

Petro's Foreign Policy Fiasco

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Following in the footsteps of his political ally Nicolás Maduro—who once described them as “Siamese twins”—President Petro has maintained close alignment with Venezuelan allies in his diplomacy from the outset.

Petro's foreign policy is marked by an ideologically driven and interventionist posture aimed at elevating his international profile, at times straining relations with traditional Western partners, particularly the United States under President Trump.

President Petro urged voters not to support Trump in the U.S. election, while Vice President Márquez publicly backed Kamala Harris's presidential campaign at an official Harvard University event in October 2024.

While this approach has intensified recurring diplomatic tensions, it has also increasingly aligned Colombia with authoritarian governments, radical movements, and transnational actors whose agendas are at odds with democratic governance, world stability, and the rule of law.

These include organized crime structures such as the Gulf Clan, the Cartel of the Suns, Tren de Aragua, the Second Marquetalia, and the National Liberation Army, as well as Hezbollah and Hamas. It has also coincided with political proximity to controversial figures in European politics, including José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Pedro Sánchez.

Maduro and Petro's proposed binational zone along the Colombia-Venezuela border could have created conditions conducive to the expansion of criminal groups such as the ELN and the Second Marquetalia, while also overlapping with the operational space of transnational criminal networks, including the Gulf Clan and other structures linked to Mexican cartels.

Their broader strategy is sometimes framed as part of a wider ideological realignment across parts of the Americas and beyond, associated by the strengthening of left-leaning and, in certain cases, more authoritarian political networks, alongside the rise of Mexico's Claudia Sheinbaum¹. It has further been alleged that similar dynamics shaped electoral environments in countries including Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Peru and parts of Central America in ways favorable to left-wing candidates².

These claims suggest two distinct levels of involvement: direct political intervention attributed to Petro, and indirect influence exercised through actors associated with the *Total Peace* policy, including networks linked to the *Segunda Marquetalia*, illegal armed groups, and organized crime operating from Venezuela. Some accounts point to the assassination of Ecuadorian presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio—widely attributed by investigators to Colombian criminal networks—as a possible precedent for transnational methods that they argue resurfaced in the attempted assassination of Colombian senator and presidential candidate Miguel Uribe Turbay.

According to these accounts, both attacks display a strikingly similar *modus operandi*, which they attribute to criminal structures associated with the *Segunda Marquetalia*, a group that has been politically engaged through Petro's *Total Peace* initiative and is widely regarded by critics as being close to Petro's political movement.

Following Trump's intervention in Venezuela in January 2026, the diplomatic effort expanded into securing support in Spain³, Portugal, Sweden, and among a group of U.S. Democratic members of Congress. It was backed by multimillion-dollar lobbying campaigns and alleged irregularities in related multimillion-dollar contracts with such European countries.

In the Middle East, President Petro has been criticized for their inconsistent and ideologically driven foreign policy, including his perceived support for Hamas over Palestinians and Israel, and for Hezbollah over the interests of Lebanese and Iranians.

His government has faced scrutiny over its approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, failing to demonstrate resolve favoring Ukrainian rights and sovereignty. Even so, Petro has portrayed Colombian mercenaries as heroes depending on the political context—whether they are fighting on Ukraine's side or on Russia's.

Regarding China, President Petro had an opportunity to secure progress, but it was not realized due to limited preparation for high-level negotiations and agreements. More broadly, his international travels are often portrayed as lacking strategic focus, with emphasis placed on private engagements and cultural visits rather than substantive diplomatic outcomes⁴.

In Africa, Vice President Márquez promoted Colombia as a “peace paradise”, while overlooking that hundreds of municipalities are under the control of criminal groups, with over 28,000 civilians killed occurring during her government.

The Petro administration's engagement with authoritarian governments reflects selective human rights advocacy, prioritizing political alignment over consistent democratic principles and civilian protection.

The UN and EU conferences in Colombia, promoted by President Petro as diplomatic successes, delivered no benefits while diverting critical security resources from conflict-affected regions. As forces were reassigned to protect high-profile events, vulnerable communities were left exposed to killings, extortion, and forced displacement, raising UN and EU responsibility under International Humanitarian Law regarding the protection of civilians.

Despite more than 28,000 civilian deaths, widespread displacement, and reports that nearly 70% of the territory is under the influence of illegal armed groups, organized crime, and environmental devastation, international attention is often perceived as focusing more on President Petro's interpretation of the situation than on these underlying facts.

Allegations hit the “Total Peace” process, claiming criminal networks rigged 2.4 million votes across 126 municipalities. The alleged interference handed Petro's movement a Senate majority and pushed Cepeda into the presidential runoff.

Despite these realities, many international actors continue to portray Colombia as a democracy on the mend, overlooking escalating insecurity, deepening humanitarian suffering, and the control of criminal groups across large parts of the country.

This gap between perception and reality casts doubts on current policy effectiveness, the peace strategy's sustainability, and the reliability of international assessments of Colombia's security and governance.

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¹ President Sheinbaum has been supporting unconditionally President Petro. She also received Cepeda's delegation in Ciudad de Mexico. It is unclear who paid for the travel expenses of Cepeda's delegation during the trips in November 2025 and April 2026.

² See *El Tiempo*, June 4, 2026, p. 1.5. printed.

³ Prime Minister Sánchez organized Sen. Cepeda's agenda in Spain in January 2026. It remains also unclear who paid for the travel expenses of Cepeda's delegation.

⁴ Since August 2022, President Petro and VP Márquez have logged over 90 foreign trips, costing taxpayers more than COP 8 billion. This frequent travel has sparked fierce legal and political backlash over compliance with Colombian law and massive delegation sizes—such as Petro's 200-person entourage to Geneva in June 2026 -during the Presidential 2026 campaign.