

His own man



EVER since Juan Manuel Santos won Colombia's presidential election on June 20th, he has delicately sought to distance himself from the policies of Álvaro Uribe, the popular, conservative two-term president who backed him during the campaign. He has moved even further in this direction since being sworn in on August 7th.

In his inauguration speech, Mr Santos said the door to talks with FARC guerrillas was "not locked"—something that would have been unthinkable when he served as Mr Uribe's defence minister. He also said he would address issues like inequality, land distribution and unemployment, which were secondary concerns in the prior government. He vowed to fight poverty "with the same intensity with which we have...fought terrorism."

Mr Santos has had a busy first two days as president. Domestically, he seems to be prioritising rebuilding the relationship between the executive and the judiciary, which had severely frayed under Mr Uribe. He has already met with the magistrates of Colombia's top four courts. And Germán Vargas Lleras, the new interior minister, withdrew the judicial-reform bill proposed by Mr Uribe's government and promised to work on a new bill with members of the judiciary. As a senator, Mr Vargas Lleras had broken with Mr Uribe over the former president's bid to run for a third term, which was ruled unconstitutional.

In foreign policy, Mr Santos scheduled a meeting on August 10th with Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's leftist president and Mr Uribe's arch-enemy. Just two weeks earlier, Mr Chávez had cut off relations with Colombia, following public accusations by Mr Uribe that Venezuela was harbouring Colombia's two main guerrilla groups.

The new president's instincts are still undeniably conservative, and no one is expecting wholesale changes to Mr Uribe's successful strategy of aggressively confronting the FARC. But voters who were hoping for a more worldly and pragmatic successor to the combative Mr Uribe should be pleased with Mr Santos's debut in office.

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