

**Mark Chernick, *Acuerdo Posible, Solución negociada al conflicto armado colombiano* Ediciones Aurora, 2008, 256 pp.**

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*Acuerdo Posible, Solución negociada al conflicto armado colombiano* is the result of Mark Chernick's heartfelt and sustained commitment to Colombia. Over twenty years ago, in 1985, Chernick witnessed from the rooftops of downtown Bogotá how the Colombian government violently re-established control of the *Palacio de Justicia*, a building that was the emblem of Colombian justice since it housed the Colombian Supreme Court (Chernick, 12). In order to hold then President Betancur accountable for the perceived betrayal of the peace negotiations between the government and the guerrillas, the M-19 guerrillas had taken over the *Palacio de Justicia* and held a large number of hostages, which included 12 magistrates. The military takeover ended with the burning of the *Palacio de Justicia* and the death and disappearance of many hostages.

This tragic event and others showed the limitations and dire consequences of a military solution to conflict in Colombia. Over the past twenty years, as a scholar and consultant, Chernick has pushed for a negotiated and peaceful solution to the Colombian conflict. *Acuerdo Posible* is an impassioned and judicious account of why and how peace negotiations are necessary and feasible to end Colombia's 60 years conflict. Instead of seeing the multiple failed peace processes since 1984 as an indicator that peace processes do not work in Colombia, he argues that the analysis of past peace processes will allow future "peacemaking" to succeed in Colombia. Chernick begins by placing Colombia's conflict and peace processes from the 1980s to today in an international context to suggest, first, that Colombia's conflict is indeed a "civil war" as defined by the Geneva Convention and, second, to push for greater international involvement in a future peace process. Making a compelling case that Colombia's conflict is indeed a civil war is an important contribution because some members of President Uribe's administration have denied the existence of a civil war and have also suggested that Colombian rebel armed groups are terrorist/criminal groups with no political objectives.

Using an international definition of civil war also allows Chernick to convince the reader of the importance of international support to end conflict in Colombia. He attributes the success of the peace processes in other countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador to the international community's full involvement. In addition, he notes that in the case of Central American countries, the U. S. changed its position and eventually supported the peace process (Chernick, 25). In contrast, as Chernick probingly shows, the U.S. has chosen to provide extensive financial assistance to the Colombian military and has viewed the conflict in Colombia almost exclusively through the lens of the drug war with deleterious consequences for the Colombian peace process. The U.S.' focus on the drug trade has prevented the full funding of social and economic programs that would help solve the structural problems of rural Colombia, which are the root causes of violence.

Chernick effectively challenges the validity of U.S. foreign policy by unraveling the political dynamics of Colombian violence. He provides a masterful and concise historical analysis of guerrilla movements, and of the underlying causes of violence. Chernick brilliantly shows the continuities between the violence of the late 1940s, 1980s, and today. His discussion of enduring patterns of violence bolsters the author's claim that the civil war in Colombia is aggravated and enlarged, but not caused by the drug trade. According to Chernick who draws upon his own analysis and the historical literature, the roots of Colombian violence lie in structural factors such as the political exclusion of some sectors of the population and in the absence of the national state in certain areas of the country. This study deftly sheds light on one of the most important and sometimes overlooked causes for Colombian violence, which is the absence of access to political power. Thus for the next peace process to succeed, as Chernick suggests, demobilized armed groups must be included in the Colombian polity.

This highly readable and accessible book makes an invaluable contribution to the understanding of past peace processes and offers an indispensable road map to a successful peace process in Colombia. This book's message is most timely in the context of recent events such as the death of Pedro Marulanda, Colombia's most important guerrilla commander, and the Colombian military's successful rescue of Ingrid Betancourt, that have led some scholars and politicians to question the need for a peace process. The book's publication in Spanish will ensure that this excellent work will have the widest possible readership in Colombia. However, this insightful study should be translated into English, since it would be of great interest to a broad range of scholars and graduate and undergraduate students.