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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

DATE: August 12, 2022

SL: [New Leadership in Colombia](#)

The Takeaway:

- This week, progressives Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez were inaugurated as president and vice-president of Colombia – the country’s first left wing national leadership.
- Their platform of peace, climate action, and human rights offers a new way forward for Colombia, and has thrilled progressive activists.
- Yet the success of many of their policies depends in part on the willingness of the Biden administration to work with Petro and Márquez.

The Left Ascendant in Colombia

We bring you a special edition of the Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief, guest written by Kate Alexander, the Policy and Campaigns Officer of [MADRE](#). MADRE is a global feminist fund and women’s rights organization with partners around the world, including in Colombia, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Palestine.

On August 7, Colombia inaugurated Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez as the nation’s first leftist presidential administration. This is unprecedented, not least because they are activists with real skin in the game after years of work with grassroots movements for economic, racial and gender justice. Their [lives have been threatened](#) in retaliation for their work to demand policies that meet the needs of their communities, and their election was [secured](#) by the tireless work of Black and Indigenous feminist organizers.

“This is a very important moment for social movements, and particularly for women and Black/ethnic movements,” said Afro-Colombian human rights defender [Charo Mina-Rojas](#) to MADRE. Ms. Mina-Rojas is the National Coordinator of Advocacy and Outreach for the Black Communities’ Process (Proceso de Comunidades Negras - PCN) and has worked alongside MADRE and Vice President Francia Márquez in human rights campaigns. “Although challenging, there is a possibility to create conditions for the changes people have been demanding and voted for. We understand it takes time and organizing, but with a President and Vice President that come from people’s struggles, we see some light at the end of the tunnel.”

This new Colombian presidential administration’s vision will require a change in course from the typical U.S.-Colombia relationship by prioritizing climate action and a “total peace” policy – a

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departure from business-as-usual, which has for decades been rooted in resource extraction and militarism. On [more than one occasion](#), President Biden has said that “Colombia is [the keystone](#) of U.S. policy in Latin America and the Caribbean.” But the Petro-Márquez agenda, and their ties to progressive movements in Colombia, will challenge and hopefully change the U.S.-Colombia relationship.

Fundamentally, the Petro-Márquez administration plans to challenge the military-industrial complex and extractive industries in Colombia through a policy agenda that prioritizes people over profits and accountability over immunity, including: [pushing for a transition](#) to renewable energy and opposing oil and gas exploration, imposing “[smart tariffs](#)” to [protect Colombian farmers](#) and challenge the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, and [restructuring the security sector](#) by separating the police from the military.

Oil exploration and drilling, like what the Biden administration is supporting in the United States, would be limited in Colombia by the Petro-Márquez administration. The new Colombian government has promised to [dramatically shift](#) Colombia away from fossil fuels and transition to renewable energy. This shift would make Colombia the first energy-producing nation to [voluntarily shift away](#) from its own oil resources. This would put the new government in conflict with existing contracts with U.S. corporations. For example, the U.S.-based Occidental Petroleum and Colombia’s state-owned Ecopetrol [recently agreed](#) to explore additional offshore oil reserves in the Caribbean.

Petro-Márquez policies are therefore likely to force the U.S. government to make a choice between its relationship with Colombia and the profit margins of U.S. fossil fuel businesses. When President Biden is forced to choose between the high-emitting, high-profit U.S. business interests of groups like Occidental Petroleum, and his relationship with Colombia, what will his decision be? Will he choose people or profits?

The Petro-Márquez administration also plans to transform other policies that have been at the core of the U.S.-Colombia relationship, and which have ultimately harmed Colombian communities. It has promised to end the failed war on drugs and assertively pursue a “Total Peace” [policy](#) that would reform the security forces and change extradition treaties with the United States.

“Achieving peace implies drastic changes in Colombia and profound understanding of roots and reasons of the critical economic, social, and political and humanitarian situation in the country,” said Ms. Mina-Rojas. “This election announces better attention to those issues, major opportunities for political dialogues and agreements not only at national but international levels, and very needed adjustments to national and international policies. Four years is not enough to solve the issues that have us under war conditions, but can set the basis for systemic transformations.”

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If the United States is to play a credible and constructive role in this peace effort, we must abandon destructive approaches that worsened Colombia's decades-long conflict. For years, the U.S. poured military aid into Colombia in the name of fighting a so-called "war on drugs." Just as Black and brown communities at home were being targeted with policing and imprisonment, the U.S. funded and armed Colombian military units, in an initiative known as Plan Colombia that then-Senator [Biden was proud to claim credit for](#). These armed forces and their associated paramilitaries were responsible for [widespread human rights abuses](#), including torture and massacres.

Lasting peace requires not only a transformation in policy, but also accountability for these harms. Too often, women and LGBTIQ people are denied justice for abuses committed against them during armed conflict. In Colombia, this impunity, which has disproportionately impacted Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities, has left these victims struggling for basic recognition. But a recent victory points to a more hopeful outcome. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (Colombia's Transitional Justice Process, also known by its Spanish acronym, JEP) on July 27 charged high-ranking army commanders with the crime of gender persecution, in the murder of a gay man during the country's armed conflict. This is part of a broader effort to acknowledge that women and LGTBIQ persons experience specific and targeted forms of violence due to social prejudice against their gender expression and gender identity.

The United States could champion these efforts for peace, climate justice, and human rights as it engages with the newly-elected Colombian government. But some figures on the right are [actively pushing](#) for the United States to retaliate through measures like blocking foreign aid to Colombia because of policies that are painted as too radical, when in fact, they are the serious but reasonable steps needed to [hold armed actors accountable](#) and [create more sustainable economies](#).

The Petro-Márquez administration should not be punished for its progressive stances on climate, diplomacy, or the war on drugs: it should be celebrated loudly, supported publicly, and funded aggressively.

Buried Ledes

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is in Rwanda this week, [telling](#) reporters at a news conference Thursday that the leaders of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo must stop supporting the brutal infighting between the over 130 armed groups in the mineral rich region of eastern Congo.

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Tensions are [growing again](#) in the Nagorno-Karabakh region between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia helped facilitate a peace agreement in 2020, but as it remains preoccupied with its war in Ukraine Azerbaijan is “attacking because it can,” according to one analyst. Armenia is attempting to balance its difficult strategic position [with close ties with Russia and Iran](#).

According to a new report from Brown University’s Cost of War Project, **one-third of Defense Department contracts from the war in Afghanistan, [worth \\$37 billion](#), went to contractors unidentifiable in contracting databases.**

This past week the world marked the 77-year anniversary of the U.S. dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing 140,000 and 74,000 people respectively. Allen Hester, Legislative Representative for Nuclear Disarmament and Pentagon Spending at the Friends Committee for National Legislation (FCNL), [discusses](#) the anniversary and legislation that would support impacted communities at home and abroad, while calling on the US to “acknowledge the full scope of harm.”

This week marks the 5-year anniversary of the Charlottesville ”Unite the Right” white supremacist protest. Constance Young, one of the counter protesters injured by the vehicular attack by a white supremacist, [reflects](#) not only on the ugliness of that day, but the beauty of finding “community in places and among people we least expect” and calls on allies to do more to “practice community care.”

The English Premier League restarted this past week, but with a climate change twist: [drink breaks](#) to fight the UK heatwave. Whether this will help Manchester United’s [cool start](#) to the season is a different story.