

## Colombia's Diplomatic Legacy

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### *Summary*

On June 19, 1822, the United States formally received its first official representative from Latin America, marking a significant gesture of support for Colombia's independence. This moment laid the foundation for a diplomatic tradition rooted in democracy, international law, and multilateralism.

Over the next century, Colombia remained committed to these principles, playing key roles in global institutions such as the United Nations.

Today, under Gustavo Petro, that legacy faces serious challenges. His administration has aligned with authoritarian regimes such as Venezuela, Iran, and Cuba, while expressing sympathy for groups like Hamas and excusing Russian aggression. These moves have strained relations with democratic allies and undermined Colombia's international credibility.

Domestically, Petro's "Total Peace" initiative has been criticized for enabling criminal groups and contributing to a surge in coca production, now accounting for 67% of the global supply.

At the same time, excessive spending on international travel, questionable diplomatic priorities, and visa-free agreements that may aid human trafficking have raised transparency and security concerns.

Further complicating matters are allegations of disinformation campaigns coordinated with Venezuela and Russia, along with the misuse of international aid for political propaganda. These actions blur the lines between diplomacy, ideology, and criminality, weakening Colombia's democratic institutions and its global standing.

### *The Building of a Diplomacy*

On June 19, 1822, Manuel Torres became the first Latin American diplomat formally received by a

U.S. President, marking a historic milestone in hemispheric relations. Despite his failing health, Torres's visit signified the United States' recognition of Colombia's independence—a crucial endorsement for the young republic and its liberator, Simón Bolívar. President James Monroe's warm reception and John Quincy Adams's poignant diary entry highlight the moment's profound human and political significance.

Over a century later, Eduardo Zuleta Ángel played a key role in securing the permanent site for the United Nations, a contribution recognized by John D. Rockefeller Jr. Colombia's diplomatic tradition, built on negotiation, respect for international law, peaceful conflict resolution, and multilateral cooperation, has long championed democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

### *The Petro's Diplomatic Shift*

Today, Colombia's diplomatic legacy faces critical challenges under Gustavo Petro. Rather than upholding principled diplomacy, Petro's government blurs domestic ideology with foreign policy, adopting a confrontational stance that damages Colombia's credibility and alienates traditional allies.

Petro aligns with authoritarian regimes and controversial groups—including Maduro's Venezuela, Hezbollah, and Iran, all linked to Hamas—and echoes rhetoric sympathetic to Hamas while excusing Russian aggression in Ukraine. Furthermore, organized crime's control over peace negotiations undermines Colombia's moral authority on the global stage.

### *Questionable Diplomatic Spending*

Petro and Vice President Francia Márquez have conducted over 90 costly international trips totaling more than \$65 million USD, excluding substantial per diems for large delegations often including political allies. High-profile expenses, such as a \$2 million USD cost for a single attendee at the World Economic Forum, fuel public

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positions at the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the International Crisis Group. He has also partnered with organizations like the ICRC, OECD, WHO, and national governments to provide strategic solutions for complex political and humanitarian challenges.

criticism. Recent private stays, such as Petro's trip to a luxury condominium in Ecuador without clear official business, raise further transparency concerns.

Meanwhile, over 900 unexplained trips by Colombian civil servants to Cuba and Venezuela deepen questions about strategy and oversight.

#### *The Global Cocaine Crisis*

Petro faces grave allegations of forming the “Pacto de la Picota,” a political alliance with organized crime—including left-wing guerrillas (ELN, FARC dissidents) and right-wing mafias (Clan del Golfo, Envigado Office)—granted immunity, territory and operational freedom under the “Total Peace” initiative.

Colombia now produces 67% of the world's coca, driving a 33% increase in global cocaine output in 2024, per UNODC data. This surge fuels environmental destruction, social displacement, and illegal economies, destabilizing rural Colombia. Despite these realities, political pressure appears to have suppressed critical UNODC findings.

#### *Human Trafficking Risks-Diplomatic Missteps*

Vice President Márquez's visa-free agreements with African nations risk turning Colombia into a trafficking hub. Many trafficked individuals arrive via Colombia en route to the U.S., often crossing the dangerous Darién Gap. This policy irresponsibly enables traffickers and escalates human exploitation in the region, reversing prior progress.

#### *Peace Talks-Regional Legitimacy Concerns*

Petro's peace negotiations legitimize Venezuela and Cuba-authoritarian regimes accused of harboring Colombian armed groups—as official guarantors. This political endorsement undermines U.S. and regional efforts to isolate Maduro's regime and weakens democratic pressure. Granting political recognition to the ELN and FARC dissidents, while suspending key extradition requests, rebrands criminal insurgents as legitimate actors, disrupting counter-narcotics and security collaboration.

#### *Cuba's Strategic Diplomatic Reemergence*

Petro's praise of Cuba's role and calls to remove Havana from the U.S. terrorism list bolster Cuba's regional influence, diverging sharply from U.S. policies and reshaping Colombia's foreign policy orientation.

#### *Peace-Washing*

Despite talks, armed groups have not disarmed, and ceasefires are fragile. Splinter groups use the peace process to evade justice and maintain illicit operations. This “peace-washing” legitimizes violence without resolving conflict's root causes.

#### *Eroding Relations with Democratic Allies*

The administration's moves to halt extraditions and weaken judicial independence alarm Western democracies, threatening Colombia's reputation as a reliable democratic partner and undermining regional security cooperation.

#### *Venezuelan Russian Disinformation Networks*

Petro's coalition allegedly coordinates with Maduro's bot army, linked to Russian interests, to spread disinformation, manipulate public opinion, and destabilize Colombia politically. This hybrid warfare blurs lines between domestic politics and foreign interference, advancing Petro ideology and Moscow's influence in Latin America through Colombia.

#### *Misuse of International Aid*

International aid funds have been diverted to produce propaganda glorifying Petro's policies and rewriting history, often portraying criminals as heroes and demonizing opposition. Esteemed institutions collaborate in these efforts, which distort realities and perpetuate division. Embassies and parliamentary committees abroad often receive misleading reports, resulting in little corrective action.

#### *Conclusion*

The combination of diplomatic mismanagement, security risks, and loss of credibility risks reversing decades of democratic progress and international cooperation. Without course correction, Colombia may find itself increasingly isolated, destabilized, and vulnerable to both internal unrest and foreign influence.

Bogotá, Colombia, July 7, 2025.