

Colombia at War

by Fernando Mora¹

Colombia is no longer merely grappling with political instability or governance failure—it is at war. A nationwide, multifront conflict has emerged, involving illegal armed groups, narco-trafficking cartels, politically motivated militias, and a state apparatus that, under President Petro, has blurred the line between political power and criminal complicity.

This is not a metaphorical war, but an actual armed confrontation—raging in cities, universities, jungles, and digital spaces—where the rule of law is no longer the arbiter of authority. Colombia, in 2025, is a country under siege from within.

Illegal armed groups and organized crime operate across all 32 departments of the country, with increasingly coordinated territorial control. These groups include the ELN, Clan del Golfo, FARC dissidents, Tren de Aragua, and over 20 drug and human beings trafficking organizations—many of whom have been politically legitimized under Petro's so-called "Total Peace" initiative.

Far from dismantling criminal networks, the state has negotiated with and empowered them, often in secret, bypassing public scrutiny, institutional oversight, and democratic process. What the Petro administration calls "peace" is a surrender of sovereignty.

Urban warfare tactics have returned to major cities, most notably through the violent actions of *Primera Línea* (First Line)—a militant force supported by Petro's political coalition since 2019. With an armed wing of masked militants (*los encapuchados*), this group acts not as a protest movement but as a left paramilitary extension of radical political factions.

These actors have seized control of public universities, enforced ideological conformity through intimidation, and engaged in street violence meant to suppress dissent. The so-

called "social mobilization" they champion is a campaign of coercion, not democratic engagement.

The collapse of state control is particularly evident in Colombia's rural and frontier regions. Territories like la Guajira, Arauca, Catatumbo, Putumayo, Caquetá, Nariño, Chocó, Vele del Cauca, Antioquia, Urabá, el Cesar, la Sierra Nevada, among others, have become war zones—controlled not by the government, but by criminal groups operating with military-grade weapons, foreign logistical support, and near-total impunity.

These actors enforce parallel justice systems, collect taxes, and control entire economies based on drug and human beings trafficking, illegal mining, and extortion. Civilians, particularly women and children, are the primary victims. In 2024 alone, over 14,000 children were sexually assaulted—yet the state agencies responsible for their protection have been politicized and rendered functionally useless.

This war is not confined to Colombia's territory. It is transnational. The Petro government's closest international ally is Venezuelan dictator Maduro, under whose regime armed Colombian groups such as the ELN and FARC dissidents find sanctuary, training, and funding. Colombia's diplomatic realignment includes increasing engagement with Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, and even indirect support for Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

These relationships not only compromise national sovereignty—they entrench Colombia within a network of authoritarian regimes and extremist groups that threaten regional and global stability.

Digital warfare is also central to this conflict. Since 2019, Petro's political movement has relied heavily on disinformation networks—many originally built by Maduro's intelligence services. These bot-driven propaganda machines manipulate public

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opinion, intimidate the press, and undermine institutional legitimacy in Colombia.

In 2022, this digital army was expanded using Colombian taxpayer funds, turning the state's communication infrastructure into a weapon against its own citizens.

Even the concept of political responsibility has collapsed. The assassination of opposition leader and presidential candidate Miguel Uribe was preceded by a sustained campaign of defamation, surveillance, and digital harassment-carried out with impunity. Uribe's state security detail was deliberately diminished by the Petro administration in the weeks before his murder.

Less than two months later, Senator Paloma Valencia-another presidential contender-is now being subjected to a similar pattern of persecution. In regions like Saravena, Arauca government-aligned armed groups are already acting to suppress opposition campaigning ahead of the 2026 elections.

Colombia's descent into war is not accidental-it is the result of deliberate policy. Under the banner of "Total Peace," President *Petro has created a parallel power structure* where the state shares authority with criminal actors.

These groups now provide territorial control, electoral enforcement, and financial resources to sustain a political project that is increasingly authoritarian and anti-democratic. What Petro has built is not peace, but a battlefield in which organized crime, ideological extremism, and state complicity converge.

This war is being waged not only with bullets and bombs, but with propaganda, institutional sabotage, and strategic silence. Petro's administration has defunded or co-opted institutions that previously upheld rule of law-courts, child protection agencies, and electoral authorities-while redirecting international aid toward political revisionism and self-aggrandizing media projects.

Museums, schools, and state-sponsored films now mythologize Petro's life and ideology, while ignoring or erasing the country's true victims: civilians caught in the crossfire of criminal and political warfare.

The international community must understand this for what it is: a complex, high-intensity internal conflict-fueled by drugs, ideology, foreign interference, and state betrayal. Colombia is at war. And the Petro administration is not merely failing to stop it-it is actively reorganizing the state to function in parallel with it.

There must be a recalibration of foreign engagement. International support must be conditional on the reestablishment of state monopoly on force, the dismantling of illegal armed networks, and the full protection of political opposition.

Foreign aid must be audited and refocused toward victims, not revisionist propaganda. International human rights organizations and multilateral institutions must open independent investigations into political violence, digital warfare, and the spread of foreign extremist influence in Colombia.

Colombia's war is not invisible. It is being televised, tweeted, and live-streamed. It is being fought in classrooms, jungle strongholds, courthouses, and social media timelines. The question is no longer whether Colombia is at war. It is whether the world will acknowledge it-and act before its democracy is lost entirely.

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