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A Preliminary Look from Washington at Colombia's New Direction and Security Challenges

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A Preliminary Look from Washington at Colombia's New Direction and Security Challenges

R. Evan Ellis^a

Abstract

This work examines the likely direction of the Gustavo Petro administration in Colombia in the arena of economic, security and foreign policy, and associated challenges. Its analysis is based on key personnel appointments, statements, and initial policy actions. It argues that the administration will likely have the will, personnel, and legislative support to at least partially implement its agenda of radical change. Its ability to avoid economic deterioration and capital flight, implement the "total peace" which it seeks, and avoid a deteriorating security situation and weakened military and police capabilities will be critical. The basis of its relationship with the U.S. will also shift, creating tensions, but both sides will work to maintain a positive tone.

Keywords: Colombia, Gustavo Petro, FARC, ELN, Venezuela.

Introduction

The June 2022 election of former M-19 guerilla Gustavo Petro as President of Colombia² has drawn significant attention to his new administration and the profound changes it could bring to Colombia and its relationships with its neighbors in the region,³ the U.S., and other global players. The relatively short time that has transpired since Petro's August 2022 inauguration makes it difficult to predict with confidence how he will navigate Colombia's numerous challenges, make tradeoffs between competing priorities,⁴ have

1 The author would like to thank David Spencer, Francisco Monaldi, and Maria Velez de Berliner, among others, for their contributions to this work. The views expressed herein are his own.

2 Joe Parkin Daniels y Edinson Bolaños, "Former guerrilla Gustavo Petro wins Colombian election to become first leftist president", *The Guardian* (June 20, 2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/20/former-guerrilla-gustavo-petro-wins-colombian-election-to-become-first-leftist-president>

3 RCN, "Francia Márquez sobre primeras decisiones de Petro: 'Pensaban que íbamos a destruir el país'", *Noticias RCN* (June 30, 2022), <https://www.noticiasrcn.com/colombia/francia-marquez-sobre-primeras-decisiones-de-petro-423025>

4 Juan Forero, "Former Colombia Rebel Gustavo Petro Inaugurated as President", *Wall Street Journal* (August 7, 2022), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/former-colombia-rebel-gustavo-petro-inaugurated-as-president-11659917654>

his initiatives undercut by political resistance, or sidetracked by emerging challenges. Nonetheless, Petro's track record as a politician, expressed objectives, personnel choices, and early initiatives provide some insight into what to expect. Similarly, Colombia's security and economic challenges, and the international and internal political landscape highlight the issues likely to shape his agenda. This article is an initial look at the direction that Petro's government may take, key challenges and opportunities, and implications.

Gustavo Petro has clearly promised change in Colombia's direction in both domestic and foreign policy.⁵ In domestic affairs, he has promised a reorientation of Colombia's economy away from carbon-producing industries,⁶ including petroleum and coal mining industries, to a more knowledge and tourism based economy.⁷ He has also promised to address the longstanding class, racial and other inequalities in Colombia, and undermine the system that produces it. In security matters, he seeks to move past Colombia's more than 60 years of armed conflict through peace negotiations with all of Colombia's armed groups. He has also promised to move away from coca eradication, legalize marijuana,⁸ and to reestablish positive diplomatic, economic and other relationships with the Maduro regime in Venezuela.⁹ He will likely also reorient Colombia's relationship with its neighbors, the region, the US and other actors more broadly.¹⁰

5 Progressive International, "Gustavo Petro: A Colombia of Possibilities and the Politics of Love", *Common Dreams* (August 11, 2022), <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2022/08/11/gustavo-petro-colombia-possibilities-and-politics-love>

6 Ignacio Portes, "Petro's economic agenda is ambitious. Perhaps too ambitious", *The Brazilian Report* (May 20, 2022), <https://brazilian.report/latin-america/2022/05/20/petro-economic-agenda-colombia/>

7 Andrea Jaramillo y Óscar Medina, "Colombia Presidential Favorite Gustavo Petro Wants to Form a Global Anti-Oil Bloc", *Time* (January 14, 2022), <https://time.com/6139508/gustavo-petro-anti-oil-bloc/>

8 Ibid.

9 Redacción MP, "Venezuela and Colombia appoint ambassadors to resume full ties", *Mercopress* (August 25, 2022), <https://en.mercopress.com/2022/08/25/venezuela-and-colombia-appoint-ambassadors-to-resume-full-ties>

10 Eloise Barry, "Gustavo Petro Could Transform Colombia—And Washington's Role in Latin America", *Time* (August 8, 2022), <https://time.com/6204300/gustavo-petro-colombia-inauguration-washington/>

In implementing his agenda, Petro is likely to move slowly in some areas, and quickly in other, inspiring much uncertainty and discussion about how far he intends, or will be able to go with his changes, inspiring shifting of allies and adversaries. That uncertainty and those shifts will be politically useful for him. While Petro's sometimes gradual, sometimes rapid moves to change both Colombia's policies and institutions invite comparisons to the first presidential term of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. Yet Colombia is not Venezuela, and the outcome is not certain.

Given that Petro had run for the Presidency four times, his current strategy arguably reflects substantial contemplation regarding how he would proceed once there, both to implement his agenda, and to position himself against those he anticipates will oppose him. To this end, Petro's initial personnel choices reflect a combination of gestures to reassure key stakeholders, while simultaneously asserting control and shoring up areas where he could find himself vulnerable.

Implications of key personnel choices

Petro's initial personnel choices show his desire to reassure the U.S. and Western financial markets, whose support or at least neutrality will be key to the success of his government. Petro's choice of Ambassador to the U.S., Luis Guillermo Murillo, illustrates his style of simultaneously signaling change and reassurance. Murillo arguably knows the U.S. very well, having lived in the U.S. since 2000 after being kidnapped by a right-wing paramilitary group and fleeing Colombia. Murillo has worked in a variety of senior professional positions in the U.S. including the World Bank. At the same time, the ambassador, from Choco, is the first afro-Colombian chosen to represent his country to the U.S. Adding to the contradiction,¹¹ his background includes the study of engineering in the Former Soviet Union.¹²

11 Latin America Advisor, "Petro Names Murillo as First Afro-Colombian Ambassador to the United States", *The Dialogue* (July 22, 2022), <https://www.thedialogue.org/blogs/2022/07/petro-names-murillo-as-first-afro-colombian-ambassador-to-the-united-states/>

12 Ibid.

In the same fashion, Petro's selection of Yale-educated former Colombian Central Bank Director Jose Antonio Ocampo Gaviria as Finance Minister seeks to signal financial markets to not initially turn from Colombia and create a financial crisis over Petro's election.¹³ Ocampo's first major trip following his appointment is to New York, to provide personal assurances to money managers. Ocampo's previous demonstrated orientation as Minister of Finance, and as an academic at the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) was left of center, supportive of a strong role for government in the national economy, not entirely inconsistent with the orientation of Petro.

With respect to international relations, Petro's selection of Alvaro Leyva Duran as Foreign Minister highlights his emphasis on peace engagement over traditional foreign policy issues.¹⁴ Leyva Duran is from the Conservative party by background, an anomaly for Petro's team. Nonetheless, he has earned a reputation of respect in Colombia as a peace broker, including his role in the demobilization of Petro's own M-19,¹⁵ as well as his participation in the negotiations with the FARC, culminating in 2016. In August 2022, in the opening weeks of Petro's administration, Leyva Duran has already been involved in preliminary talks with the FARC in Havana.¹⁶

Beyond Leyva Duran's role in peace talks, the combination of his social conservative political orientation, and the relationship of trust he reportedly built with the FARC during his prior peace talks, suggests the possibility of a reasonable political tone. With respect to the National Intelligence

13 Andrea Jaramillo, "Colombia's Petro Names Ocampo Finance Minister in Nod to Market", *Bloomberg* (June 30, 2022), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-30/colombia-s-petro-names-ocampo-finance-minister-in-nod-to-market#xj4y7vzkg>

14 Reuters, "Colombia president-elect Petro names peace envoy as foreign minister", *Reuters Breaking International News & Views* (June 25, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombia-president-elect-petro-names-peace-envoy-foreign-minister-2022-06-25/>

15 Ibid.

16 Gustavo A. Maranges, "Cuba to Host Peace Talks Between ELN and Colombian Government: New Opportunities vs. Old Obstacles (Part 1)", *Orinoco Tribune* (August 22, 2022), <https://orinocotribune.com/cuba-to-host-peace-talks-between-the-eln-and-the-colombian-government-new-opportunities-vs-old-obstacles-part-1/>

Directorate (DNI), Petro's choice of former M-19 colleague Manuel Alberto Casanova illustrates Petro's disposition to ensure that critical security and other positions are in the hands of persons of trust.¹⁷ With respect Petro's security policy, the President's selection of Ivan Velasquez Gomez highlights his emphasis on ensuring that the military is not engaged in extrajudicial killings or other human rights abuses.

On one hand, both within Colombia and internationally, Velasquez commands respect as a former Supreme Court judge, and the Commissioner of the United Nations Commission Against Corruption and Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). On the other hand, unusual for a Defense Minister, Velasquez' background is not in security affairs, but in investigating and fighting against human rights abuses by paramilitary groups, including focusing on torture cases as a prosecutor in Antioquia.¹⁸ While on the Supreme Court, he supported the investigation of collaboration between Colombian Congresspersons and paramilitary forces. Incidents such as the "false positives" case of civilians killed by the Colombian Army between 1998 and 2014,¹⁹ and incorrectly labeled as insurgents are undeniable. Petro's selection of Velasquez as defense minister over someone with a military background suggests that he gives particular weight to ensuring that the military will do no harm.

Petro's selection of military leadership below Velasquez further shows his emphasis on ensuring that the military does no harm, and that he can rely on it to faithfully execute his commands, even if they are not palatable to the institution. Following the imperatives of the Colombian system that requires the heads of the services to have greater seniority than those under

17 Noticias Semana, "Atención: el ex-M19 Manuel Alberto Casanova será el nuevo director nacional de Inteligencia; ya hay polémica", *Semana* (August 19, 2022), <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/atencion-manuel-alberto-casanova-exintegrante-del-m-19-sera-el-nuevo-director-nacional-de-inteligencia/202223/>

18 Redacción CNN, "¿Quién es Iván Velásquez el nuevo ministro de Defensa de Petro para Colombia?", *CNN Español* (July 22, 2022), <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2022/07/22/petro-ivan-velasquez-ministro-defensa-colombia-orix/>

19 Mariana Palau, "The 'false positives' scandal that felled Colombia's military hero", *The Guardian* (November 19, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/19/colombia-false-positives-killings-general-mario-montoya-trial>

them, he obligated an unprecedented 52 senior military and police officers were obliged into retirement to arrive at those selected.²⁰ Petro notably insisted on selecting military leaders without human rights accusations against them,²¹ let alone convictions.

A notable number of those selected also had degrees in human rights, as well as service in academic positions. Several of those selected also had worked closely with the U.S. previously, creating a basis for U.S. engagement with the new leadership, to the extent that the Petro administration authorizes it, and the programs supporting that engagement continue in some form. The officer selected to head the Armed Forces, General Helder Fernán Giraldo, among his noteworthy achievements, has a PhD in human rights education and previously served as Inspector General of the Colombian Army,²² as well as head of the Colombian Military higher War College. As is normal for those attaining his rank, he also has a background as an operator, having commanded Colombia's 8th division. With respect to U.S. ties, the head of the Colombian Joint Staff, Vice Admiral José Joaquín Amezcuita García, previously served as Colombia's Naval Attaché to Washington from 2013–2014.²³

With respect to academic assignments, like General Fernán Giraldo, the new head of Colombia's Army, General Luis Mauricio Ospina Gutiérrez,²⁴

20 Redacción MP, "Petro shakes-up Colombia's military brass", *Mercopress* (August 15, 2022), <https://en.mercopress.com/2022/08/15/petro-shakes-up-colombia-s-military-brass>

21 Luis Jaime Acosta, "Colombia's Petro replaces military commanders in human rights drive", *Reuters Breaking International News & Views* (August 12, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombias-petro-replaces-military-commanders-human-rights-drive-2022-08-12/>

22 Comunicado CGFFMM, "Mayor general Helder Fernan Giraldo Bonilla es el nuevo comandante de las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia", *Comando General Fuerzas Militares Colombia* (August 12, 2022), <https://www.cgfmil.co/es/blog/mayor-general-helder-fernan-giraldo-bonilla-es-el-nuevo-comandante-de-las-fuerzas-militares-de#:~:text=Nació%20hace%2054%20años%20en%20la%20ciudad%20de,diciembre%20de%201987%20ascendió%20al%20grado%20de%20subteniente.>

23 Comunicado CGFFMM, "Vicealmirante José Joaquín Amézquita García, nuevo jefe de estado mayor conjunto de las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia", *Comando General Fuerzas Militares Colombia* (August 12, 2022), <https://www.cgfmil.co/es/blog/vicealmirante-jose-joaquin-amezcuita-garcia-nuevo-jefe-de-estado-mayor-conjunto-de-las-fuerzas>

24 Comunicado MDN, "Mayor general Luis Mauricio Ospina Gutiérrez es el nuevo comandante del Ejército Nacional", *Ministerio de Defensa Nacional Colombia* (August 12, 2022), <https://www.ejercito.mil.co/mayor-general-luis-mauricio-ospina-gutierrez-es-el-nuevo-comandante-del-ejercito-nacional/>

previously served as the director of Colombia's higher War College. He previously also had significant operational experience, including commanding the 4th Division. Colombia's new Air Force head, General Luis Carlos Córdoba Avendaño received his Masters degree in National Defense University in the U.S.²⁵ He also had a career as a transport pilot,²⁶ rather than a fighter pilot, ultimately heading Colombia's national military airline SATENA, an uncommon path for those becoming the head of the Air Force. The new head of Colombia's Navy, Hernando Cubides Granados, a submariner by background, has degrees in human rights and human rights law,²⁷ and previously headed Colombia's Naval Academy. The head of the Colombian police, General Henry Armando Sanabria Cely, had previously served in an academic position in Colombia's higher-level police academy, and was a lawyer by profession.²⁸ The focus of his police career has been in intelligence, although he began in the investigations division of the police.

Petro's economic direction and challenges

Petro faces a significant challenge in implementing his promised sweeping changes to Colombia's economy in the context of the country's significant economic and fiscal challenges.²⁹ His first major hurdle is implementing a promised tax increase on Colombia's wealthy to address the country's fiscal balance and generate revenues for increases in government spending to support expanded implementation of the 2016 peace plan, including

25 Laura Paola Preciado, "El general Luis Carlos Córdoba Avendaño es el nuevo comandante de la Fuerza Aérea", *Caracol Radio* (August 12, 2022), https://caracol.com.co/radio/2022/08/12/judicial/1660335812_028748.html

26 Ibid.

27 Comunicado AC, "Vicealmirante Francisco Hernando Cubides Granados, nuevo Comandante de la Armada de Colombia", *Armada Colombiana* (Augusto 12, 2022), <https://www.armada.mil.co/es/content/vicealmirante-francisco-hernando-cubides-granados-nuevo-comandante-armada-colombia>

28 Ibid.

29 Nelson Bocanegra, "Analysis: Colombia presidential candidate Petro's oil, pension proposals give investors pause", *Reuters Breaking International News & Views* (March 29, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombia-presidential-candidate-petros-oil-pension-proposals-give-investors-2022-03-29/>

infrastructure construction, land redistribution,³⁰ and other public sector investments to create economic opportunities in marginalized areas, as well as to transfer land and resources to poorer Colombians.³¹

The attempt of Petro's predecessor Ivan Duque in 2021 to balance the budget with tax increases seen as too lenient on Colombia's wealthy was met by massive protests that forced him to withdraw the initiative.³² Petro's alternative is tax increases focused on Colombia's wealthiest, including a special tax on Colombians with assets worth more than \$690,000.³³ Petro has also controversially said that he would transfer money from Colombia's private pension plans to a public one,³⁴ as well as paying pensions to millions of poorer Colombians who never paid into a pension system. Petro also has taken early steps to move Colombia away from a more environmentally friendly economy, announcing the end to authorizations for new oil exploration and drilling,³⁵ and a halt to fracking.³⁶ He has also called oil and coal Colombia's two "most venomous products" in addition to coca,³⁷ although it is not clear how quickly Petro will be able to phase these industries out, since they are two of Colombia's principal sources of export earnings.

30 Redacción VG, "Implementación de Acuerdo de Paz podría tardar 20 años: Contraloría", *Vanguardia* (August 21, 2022), <https://www.vanguardia.com/colombia/implementacion-de-acuerdo-de-paz-podria-tardar-20-anos-contraloria-FI596878>

31 Nelson Bocanegra, "Analysis: Colombia presidential candidate Petro's oil, ...".

32 Redacción CNN, "Cronología de las protestas de 2021 en Colombia", *CNN Español* (May 10, 2021), <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2021/05/10/cronologia-protestas-de-2021-en-colombia-orix/>

33 <https://www.latimes.com/espanol/internacional/articulo/2022-08-08/petro-busca-subir-impuestos-a-los-mas-ricos-de-colombia>

34 Nelson Bocanegra, "Analysis: Colombia presidential candidate Petro's oil, ...".

35 Catherine Osborn, "Can Petro Move Colombia Away From Oil?", *Foreign Policy* (June 24, 2022), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/24/colombia-election-petro-oil-exports-economy-climate-change-dutch-disease/>

36 Brent Patterson, "Petro government seeks to cancel Platero and Kalé fracking pilot projects in Puerto Wilches, Colombia", *Peace Brigades International Canada* (August 13, 2022), <https://pbicanada.org/2022/08/13/petro-government-seeks-to-cancel-platero-and-kale-fracking-pilot-projects-in-puerto-wilches-colombia/>

37 Forbes Staff, "Polémica: Petro dice que 'el carbón es más peligroso para la humanidad que la cocaína'", *Forbes* (May 17, 2022), <https://forbes.co/2022/05/17/actualidad/polemica-petro-dice-que-el-carbon-es-mas-peligroso-para-la-humanidad-que-la-cocaina/>

In reassuring Colombians regarding the Petro government's plan for moving Colombia away from a carbon economy, Finance Minister Ocampo has said that the transition away from fossil fuels would be gradual, and that Colombia's existing 180 contracts for oil extraction and exploration would continue while the government transitioned the domestic economy away from the use of fossil fuels.³⁸ Still, the policies of the government toward the oil sector may also have adverse effects on its generation of revenues more rapidly than expected.

The Petro government has already proposed a 4.6% tax increase on the petroleum industry that may contribute to hesitation by investors to go forward with existing projects in the sector.³⁹ Colombia currently has only three years of reserves.⁴⁰ In the absence of new discoveries, and significant investment in existing projects, production volumes, and possibly revenues will continue to decline. The future Ecopetrol, one of the most respected state oil companies in the region, is also in question, with uncertainty over the future of its head, Felipe Bayón Pardo,⁴¹ who is perceived as not fully aligned with Petro's intention to phase out petroleum.

Petro has also pledged to replace fossil-fuel based electricity production with green energy such as photovoltaic, and wind energy,⁴² including an ambitious proposal for a transcontinental grid powered by each country's

38 Ibid.

39 Astrid Suárez, "Petro busca subir impuestos a los más ricos de Colombia", *Los Angeles Times* (August 8, 2022), <https://www.latimes.com/espanol/internacional/articulo/2022-08-08/petro-busca-subir-impuestos-a-los-mas-ricos-de-colombia#:~:text=El%20impuesto%20será%20de%204%2C6%25%20para%20el%20petróleo%2C.su%20aporte%20ayudaría%20a%20financiar%20el%20gasto%20social>.

40 Redacción EC, "“Hay que seguir exportando petróleo y buscar más gas”: José Antonio Ocampo, ministro de Hacienda de Petro", *El Colombiano* (July 2, 2022), <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/esto-dijo-jose-antonio-ocampo-ministro-de-hacienda-de-petro-sobre-el-gas-y-el-petroleo-AL17942200>

41 Redacción Semana, "¿Seguirá Felipe Bayón al frente de Ecopetrol tras la llegada de Petro a la Presidencia?", *Semana* (August 10, 2022), <https://www.semana.com/economia/empresas/articulo/seguira-felipe-bayon-al-frente-de-ecopetrol-tras-la-llegada-de-petro-a-la-presidencia/202240/>

42 Juan Pablo Vargas, "Presidente Petro propuso hoy crear red de energía que atravesara todo el continente", *La República* (August 25, 2022), <https://www.larepublica.co/economia/presidente-petro-propuso-hoy-crear-red-de-energia-que-atravesara-todo-el-continente-3432941>

best renewable energy sources.⁴³ While Colombia already has a vibrant renewable energy sector,⁴⁴ areas of Colombia such as La Guajira have considerable wind potential,⁴⁵ it is not clear whether the price or intermittent character of the energy will allow it to be economically viable, whether the investment climate under Petro will be seen as sufficiently attractive for companies to commit to such projects, or whether the impact that the elevated energy prices that the transition would generate would further prejudice an already struggling Colombian manufacturing sector. Petro's policies will also have to contend with the risk of capital flight. Reflecting investor anxiety, in the run-up to the election, a number of commercial contracts reportedly included a "Petro" clause,⁴⁶ making the contract valid only if Petro did not win the presidency.

While Petro's selection of Jose Ocampo as Finance Minister is likely to buy some time from nervous capital markets, in the long term, his success will depend on whether his tax and other economic policies are perceived as unduly confiscatory, whether he can achieve a level of stability in the performance of his government and implementation of his legislative plan. Petro's success in the economic realm will also depend on whether, as discussed later in this work, Petro can achieve a true demobilization of the ELN and other groups that produces a peace that opens up opportunities in sectors such as agriculture and tourism in parts of Colombia long prejudiced by insecurity.⁴⁷

43 Ibid.

44 Juan Carlos Chávez, "Colombia construirá 16 nuevos parques eólicos en 2021", *Energía Hoy* (March 30, 2021), <https://energiahoy.com/2021/03/30/colombia-construira-16-nuevos-parques-eolicos-en-2021/>

45 Forbes Staff, "La Guajira, epicentro de la transición energética en Colombia", *Forbes* (July 23, 2021), <https://forbes.co/2021/07/23/actualidad/la-guajira-epicentro-de-la-transicion-energetica-en-colombia/>

46 Bocanegra, "Analysis: Colombia presidential candidate Petro's oil, ...".

47 John Otis, "He's running to be Colombia's 1st left-wing president. Here's what he plans to do", *National Public Radio* (April 28, 2022), <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/28/1094609544/colombia-election-candidate-gustavo-petro#:~:text=Petro%20has%20outlined%20a%2012-year%20transition%20period%20and,to%20tourism%20%20and%20improvements%20in%20agriculture%20and%20industry.>

In Colombia's economic future, both U.S. and European investment will likely play a key role. Investment by PRC-based companies, already well established⁴⁸ in sectors from petroleum⁴⁹ and mining⁵⁰ to telecommunications to infrastructure construction,⁵¹ to vehicle manufacturing,⁵² will also likely play an expanded role. The significant position of Huawei as a supplier of smartphones and telecommunications infrastructure,⁵³ and the construction of the Bogota metro by a consortium of China Harbour and Xian Metro highlight the significant position that Chinese companies have already achieved in Colombia.⁵⁴ The level of governance and success of Petro's other policies, however, will likely impact whether PRC-based companies expand their presence in a predatory fashion as an alternative to Western investors who are pulling out, or as a compliment to them, in a framework of transparency and good governance.

Petro's foreign policy direction and challenges

Petro's foreign policy is likely to re-integrate Colombia into a region increasingly leftward oriented in its politics, while maintaining a positive, if evolved relationship with the U.S. and other key stakeholders. Petro's reestablishment of the relationship with the Maduro regime in Venezuela

48 R. Evan Ellis, "Chinese Advances and Setbacks in Colombia", *EconVue* (May 31, 2017), <https://econvue.com/pulse/chinese-advances-and-setbacks-colombia>

49 Reuters Staff, "Emerald Energy halla hidrocarburos campo de Colombia", *Reuters Breaking International News & Views* (September 16, 2008), <https://www.reuters.com/article/negocios-petroleo-emerald-sol-idLTAN1651018720080916>

50 Reuters, "Levantán bloqueo que tenía la mina de producción de oro Zijin en Buriticá, Antioquia", *La Republica* (August 22, 2022), <https://www.larepublica.co/economia/levantan-bloqueo-que-tenia-la-mina-de-produccion-de-oro-zijin-en-buritica-antioquia-3429962>

51 Juan Diego Ortiz, "Con 200 frentes activos, vía 4G a Urabá espera recuperar retrasos", *El Colombiano* (February 3, 2020), <https://www.elcolombiano.com/antioquia/avance-de-mar-2-via-4g-al-uraba-antioqueno-Pl12383792>

52 RCN, "El fabricante Foton abrirá planta de ensamblaje en Colombia", *Noticias RCN* (September 20, 2014), <https://www.noticiasrcn.com/nacional-economia/el-fabricante-foton-abrira-planta-ensamblaje-colombia>

53 Yash Mishra, "Colombia's Medellín will get a new Huawei Store", *Huawei Central* (October 27, 2021), <https://www.huaweicentral.com/colombias-medellin-will-get-a-new-huawei-store/>

54 Andrés Bermúdez y Wang Chen, "Chinese companies win bid to build Bogotá metro", *Dialogo Chino* (October 17, 2019), <https://dialogochino.net/en/infrastructure/31002-chinese-companies-win-bid-to-build-bogota-metro/>

reflects the ideological sympathy of Petro toward Venezuela's "Bolivarian Socialist" project, if not necessarily the corruption and authoritarianism that has come to dominate it.⁵⁵ It also highlights the historical bond that has existed between the two countries, including both migration and cross-border commerce, with a desire to restore it.

While the re-opening of the Colombia-Venezuela border will likely revive that commerce to some degree,⁵⁶ the economic dynamics will be substantially different than that between the two countries prior to the economic collapse of Venezuela. This will include a much greater focus on Venezuelans seeking goods and economic opportunities on the Colombian side, as well as an increased component of illicit activity that has grown in the border region,⁵⁷ although the opening of borders may shift profiteering opportunities of groups who secured considerable rent from taxing the flow of goods and people across previously closed borders.

An illustration of the interdependence of the two economies and the complex issues it raises is Monómeros, a Venezuelan state-owned company which is a key supplier of fertilizer to Colombia. When Colombia recognized Juan Guaidó as the de jure president of Venezuela, it transferred control over Monómeros operations in Colombia from Maduro to Guaidó.⁵⁸ Petro is now talking of returning it to Maduro.⁵⁹ The possible change not only reflects

55 Daniella Monroy, "Los desafíos de los nuevos embajadores de Colombia y Venezuela", *El Espectador* (August 23, 2022), <https://www.msn.com/es-co/noticias/mundo/los-desaf-c3-ad0s-de-los-nuevos-embajadores-de-colombia-y-venezuela/ar-AA114WN?fromMaestro=true>

56 Redacción MP, "Colombia: Petro discusses reopening borders with Maduro", *MercoPress* (June 22, 2022), <https://en.mercopress.com/2022/06/22/colombia-petro-discusses-reopening-borders-with-maduro>

57 Redacción IB, "Así funciona la frontera entre Venezuela y Colombia, un mercado ilegal de millones de dólares manejado por mafias", *Infobae* (December 8, 2021), <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2021/12/08/asi-funciona-la-frontera-entre-venezuela-y-colombia-un-mercado-ilegal-de-millones-de-dolares-manejado-por-mafias/>

58 Daniella Monroy, "Los desafíos de los nuevos embajadores de Colombia y Venezuela".

59 Redacción AN, "Petro, dispuesto a regresar el control de Monómeros a Maduro", *Al Navio* (July 8, 2022), <https://alnavio.es/petro-dispuesto-a-regresar-el-control-de-monómeros-a-maduro>

pressure from the Maduro regime,⁶⁰ and the possibility that Maduro's relaxation of that pressure could improve Monómeros' ability to supply fertilizer to Colombia, since fertilizer has become expensive and scarce on global markets by Russia's invasion of the Ukraine. It is also not clear if the problem of payment of Colombian companies for services rendered in Venezuela, or the resolution of substantial moneys owed to Colombian companies from the previous era, can be resolved.

In the arena of defense collaboration, while Venezuela has expressed clear interest in such cooperation,⁶¹ it is not clear that the level of penetration of Venezuelan forces by Cuban intelligence,⁶² and their involvement in narcotrafficking and other illicit activities,⁶³ will permit significant intelligence sharing or other cooperation by the Colombian military, although cooperation on border issues, and symbolic personnel exchanges and the sending of liaison officers may occur.⁶⁴ At the political level, the Petro government's re-engagement with Maduro will strengthen the regime's survival and reintegration into the politics of the region, complementing similar moves by other governments, such as the call by the Fernandez regime in Argentina, currently head of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), for the region to restore ties with Maduro.⁶⁵

60 Luc Cohen y Brian Ellsworth, "Maduro demand for control crimped finances of Colombia's Monomeros, ex-chair says", *Reuters Breaking International News & Views* (September 14, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/maduro-demand-control-crimped-finances-colombias-monomeros-ex-chair-says-2021-09-14/>

61 Stephen Johnson, Julia Buxton, Diego Arria y R. Evan Ellis, "Would Colombia-Venezuela Military Ties Boost Security?", *The Dialogue* (August 17, 2022), <https://www.thedialogue.org/analysis/would-colombia-venezuela-military-ties-boost-security/#:~:text=Venezuela%20will%20seek%20to%20re-establish%20military%20ties%20with,between%20Colombia%20and%20Venezuelan%20President%20Nicol%C3%A1s%20Maduro's%20government>

62 Josefina Blanco, "Pruebas de la presencia militar cubana en las Fuerzas Armadas venezolanas", *PanamPost* (February 20, 2019), <https://panampost.com/josefina-blanco/2019/02/20/cuba-venezuela-militar/>

63 Marcos Tarre Briceño, "Cómo funciona el mal llamado Cártel de los Soles: los negocios oscuros de los militares venezolanos", *Infobae* (October 2, 2019), <https://www.infobae.com/americas/venezuela/2019/10/02/como-funciona-el-mal-llamado-cartel-de-los-soles-los-negocios-oscuros-de-los-militares-venezolanos/>

64 Johnson, et al., "Would Colombia-Venezuela Military Ties Boost Security?"

65 Redacción PI, "Alberto Fernández ignora violaciones a los DDHH y presiona para normalizar las relaciones con la dictadura de Maduro", *Primer Informe* (April 18, 2022), <https://primerinforme.com/actualidad/alberto-fernandez-pide-a-latinoamerica-normalizar-relaciones-con-maduro/>

Cooperation between the Petro and Maduro regimes will also weaken the position of Venezuela's de jure president Juan Guaido, who has called Petro the "accomplice of Maduro" in the region.⁶⁶ It will also create uncertainty in the position of many members of the Venezuelan opposition who have taken refuge in Colombia. Indeed, Venezuelan politicians have already called for the "extradition" of Venezuelan opposition politicians to face criminal charges in Caracas, although Petro has thus far indicated that he would maintain their political asylum in Colombia.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, such decisions are likely to be made on a case-by-case basis, and Petro's position could evolve as a function of Venezuelan pressure and Colombian interests. Indeed, in May 2011, Colombia's more centrist prior President Juan Manuel Santos controversially extradited Walid Makled to Venezuela,⁶⁸ rather than to the U.S. as the latter had requested. It is further possible that the expanded opening of the Venezuela-Colombia border, in conjunction with a weakened position of Colombian security forces and military and police intelligence, could make Colombia more vulnerable to the penetration of Venezuelan and affiliated Cuban agents, including those with agenda targeting high-profile Venezuelan exiles.

In Colombia's relations with the region more broadly, Petro's orientation will also facilitate Colombia's integration into a region whose politics are increasingly left-oriented,⁶⁹ albeit diverse.⁷⁰ The principal beneficiary of the new multilateralism will likely be the CELAC, possibly at the expense of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the associated legacy

66 The City Paper Staff, "Guaidó in Colombia: 'Petro is an accomplice of Maduro'", *The City Paper Bogota* (January 21, 2020), <https://thecitypaperbogota.com/news/guaido-in-colombia-petro-is-an-accomplice-of-maduro/>

67 Reuters, "Colombia will guarantee asylum, Petro says, after Venezuela urges extradition", *Reuters Breaking International News & Views* (August 23, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombia-will-guarantee-asylum-petro-says-after-venezuela-urges-extradition-2022-08-23/>

68 BBC, "Colombia extradites Venezuela 'drug lord' Walid Makled", *BBC News* (May 9, 2011), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-13333423>

69 Redacción SFS, "The Struggle for The Soul of The Latin American Left", *Center for a Secure Free Society* (April 19, 2022), <https://www.securefreesociety.org/research/the-struggle-for-the-soul-of-the-latin-american-left/>

70 Benjamin N. Gedan y Richard E. Feinberg, "Latin America's Leftists Aren't Who You Think", *Foreign Policy* (January 31, 2022), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/31/latin-americas-leftists-arent-who-you-think/>

Interamerican system. The empowerment of CELAC, in turn, will give added weight to use of the institution by the PRC, with the numerous committees and consulting mechanisms set up through the China-CELAC forum.⁷¹

U.S.-Colombia relations under Petro are likely to remain positive.⁷² The President's approval of the operation of eight F-16s from the South Carolina National Guard to operate in Colombia, despite the possible sensitivity of Venezuela over the matter, was arguably an indication of Petro's interest in maintaining balance in the relationship. Nonetheless, the focus of the Colombia-U.S. relationship will likely gradually shift from counter-narcotics and security cooperation to other areas such as the environment,⁷³ and projects to strengthen communities, justice and development in Colombia's countryside.⁷⁴ At the political level, the Biden Administration will likely continue to respect decisions by the Petro regime that differ from its own policies,⁷⁵ and find common ground for working with the Petro Administration on such issues.⁷⁶ It will also likely find positive elements in Petro's prioritization of avoiding possible human rights abuses by security forces, as suggested by his choices of leaders in that sector.

On the other hand, Petro's opposition to forced coca eradication, talk of depenalizing the cocaine industry,⁷⁷ and the possibility of quietly decreasing

71 R. Evan Ellis y Leland Lazarus, "China's New Year Ambitions for Latin America and the Caribbean", *The Diplomat* (January 12, 2022), <https://evanellis.substack.com/p/evan-ellis-and-leland-lazarus-chinas>

72 Reuters, "Colombia's President-Elect Petro Meets With Biden Delegation", *U.S. News & World Report* (July 22, 2022), <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-07-22/colombias-president-elect-petro-meets-with-biden-delegation>

73 Ibid.

74 Oliver Griffin y Luis Jaime Acosta, "Colombia's President-Elect Petro Meets With Biden Delegation", *Reuters* (July 22, 2022), <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-07-22/colombias-president-elect-petro-meets-with-biden-delegation>

75 Viviana Angélica Trujillo, "U.S. respects Gustavo Petro's decision to restore relations with Nicolás Maduro", *Al Día News* (August 17, 2022), <https://www.aldianews.com/en/politics/policy/us-gives-petro-ok>

76 Griffin y Acosta, "Colombia's President-Elect Petro ...".

77 Redacción LN, "Los planes de Petro para depenalizar la cocaína en la región preocupan a EE.UU.", *La Nación* (August 21, 2022), <https://es-us.noticias.yahoo.com/planes-petro-despenalizar-cocaína-región-110000508.html?guccounter=1>

specific areas of collaboration with the U.S. in the security sector will likely create discomfort in Washington and force a search to find new bases for the U.S.-Colombia relationship. Similarly, Petro's posture on re-engagement with Maduro, and a likely reluctance by the Petro regime to support U.S. criticism of and sanctions against other leftist authoritarian governments such as Nicaragua and Cuba,⁷⁸ will complicate Washington's achievement of policy objectives in the region.

Petro's security and drug policy and challenges

The focus of Petro's security policy, under the slogan "total peace" involves negotiating with all of the major armed groups,⁷⁹ beginning with the National Liberation Army (ELN), but eventually the Gulf Clan and others as well. The other principal focus, as noted previously, is a shift away from combatting coca growing at the local level, coupled with the possible legalization of marijuana to increase Colombia's export earnings.⁸⁰ The August 2022 attack in El Tarra against a security team sent to do advance planning for a visit by President Petro to the town highlights the magnitude of the challenge that Petro security sector initiatives face,⁸¹ and the uncertain prospects for their success.

Negotiations with the ELN are already off to a strong start with a symbolic release of nine hostages⁸² and an initial meeting between the ELN and

78 Confidenciales, "Por silencio frente a Nicaragua, gobierno de Gustavo Petro a responder ante el Congreso", *Semana* (August 17, 2022), <https://www.semana.com/confidenciales/articulo/por-silencio-frente-a-nicaragua-gobierno-de-gustavo-petro-a-responder-ante-el-congreso/202202/>

79 Progressive International, "Gustavo Petro: A Colombia of Possibilities and the Politics ...".

80 Anais Lucena, "Will Colombia legalize marijuana? this is Petro's proposal", *El Ciudadano* (August 19, 2022), <https://www.elciudadano.com/en/will-colombia-legalize-marijuana-this-is-petros-proposal/08/19/>

81 Redacción ET, "Así operan grupos armados en zona donde fue atacado equipo de seguridad de Petro", *El Tiempo* (August 24, 2022), <https://www.msn.com/es-co/noticias/otras/as-c3-ad-operan-grupos-armados-en-zona-donde-fue-atacado-equipo-de-seguridad-de-petro/ar-AA1144gO?fromMaestro=true>

82 Redacción MP, "Colombia: ELN rebels release hostages while returning to peace talks", *Mercopress* (August 13, 2022), <https://en.mercopress.com/2022/08/13/colombia-eln-rebels-release-hostages-while-returning-to-peace-talks>

representatives from the Petro government in Havana in August 2022.⁸³ Negotiations are likely to proceed quickly in a positive direction, given that President Petro, and key delegates to the talks such as Colombia's High Peace Commissioner Danilo Rueda is a former guerilla himself,⁸⁴ while Congressman Ivan Cepeda,⁸⁵ who also participated in the meetings in Havana, is believed to have close ties to the FARC.⁸⁶ Foreign Minister Alvaro Leyva, also part of the delegation, has similarly earned the trust of guerillas in past negotiations, including those leading to the peace deal with the FARC. The facilitating role of the Maduro regime in Venezuela, which effectively hosts and works with the ELN⁸⁷ in areas of Venezuela such as Apure⁸⁸ and the Orinoco mining arc,⁸⁹ will likely also contribute to positive results.

Possible issues on the table include future participation of the ELN,⁹⁰ like the demobilized FARC, in Colombian politics. In addition, multiple persons consulted for this work believe that negotiations with the ELN

83 Staff and agencies, "Colombian government and ELN rebels meet in Havana to restart peace talks", *The Guardian* (August 12, 2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/12/colombia-eln-rebels-restart-peace-talks-havana>

84 Luis Jaime Acosta, "Colombia peace commissioner in Cuba to meet ELN rebels", *Nasdaq* (August 11, 2022), <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/colombia-peace-commissioner-in-cuba-to-meet-eln-rebels>

85 Sebastián Casas, "Participación política del ELN está formulada: Iván Cepeda", *RCN Radio* (August 23, 2022), <https://www.rcnradio.com/politica/participacion-politica-del-eln-esta-formulada-ivan-cepeda>

86 Sixto Alfredo Pinto, "Iván Cepeda, un 'Senador de las Farc'", *La Otra Cara* (November 30, 2020), <https://laotracara.co/destacados/ivan-cepeda-un-senador-de-las-farc/>

87 R. Evan Ellis, "Venezuela: Understanding Political, External, and Criminal Actors in an Authoritarian State", *Small Wars Journal* (January 14, 2022), <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/venezuela-understanding-political-external-and-criminal-actors-authoritarian-state>

88 Juan Diego Posada, "Ex-FARC Mafia vs. ELN: a Fight Too Far at Colombia-Venezuela Border?", *InSight Crime* (January 11, 2022), <https://insightcrime.org/news/is-the-ex-farc-mafia-betting-all-its-chips-on-the-colombian-venezuelan-border/#:~:text=The%20ELN%20largely%20controls%20Arauca%20and%20Apure%2C%20in,quarrels%20linked%20to%20drug%20trafficking%20and%20territorial%20control.>

89 Gabriela Saavedra, "El ELN, grupos armados y militares venezolanos son los dueños del Arco Minero del Orinoco", *El Nacional* (September 23, 2019), <https://www.elnacional.com/ambiente/eln-grupos-armados-y-militares-venezolanos-los-duenos-del-arco-minero-del-orinoco/#:~:text=El%20ELN%2C%20grupos%20armados%20y%20militares%20venezolanos%20son,Amacuro%2C%20Bolívar%20y%20Amazonas%20Por%20Gabriela%20Saavedra%20->

90 Casas, "Participación política del ELN está formulada: ...".

and other groups could lead to proposals for a Constituent Assembly to rewrite Colombia's constitution. The decentralized nature of the ELN organization,⁹¹ and the significant illicit and other economic interests of key ELN leaders, will make achieving a comprehensive agreement complicated. In addition, it remains unclear whether an agreement to demobilize the ELN in Colombia, will cover its organization and activities in Venezuela, such as its participation in illegal mining in Orinoco,⁹² just as the 2016 peace accords with the FARC did not address the organization's hidden assets and personnel in that country.

The Petro government has committed to suspend arrest warrants against ELN leaders while the negotiations are ongoing.⁹³ In the future, it could also formally or informally reduce actions by security forces against the ELN to facilitate the talks. Given that the organization has an increasingly powerful position among armed criminal actors in Colombia, there is a risk that such actions could strengthen its position in the criminal economy while talks are ongoing. Indeed, something similar occurred with Colombian government negotiations with the FARC under the Pastrana administration, when that government agreed to a safe zone within which the guerillas were able to operate and reconstitute themselves.⁹⁴

Beyond the ELN, dissident fronts of the FARC in Colombia and Venezuela have arguably been weakened and fragmented with the deaths of

91 Ellis, "Venezuela: Understanding Political, External, and Criminal Actors ...".

92 Gabriela Saavedra, "El ELN, grupos armados y militares venezolanos son los dueños del Arco Minero del Orinoco", *El Nacional* (Septiembre 23, 2019), <https://www.elnacional.com/ambiente/eln-grupos-armados-y-militares-venezolanos-los-duenos-del-arco-minero-del-orinoco/#:~:text=El%20ELN%2C%20grupos%20armados%20y%20militares%20venezolanos%20son.Amacuro%2C%20Bolívar%20y%20Amazonas%20Por%20Gabriela%20Saavedra%20->

93 Reuters, "Colombia suspends ELN rebel arrest warrants, extradition orders to restart peace talks", *Reuters Breaking International News & Views* (August 20, 2022) <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombia-suspends-eln-rebel-arrest-warrants-extradition-orders-restart-peace-2022-08-20/>

94 Infobae, "El fallido plan de paz de Pastrana con las FARC", *Infobae* (August 27, 2012), <https://www.infobae.com/2012/08/27/1057010-el-fallido-plan-paz-pastrana-las-farc/>

former coordinator Gentil Duarte,⁹⁵ and his successor Ivan Mordisco.⁹⁶ Similarly, the deaths of key leaders of the “Segundo Marquetalia,” FARC leaders who had joined the demobilization and abandoned it, including Jesus Santrich,⁹⁷ Paisa and Romaña,⁹⁸ have greatly weakened that group. Such losses also includes the incapacitation of Ivan Marquez.⁹⁹ Although the group’s significance derived from the role of its leaders in the pre-demobilization FARC, Petro’s “total peace” concept could give new life to it, since their relative credibility as leftist guerrillas and their connection to the Cuban and Venezuelan leadership gives them utility in a future “comprehensive” peace negotiation with multiple parties. As with the other groups, successful Colombian Government operations against the Gulf Clan in the last year of the prior Duque Administration, including the October 2021 capture of its leader Dario Úsuga (“Otoniel”) in Operation Agamemnon,¹⁰⁰ have left that group weakened and fragmented into at least three factions,¹⁰¹ although still with substantial capability.¹⁰²

95 Chris Dalby y Javier Villalba, “The Fall of Gentil Duarte – What Does It Mean for Colombia?”, *InSight Crime* (May 26, 2022), <https://insightcrime.org/news/fall-gentil-duarte-what-does-mean-colombia/>

96 RCN, “En Caquetá murió ‘Iván Mordisco’, confirman fuentes de las fuerzas militares”, *Noticias RCN* (July 15, 2022), <https://www.noticiasrcn.com/colombia/confirman-muerte-del-disidente-ivan-mordisco-424224>

97 Melissa Velásquez Loaiza, “¿Cómo murió Jesús Santrich? Lo que sabemos hasta el momento”, *CNN Español* (May 20, 2021), <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2021/05/20/analisis-muerte-jesus-santrich-colombia-orix/>

98 Juan Diego Posada y Sara Garcia, “Top Ex-FARC Commanders, El Paisa and Romaña, Confirmed Killed in Venezuela”, *InSight Crime* (December 9, 2021), <https://insightcrime.org/news/unconfirmed-reports-leading-ex-farc-commander-el-paisa-killed-in-venezuela/>

99 Lily Adric, “Colombian military intelligence believes ‘Ivan Marquez’ is brain dead”, *Royals Blue* (August 2, 2022), <https://www.royalsblue.com/colombian-military-intelligence-believes-ivan-marquez-is-brain-dead/>

100 Stefano Pozzebon, “Colombia captures its ‘most-feared’ drug lord Dairo Antonio Usuga”, *CNN* (October 25, 2021), <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/24/americas/colombia-drug-lord-otoniel-intl-hnk/index.html>

101 Colombia Personalities, “Jobanis de Jesús Ávila Villadiego, alias ‘Chiquito Malo’”, *InSight Crime* (June 17, 2022), <https://insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/jobanis-de-jesus-avila-villadiego-chiquito-malo/>

102 Joe Parkin Daniels, “It’s total terror’: Colombian cartel retaliates over kingpin’s arrest”, *The Guardian* (May 8, 2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/08/gulf-clan-cartel-armed-strike-colombia-otoniel-dairo-antonio-usuga>

With respect to all of Colombia's illegal armed groups, Petro has said that he will not extradite leaders to the U.S. who cooperate with the state and abandon their criminal business.¹⁰³ It is not clear whether this posture could also open a door to negotiations over non-extradition in exchange for demobilization, as groups such as the AUC demanded in the past.¹⁰⁴ It is also unclear whether the state might refrain from using military force against groups that restrict their violence, with the state acting only selectively to "punish" those who do not negotiate or are too violent. The penetration of Venezuelan criminal groups into Colombia will also continue to challenge Colombia under Petro. The Venezuelan gang *Tren de Aragua* reportedly operates not only in the border region,¹⁰⁵ but throughout Colombia and elsewhere,¹⁰⁶ trafficking and exploiting Venezuelan immigrants among its other activities.

With respect to drug policy, Petro's shift away from coca eradication, including calling a national assembly to discuss coca growing¹⁰⁷ and the possibility of legislation legalizing coca production,¹⁰⁸ absent viable economic opportunities and good infrastructure integrating the affected communities into the broader economy, could significantly expand coca production. Beyond cocaine, the legalization of marijuana in Colombia

103 Daniel Stewart, "Petro proposes not to extradite drug traffickers who collaborate with the State and do not reoffend", *News360* (August 24, 2022), <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/petro-proposes-not-to-extradite-drug-traffickers-who-collaborate-with-the-state-and-do-not-reoffend/ar-AA114ior>

104 Redacción ET, "AUC exigen no extradición.", *El Tiempo* (March 7, 2004), <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1542030>

105 Noticias Caracol, "Tren de Aragua aviva la violencia en Colombia para acaparar vacíos que dejó extradición de 'Otoniel' (VIDEO)", *La Patilla* (August 26, 2022), <https://www.lapatilla.com/2022/08/26/tren-de-aragua-aviva-la-violencia-en-colombia-para-acaparar-vacios-que-dejo-extradicion-de-otoni-el-video/>

106 Ibid.

107 Redacción ET, "Asamblea cocalera: ¿qué tan viable es la propuesta del presidente Gustavo Petro?", *El Tiempo* (August 26, 2022), <https://www.msn.com/es-co/noticias/otras/asamblea-cocalera-c2-bfqu-c3-a9-tan-viable-es-la-propuesta-del-presidente-gustavo-petro/ar-AA1198Ei?fromMaestro=true>

108 Gabrielle Gorder, "Could Gustavo Petro Legalize Coca and Cocaine in Colombia?", *InSight Crime* (June 21, 2022), <https://insightcrime.org/news/could-gustavo-petro-legalize-coca-and-cocaine-in-colombia/>

could similarly increase its cultivation in the country.¹⁰⁹ A significant legal marijuana industry in areas in which illegal armed groups operated would arguably increase extortion opportunities for them in these areas. It could also create money laundering by channeling criminal proceeds into legal marijuana plantations.

The re-opening of the Colombia-Venezuela border may also change the landscape for criminal groups. The increased ease of legal passage may undermine the extortion-based income of groups that control the illicit crossings (“trochas”) along the border. At the same time, increased flows of people and goods will expand opportunities for contraband, human trafficking, the supply of products supporting illegal Venezuelan mining from Colombia, and other illicit activities. Overall, the efficacy of the Petro government’s response to criminal groups will be complicated by the likely increase in the volume of coca grown in Colombia, and thus the size and quality of cocaine shipments to interdict, as well as the increase in revenues available to criminal groups from the combination of coca, extortion of legal marijuana crops, and illicit activities associated with the reopened border.

The restructuring of security forces

The Petro government’s restructuring of security forces may complicated their ability to contend with an increasingly fragmented criminal landscape, fueled by more money coming from coca, other illicit activities, and the border region. The proposed transfer of the National Police from under the Armed Forces to a new “Ministry of Peace and Cohabitation” may create challenges for operational coordination between the police and the military,¹¹⁰ particularly if some of the more militarized special forces units

109 Anais Lucena, “Will Colombia legalize marijuana? this is Petro’s proposal”, *El Ciudadano* (August 19, 2022), <https://www.elciudadano.com/en/will-colombia-legalize-marijuana-this-is-petros-proposal/08/19/>

110 Natalia Chacón, “La Policía pasaría al Ministerio de la Paz y Convivencia: Gustavo Petro”, *W Radio* (July 5, 2022), <https://www.wradio.com.co/2022/07/05/la-policia-pasaria-al-ministerio-de-la-paz-y-convivencia-gustavo-petro/>

currently within the police are eliminated. Among other changes, Petro has proposed replacing the police anti-riot unit, Esmad with an entity focusing on dialogue as well as control,¹¹¹ the “Unit for dialogue and accompanying public demonstrations.”¹¹² The possible elimination of police and military intelligence organizations to rely solely on the civilian National Intelligence Directorate (DNI),¹¹³ if it occurs,¹¹⁴ could further hamper police effectiveness. There are various ways in which Petro could eliminate or redirect these intelligence organizations through administrative action,¹¹⁵ without legislation, if he chooses to do so.

Restrictions by the Petro government over the ways in which the Armed Forces and police can operate could also complicate their actions against armed groups. In August 2022, for example, Defense Minister Velasquez ordered a halt to aerial bombings of groups, on the ground that collateral damage to civilians could not be adequately controlled.¹¹⁶ The ability of the armed forces to cover the increasingly challenging Colombian criminal landscape will be further challenged, if in the face of competing fiscal demands, the Petro administration curtails the role of the military in internal security and reduces its budget.

111 Acosta, “Colombia’s Petro replaces military commanders ...”.

112 Redacción EE, “Adiós Esmad: así es la nueva Unidad de Diálogo y Acompañamiento a la Manifestación”, *El Espectador* (August 23, 2022), <https://www.msn.com/es-co/noticias/nacional/adios-esmad-así-es-la-nueva-unidad-de-diálogo-y-acompañamiento-a-la-manifestación/ar-AA1u04FH>

113 Redacción Política, “A pesar de la exitosa inteligencia de la Policía, ministro de Defensa designado anuncia que habrá cambios”, *Semana* (August 1, 2022), www.semana.com/politica/articulo/atencion-a-pesar-de-la-exitosa-inteligencia-de-la-policia-ministro-de-defensa-designado-anuncia-que-habra-cambios/20225/

114 María José Echeverry, “Detector: Gobierno de Petro no ha anunciado que eliminará Cuerpos de la Policía”, *La Silla Vacía* (August 8, 2022), <https://www.lasillavacia.com/historias/silla-nacional/detector-gobierno-de-petro-no-ha-anunciado-que-eliminara-cuerpos-de-la-policia/>

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Further considerations

One key to Petro's success will be his ability to implement his legislative agenda on issues from taxes, to decarbonizing the economy, to restructuring the security apparatus. Although Petro's "Historic Pact" party does not have a majority in Congress, Colombia's March 2022 Congressional elections created a strong bench of left-oriented and pragmatic parties.¹¹⁷ Petro has correspondingly created a coalition that,¹¹⁸ for the moment, appears disposed to support his key proposals. The head of Colombia's Senate, Roy Barreras, is regarded as a skillful political operator who has pragmatically supported a range of Colombian Presidents from Alvaro Uribe to Juan Manuel Santos.¹¹⁹ His current disposition to work with Petro strongly increases the prospects for his legislative success.¹²⁰

Still unclear is the future role of Francine Marquez, Petro's running mate and now Colombia's first Afro-Caribbean Vice President. Petro has created a Ministry of Women's Equality for her to run as part of her duties.¹²¹ Nonetheless, the personal interaction between Petro and Marquez is reportedly difficult, and it remains to be seen whether Petro will be able to leverage her in government without conflict, and in a manner that lives up to her expectations, and the expectations of the Colombians who supported the Presidential ticket because of her role on it.

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Conclusions

The outcome of the Petro presidency will depend on the Administration's ability to navigate a difficult path. If Petro, by contrast to prior administrations, succeeds in achieving "total peace," his restructuring of security forces will be seen as appropriate and visionary for the new Colombia.¹²² Similarly, if Petro maintains economic stability and avoids capital flight, buoyed by that peace dividend, infrastructure investment, and a vibrant Colombia-Venezuela border economy, he may succeed in raising taxes and gradually transitioning away from petroleum and coal without wrecking the Colombian economy.

If he does not succeed in navigating that difficult course, Colombia could find itself in a spiral of expanded criminality, with debilitated security forces overmatched by the challenge, and a collapsing economy with desperate, disappointed people, further fueling the forces of political radicalization and violence. Whichever course Colombia follows, the impact on the country, as well as its relationship with its neighbors, the region, and the U.S., will be profound. For those who profoundly fear or disagree with Petro, as well as those who support him, it is now vital that he succeeds.

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