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Alarms at the Embassy: U.S. Operations to Prevent Gustavo Petro's Triumph in Colombia

It is understandable that Washington is terrified of Petro's triumph.



Next Sunday, May 29, the presidential elections will be held in Colombia, the Latin American country most identified with Washington's policies during the last decades. In the event that none of the candidates exceeds 50% of the votes, a runoff will be held on June 19, with the participation of the two most voted candidates. The totality of the polls conjecture the triumph of the candidate of the Historical Pact, the current senator Gustavo

Petro, surpassing the referent of the right-wing coalition, Team for Colombia, Federico known by the alias of 'Fico' Gutiérrez.



Gustavo Petro attending a campaign rally with armored protection.

Gustavo Petro joined, in his youth, the ranks of the April 19 Movement (M-19), a political-military organization that was dissolved in the '80s to become a political party. Between 2012 and 2015 he was mayor of Bogotá and revealed himself as the maximum exponent of the opposition to the [questioned and delegitimized former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez](#), the Colombian leader of the right, repeatedly accused of being [associated with drug trafficking](#). In the last presidential elections, in 2018, Petro came to dispute the second round against the current president, the neoliberal Iván Duque.

In this contest, the senator presents as a running mate the Afro-Colombian militant [Francia Márquez Mina](#), linked to feminist movements, ecological-environmental activism and the fight against racism. In the March primaries, the former mayor of Bogotá won first place among the preferences of progressive sectors, while Francia Márquez – who survived an [attempt](#) on her life in 2019 – became the third most voted candidate. The Historic Pact, the political alliance that Petro and France consolidated, achieved more

significant voting percentages in the departments where the social explosion of 2020 and 2021 became more evident.

The possibility of the first triumph of the left – in the latin American and Caribbean country that has the most affinity with Washington's policies – has motivated multiple alerts from agencies dedicated to the "*Western Hemisphere*", a label with which the State Department locates the continent in which it is inserted. After the primary and parliamentary elections on March 13, the [Southern Command \(SOUTHCOM\)](#) – which coordinates military activities from Guatemala to the south – promoted a [meeting](#) with the general commander of the Colombian Military Forces, General Luis Navarro. In this gathering, the scenarios of a potential triumph of Petro in the May elections were conjectured. Navarro was received by [Army General Laura Richardson](#), who asked him for information about the possible dismantling of [the seven military bases that the United States has within Colombian territory](#), in the event that the candidate of the Historical Pact obtains the Presidency.



General Laura Richardson, head of the Southern Command, greets Colombian General Luis Navarro, commander of the Colombian Military Forces.

The testimony provided by Navarro on March 28 to Richardson states that both the majority of the congressmen and the military forces themselves would oppose such a decision. At the end of the meeting, SOUTHCOM released a press release in which Colombia is classified as "an unconditional security partner" of Washington. A few weeks later, consistent with Navarro's testimony, army chief Eduardo Zapateiro Altamiranda went to Gustavo Petro's crosswalk via Twitter, after the latter questioned the repressive actions in the [Putumayo massacre](#), in which 11 people were killed, including an 11-year-

old boy, Brayan Pama. All of them were exposed as dissident members of the FARC, but investigations show that their bodies were arranged to make judicial investigations impossible.

Senator Petro alluded – in the face of this crime – to the continuity of the so-called "[false positives](#)", the mechanism used by the Colombian Armed Forces and the paramilitaries to exhibit successes before the guerrillas and terrorize the peasants to force them to abandon ancestral lands and allow the expansion of mining and agro-industrial extractivism. As of April 24, 2022 – according to the human rights body that is responsible for relieving murders for political and social reasons – there were 36 massacres, with a total of [133 victims](#). Those responsible for the executions, according to investigations by various international organizations, are the paramilitary structures that control the production of cocaine, specifically in the territories that the demobilized guerrillas stopped controlling after the 2016 peace agreements.



There come the Russians

According to diplomatic sources based in Bogotá, one of the most hyperactive officials is the current ambassador of Washington in that city, [Philip Goldberg](#), who holds the antecedent of having been expelled from Bolivia in September 2018 for promoting secessionist initiatives in the regions of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija and Chuquisaca. Goldberg – transferred to Bogotá on September 19, 2019, two months before the coup against Evo Morales – warned scandalized that there is the possibility of "[interference by Russians, Venezuelans](#) or Cubans in the elections." These statements were interpreted by a

large part of Colombian analysts as the prologue to a future delegitimization of the election, in the event that Petro rises with the Presidency of the Republic: a way to prepare the ground, similar to the one perpetrated in November 2019 in Bolivia.

The U.S. Embassy's interventionist and outgoing support for right-wing candidates became more explicit during the deliberations of the General Assembly of affiliates of the [American Business Council \(CEA\)](#), which commemorated the 60th anniversary of the creation of that institution and [the 200 years of bilateral relations between Colombia and the United States](#). Goldberg pointed out – along with Iván Duque – that both governments are working to prevent any foreign interference.



On April 22, the head of the Army forgot the neutrality expected for an active military officer and joined the campaign against the candidate of the Historical Pact. In response, the parliamentarians linked to the candidate who won the primaries reminded the military of their responsibility for the fifty [demonstrators killed](#) on the occasion of the mobilizations carried out during 2019 and 2020 in Cali, where the Army had priority responsibility for the repressive operations.

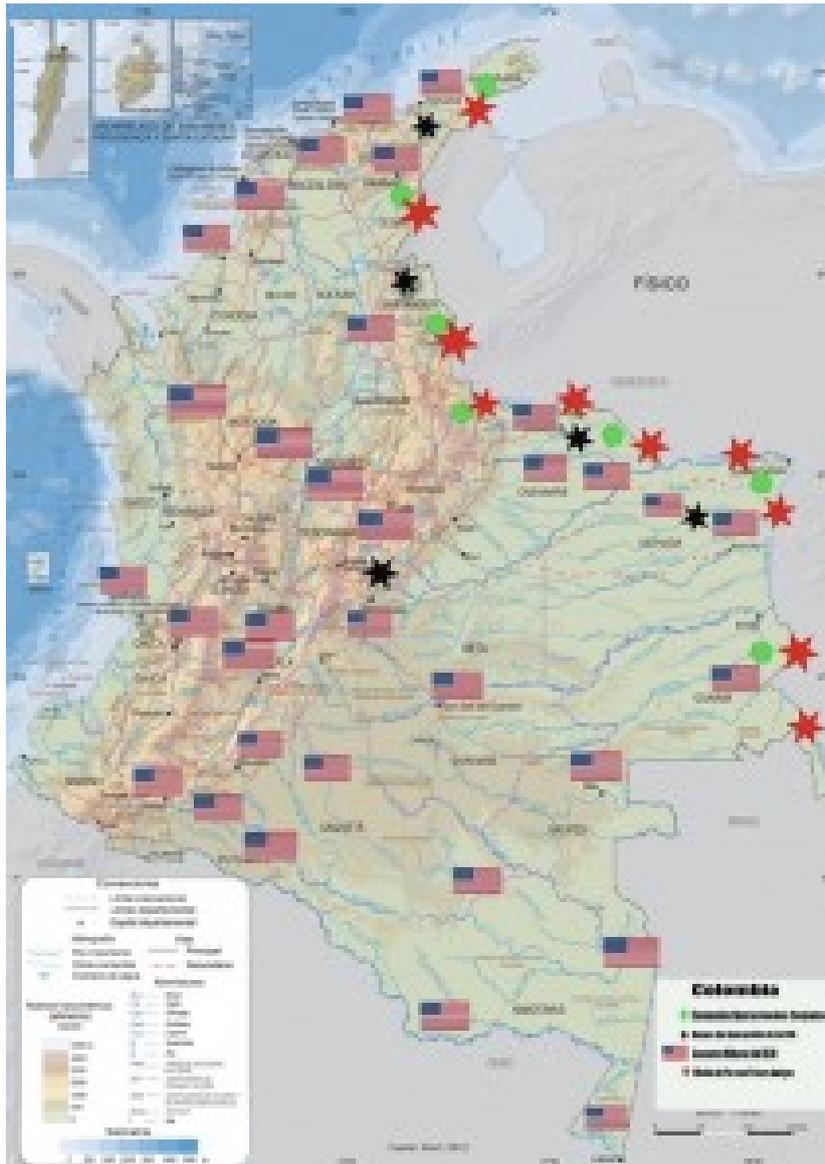
In parallel, uribe businessman Fabio Andrade, based in La Florida, organized a caravan in Miami on May 15, in which he spoke out against a future fraud given that "the institutions are taken: all the money from drug trafficking is against the maintenance of democracy in Colombia." The mobilization of a hundred people received the salutations of the fascist congresswoman María Elvira Salazar – a member of the Republican caucus in the House of Representatives – who considered before the [Subcommittee on Foreign](#)

Relations that *"Gustavo Petro is a thief, he is a socialist, he is a Marxist, he is a terrorist and he is leading the poll for President of Colombia."*



The United States turned Colombia into a military enclave: the Southern Command controls seven bases as well as has free access to airports, battalions and military infrastructure.

[Click here to enlarge the image](#)



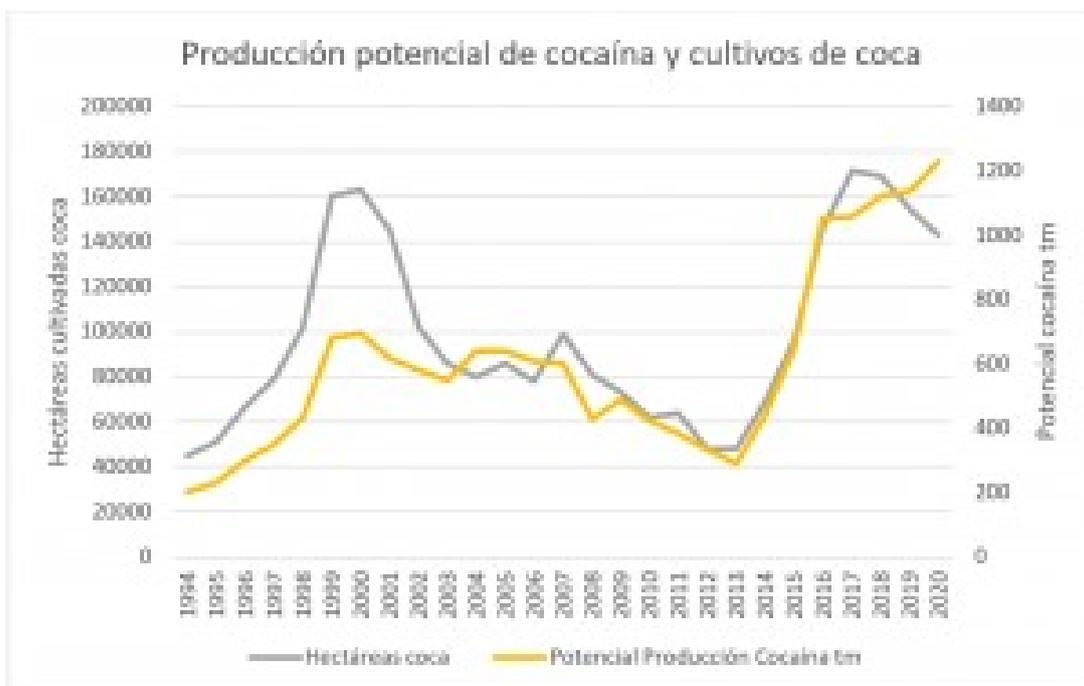
... it is wrong to say that there are only seven bases, because they are present in many more places of Colombian territory, in strategic areas, especially in the border regions with Venezuela. A tenacious device was created to encircle Venezuela with military bases that cover the entire Caribbean from Colombian territory. This is an issue that we always have to bring up when it comes to this issue. [[read interview with Renán Vega Cantor](#) May 13, 2022]

Petro is the first left-wing candidate to reach a second round. Those who tried to reach that instance in the past were killed. Among them Jaime Pardo Leal and Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, candidates of the Patriotic Union, the former member of the April 19 Movement, Carlos Pizarro and the liberal reformist leader Luis Carlos Galán. [The Pact candidate denounced two weeks ago that there was a plan to assassinate him](#) as part of the planned

tour in the city of Pereira, controlled by the paramilitary organization *La Cordillera*, associated with drug cartels linked to Mexican gangs that introduce cocaine and heroin into the United States.

The drug economy has accounted for between 2 and 3% of Colombia's GDP over the last decade. In terms of exportability, it adds up to 5 points of the total. The enormous capital involved in these [illegal transactions](#) is poured into the concentration of land ownership and the financing of electoral campaigns. It also generates a sustained labor informality, the institutionalization of money laundering, the smuggling of weapons, the privatization of security through the formation of paramilitary gangs – which have regiments of hitmen – in complete collusion with the Armed Forces and security.

Days before the primary elections, on March 1, 2021, the State Department increased subsidies for Bogotá aimed at limiting drug trafficking. The approved regulations must be executed by the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement ([INCLE](#)), derived from the Andean Initiative Against Drugs, which began at the beginning of the xxi century. In early June 2021, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)) published the initial results of crop monitoring in Colombia, conducted during 2020 through satellite surveys (comprising crop extent and density) and field observations.



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The result is very eloquent: the areas occupied by plantations are larger than those existing when [Plan Colombia](#) began in 1999, and the productivity of these crops doubled during the last two decades. The programs promoted jointly by Washington and the Colombian governments promoted – under the pretext of limiting coca crops – aerial fumigations. These procedures, in turn, led to the abandonment of community fields by farmers affected by herbicides. The result was the concentration of the lands – after the expulsion of its ancestral inhabitants – and the reduction of biodiversity by expanding monoculture.

While the United States uses soft policies dedicated to addressing the demand for narcotics (harm reduction treatments and forms of substance regulation), in Latin America and the Caribbean criminalization is required as the central core of supply reduction. The combination of both measures – the punitiveness and empowerment of the sectors complicit in drug trafficking, associated with the landowners – explain both the increase in drug trafficking and the partnership between the armed forces, the embassy and the cartels.



On the other hand, a large part of the capital from drugs [accumulates in the tax havens](#). But another part surrounds the businessmen who swarm the embassies to join the chorus of those who seek to avoid the triumphs of the popular, leftist or progressive sectors. This is the reason why in Colombia there are more and more plantations, more cocaine production and more flows of usable foreign exchange to prevent democratization and public regulation of land at the service of social interests.

The late writer Rafael Humberto Moreno-Durán (1945-2005) commented in an interview that, in Colombia, "politics is so corrupt that it corrupted even drug trafficking." It is understandable that Washington is terrified of Petro's triumph.

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