1984 the FARC created a political party, the Unión Patriótica, with the hopes of creating a successful leftist party within the government. By “combining various forms of struggle,” the FARC used legal political activity in its creation of the Unión Patriótica but also employed illegal activity, such as taxing farmers involved in the drug trade and kidnapping citizens and government officials for ransom (Vargas). Guerilla activity reached its peak in the 1990s while FARC’s political power waned, causing it to resort solely to violence and illegal activity. However, since the turn of the century, the Colombian government has been open to negotiating with the FARC and employing the help of international actors, such as the United States, which has brought about a decline in the violence caused by guerilla activity in Colombia (“FARC”; Vargas).

One major inhibiting factor to ending the security threat posed by the FARC came from Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez. From its formation in 1966, the FARC has described itself as a Bolivarian movement after the visions of Simón Bolívar (supporting Bolívar’s vision of a united Latin America). Chávez saw a formidable political ally in the FARC, because its successful incorporation into the Colombian government could have made Chávez’s dream of re-creating a united Latin America (such as Gran Colombia) a reality. Chávez supported the FARC’s activities by offering safe havens in Venezuela for its members and seeking peace negotiations with the guerillas (Gott, p. 193). His support of the FARC has caused a great deal of tension between Colombia and Venezuela, particularly during Colombian President Álvaro Uribe’s presidency (2002–2008).

Uribe used a confrontational approach in outwardly accusing Chávez of harboring FARC

rebels and allowing them to freely cross the border into Venezuela. In both 2005 and 2007, disputes over the FARC angered Chávez, causing him to pull Venezuela’s ambassador out of Colombia and to categorize Venezuela’s relationship with Colombia as a “most serious” crisis (Tullos). On March 1, 2008, after presenting evidence to the OAS that Chávez had been aiding the FARC, President Uribe ordered an attack in Ecuador to capture the FARC’s second in command, Luis Edgar Silva or “Raúl Reyes” (“Colombia/Venezuela Politics . . .”). This incident uncovered evidence that Silva had been previously supported by the Venezuelan government, which again angered Chávez and caused him to temporarily cut diplomatic ties with Colombia. Chávez even suspended trade relations and prepared for war by ordering troops to the Colombia/Venezuela border as a result of the dispute in Ecuador (“United States Congress . . .,” p. 2). These examples reveal that Chávez’s support of the FARC in his quest to become a regional leader not only has undermined Colombia’s interest in increasing national security but also ruptured diplomatic relations between the countries.

Tensions Arising from Colombia’s Alliance with the United States

As discussed previously, Venezuelan leaders began losing trust in U.S. involvement in Latin American affairs as early as the creation of the IAMS in the 1890s. This loss of confidence continued into the twenty-first century, when Chávez was especially wary of U.S. involvement in Latin American affairs. He claimed that U.S. involvement thwarted his Bolivarian mission of a purely Latin American unity with Venezuela as its most prominent actor. To eliminate the United States in Latin American affairs, Chávez proposed to the Andean Parliament in November 1999 a Latin American NATO that would exclude the United States (Gott, p. 185). However, this vision runs contrary to Colombia’s alliance with the United States, because Colombia has allowed the United States to set up bases in order to help solve its problems of drug trafficking and guerilla activity. This alliance reached its peak in 1999 when Colombian President Andrés Pastrana created an agreement that would be heralded as the most

⁴La Violencia was a ten-year period (1948–1958) of civil war in Colombia between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. La Violencia began in 1948 with the murder of Liberal Party politician and presidential candidate Jorge E. Gaitán and led to violence that started in Bogotá but later became pervasive in the Colombian countryside. La Violencia killed around 200,000 people and forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes to avoid being the targets of violence due to political affiliation. This civil war ended with the creation of the National Front Government, a coalition of conservatives and liberals, in 1958 (“FARC”; Vargas).

ambitious campaign against drug trafficking in history (Livingstone, p. 123). Named Plan Colombia, the agreement would contribute more than \$8 billion between FY2000 and FY2012 to stopping violence, creating peace, ending drug trafficking, and strengthening the Colombian military and economy. Another agreement, the Defense Cooperation Agreement, announced by Colombian President Uribe in 2009, allowed the United States to establish military bases on its territory in order to conduct anti-drug trafficking and antiterrorism operations within Colombia. Although the United States assured that the sole purpose of the bases was to aid in eliminating drug trafficking in Colombia, Chávez was concerned that the United States was using the bases to establish military forces to target Venezuela. Announcing that Colombia's agreement to allow U.S. military bases in Latin America was a declaration of war against the Bolivarian Revolution, Chávez suspended diplomatic relations and made preparations for war with Colombia in 2010 (Martinez).

Cooperation despite Conflict

Since 2005, Chávez had cut diplomatic ties with Colombia numerous times and even began preparations for war in 2010 (Tullos). Conflicts concerning both the FARC and Colombia's agreements with the United States have undoubtedly caused great tension between the two countries. However, the resolution and restoration of diplomatic relations after these disputes have also shown Colombia's and Venezuela's willingness to cooperate with each other. For example, after the election of Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos in 2010, Chávez agreed to cooperate in eliminating any FARC members living in Venezuelan territory (Wilpert; Buxton). Cooperation to eliminate the FARC stemmed primarily from the security threat that it posed for both Colombia and Venezuela. It is obvious that the FARC created concerns for Colombia due to the violence, drug trafficking, and kidnapping within its own borders. The FARC also infiltrated Venezuela from the border regions and used its military presence to encamp and attack Venezuela's military forces and citizens. Therefore, both Colombia and Venezuela have identified the neces-

sity of cooperating militarily on border security, particularly to end the activity of the FARC but also to end illegal smuggling of drugs and other goods.

In addition, Colombia and Venezuela have found economic incentives to improve cooperation between each other. Before Chávez placed an embargo on Colombian imports in 2009, \$6 billion of the \$7.2 billion (in U.S. dollars) in trade between the two countries consisted of Colombian exports to Venezuela. These Colombian exports included more than two-thirds of Venezuela's food supply and were lost when conflict caused trade and diplomatic relations to cease. Therefore, tension that ended trade between the countries required Colombia to find another trading partner to absorb the \$6 billion of exports to Venezuela, and Venezuela was required to search for another partner to supply more than two-thirds of its food supply (Tullos). However, trade between the two countries began to recover in 2012 as Colombia and Venezuela sought to make up for the devastating loss of trade during the diplomatic and economic freezes from 2008 to 2010 (Robertson). Therefore, despite recent conflict between the two countries, Colombia and Venezuela have improved their economic cooperation through the reopening of bilateral trade.

Finally, both Colombia and Venezuela have realized the benefits of cooperating on more than just military or economic interests. For example, in 2011, President Santos and President Chávez met and signed 13 bilateral cooperation agreements, including ones in health, science, technology, energy, and culture. These agreements, which broaden the scope of bilateral relations between Colombia and Venezuela, go beyond bolstering the movement of products to strengthening the friendship, trust, and policies between the two countries. One such agreement is an energy project that would create a binational oil pipeline linking the Venezuelan Orinoco Oil Belt with Colombia's Pacific coast (Agencia Venezolana . . .). Other agreements involve improving infrastructure between the countries and increasing tourism. Therefore, despite the extreme tension between Venezuela and Colombia in the first decade of the twenty-first century, both countries have since expressed their willingness for cooperation.

Conclusion

Beginning with the dissolution of Gran Colombia in 1831, Colombia and Venezuela have experienced a history of tensions between each other. Territorial conflicts emerged immediately after the dissolution of Gran Colombia over pride in national identity and competition for power in the region. Tensions between Colombia and Venezuela were heightened at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as Chávez's Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement led Colombia and Venezuela to the brink of war. However, some have argued that Chávez's reactions to Colombia's relationship with the United States and his anger over being accused of harboring FARC rebels can be attributed to his technique of "ramping up the rhetoric over an external threat to distract [Venezuelan citizens] from domestic problems, such as high inflation and water and power shortages" (Tullos). In other words, Chávez may have targeted Colombia as an enemy in order to rally support during the economic and political crises in Venezuela under his leadership, with no true intentions of actually engaging in war.⁵ Furthermore, although Chávez cut diplomatic ties with Colombia three times since 2005, he did not hesitate to restore relations shortly after, indicating that he was not serious about becoming involved in armed conflict with Colombia.

Therefore, although Colombia and Venezuela have engaged in serious conflicts

throughout their history, it is unlikely that any calls for war will become a reality. In addition, Colombia and Venezuela have realized the benefits of cooperation during the Chávez -Santos administrations, as their military cooperation provided security against FARC activity and economic cooperation helped restore bilateral trade. While future conflict between Colombia and Venezuela may be inevitable and based on domestic political concerns (as some have argued with the Chávez and Maduro administrations), the cooperation that has emerged despite nearly a decade of intense conflict has shown that war is not on the horizon and that the two countries have found the benefit in maintaining a peaceful relationship.

⁵A similar tactic of diverting attention away from domestic political and economic failures can also be seen in the current administration under President Nicolás Maduro (who won the presidential election in April 2013). For example, in May 2013, Maduro accused former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe of plotting to assassinate him, a move that may have been used to create a common enemy abroad in order to maintain popular support at home ("Venezuelan Leader . . ."). This lends evidence to the prediction that tensions are likely to remain between Colombia and Venezuela but that they will not become serious enough to amount to war. The most recent tensions may be based on targeting a common enemy (Colombia) in order to quell the unpopularity that citizens have for the Venezuelan government because of high inflation and poverty rates and increases in food prices and crime within the country.

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