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# From the War on FARC to the War on Dissidents: a Critique of Imperial Peace in a Post-Agreement Theatre of War

*Oliver Villar* | ORCID: 0000-0003-2670-6581

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Charles Sturt University,  
Bathurst, NSW 2795, Australia

*ovillar@csu.edu.au*

## Abstract

In 2016, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC-EP) signed a peace deal (The Final Agreement to End the Conflict and Establish a Stable and Long-lasting Peace) in Havana, Cuba to end a 50-year-old civil war. This paper argues that, contrary to the conventional view, the relinquishing of weapons was a mistake, which is best understood through the context of regional power relations and politics of the Pink Tide and United States imperialism. It also argues that the peace deal has only favoured repressive political forces. It is hoped that this critical analysis of imperial peace will provoke further debate and discussion of the policies and movements which have disintegrated or survived, and can spark genuine solidarity amongst liberation struggles to achieve better strategic outcomes that are independent of any state power, however great or small.

## Keywords

FARC – imperialism – peace – civil war – counterinsurgency – post-agreement – revolution

## 1 Introduction

In 2016, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) signed a peace deal in Havana, Cuba to end a 50-year-old civil war. That civil war was a class war that had been triggered by the CIA's murder of the charismatic Liberal Party politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, who was promising land reform but did not live to see the 1949 election.<sup>1</sup> His death was followed by an unstoppable social revolt that has ravaged Colombia repeatedly, and almost without interruption, for the last seven decades.<sup>2</sup> Alberto Lleras Camargo, Colombia's first president for a national 'peace,' called the conflict an 'undeclared civil war'.<sup>3</sup>

The US counterinsurgency to destroy the FARC, which had begun in 1964, appeared to finally come to an end with the 2016 Havana peace deal. Washington connected this peace deal with US President Bill Clinton's 'Plan Colombia,' hailing this \$10 billion 'war on drugs' military aid and training program as instrumental in forcing the FARC into a conditional surrender.<sup>4</sup> This was supposed to end the conflict.

However, Colombians rejected the peace deal, revealing the deep divisions among Colombian society and its ruling class that are likely to mean that the revolutionary war does not end until one side wins outright militarily, regardless of peace agreements. Since 1982 there have been 8 major peace processes between various Colombian presidencies including Betancur, Gaviria, Samper, Pastrana and Uribe and both the FARC and the ELN, and at times when the guerrillas' position was much less strong.<sup>5</sup>

1 ICAIC, "Fragmentos de 'Pantomima.' Colombia 9 de abril de 1948" (Cuba, 2005), available online at <https://www.voltairenet.org/article124740.html>. The CIA's assassination, 'Operation Pantomime,' was exposed by a former CIA agent named John Mepples Espirito, captured by Cuban intelligence in the 1960s. In 2005, the *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* (ICAIC) released a documentary "Fragmentos de 'Pantomima.' Colombia 9 de abril de 1948" about the CIA operation involving Espirito and a team of other US agents that travelled to Colombia to contact Gaitán's assassin, Juan Roa Sierra. In the documentary, excerpts of Espirito's interrogation reveal that the US had tried and failed to bribe or blackmail Gaitán.

2 Hylton, F. "The Experience of Defeat: The Colombian Left and the Cold War that Never Ended." *Historical Materialism* 22 (1) (2017), 67–104.

3 Karl, R.A. *Forgotten Peace: Reform, Violence, and the Making of Contemporary Colombia* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 5.

4 "A Roadmap for US Engagement with Colombia: Independent Task Force Report" (2017), available online at <https://publications.atlanticcouncil.org/colombia-roadmap/>.

5 Villar, O. "In Whose Hands Is Colombia's Future?" (2016), available online at <https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/In-Whose-Hands-Is-Colombias-Future-20160417-0033.html>.

On 21 November 2019, hundreds of thousands of Colombians marched through the streets of Bogotá and other cities across Colombia in a wave of social protest spreading throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup> The mass protest can be characterised as a wave of popular discontent, rather than a single hot button issue. As Andes Director of the Washington Office on Latin America, Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli explained, the protests are linked to a failure of Latin America's political and economic system to meet the needs of its citizens.<sup>7</sup> Eight out of the twenty most unequal countries worldwide, when measuring income inequality on the Gini Index, are in Latin America.<sup>8</sup>

The right-wing government of Iván Duque Márquez closed Colombia's borders as one of the security measures to contain mass strikes and protests. Other suppression measures included torture, sexual abuse and threats of murder against illegally detained participants.<sup>9</sup> President Duque dismissed the protesters as 'vandals.' US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo applauded the Colombian government's violent response to the ongoing mobilisations.<sup>10</sup>

In these mass protests reports were that seven were killed, 700 injured with many more missing, and 600 were arrested.<sup>11</sup> The Committee for Political Prisoners, however, counts more than 1000 unlawful arrests, and the Foundation of the Freedom of Press reports that, in an unprecedented move, dozens of journalists trying to cover the protests were also detained.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, a bombing raid by Colombian special forces, aimed at the FARC killed 18 children, not eight as reported in Colombian and Western media, in the southern department of Caquetá.<sup>13</sup> There have been tanks on the streets

6 Janetsky, M. "Referendum on Duque': Thousands march against Colombia president" (22 November 2019), available online at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/duque-thousands-march-colombia-president-19112173409335.html>.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Messina, J. and J. Silva, *Wage Inequality in Latin America: Understanding the Past to Prepare for the Future* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2018).

9 "Colombia's police tortured, sexually abused and threatened to kill unlawfully detained protesters: reports." *Colombia Reports* (2019), available online at <https://colombiareports.com/colombia-tortured-sexually-abused-and-threatened-to-kill-unlawfully-detained-protesters-reports/>.

10 "Pompeo 'applauds' Colombia's violent response to peaceful protests." *Colombia Reports* (2020), available online at <https://colombiareports.com/pompeo-applauds-colombias-violent-response-to-peaceful-protests/>.

11 López, T. "Colombia: Dylan y Brandon, no murieron, los mataron" (2019), available online at <https://barometrolatinoamericano.blogspot.com/2019/12/colombia-dylan-y-brandon-no-murieron.html>.

12 *Supra* note 10.

13 *Supra* note 11.

in Chile, barricades and bloodshed in Bolivia prior to MAS's re-election and unrest in Haiti and Ecuador, forcing Ecuador's president to relocate his government, as social unrest unfolds across the continent.<sup>14</sup>

The conventional wisdom has been that the FARC's decision to surrender their weapons was the right choice in that it would put an end to the conflict.<sup>15</sup> This paper argues that the peace deal has only favoured repressive political forces, and that relinquishing their weapons was a mistake that is best understood through the context of regional power relations and politics during the Obama and Trump administrations. In that regard, the abandonment of the armed struggle was encouraged by the Cuban and Venezuelan leaderships of the 'Pink Tide', which opposed armed struggle in favour of a parliamentary approach to revolution. This played into the hands of US imperialism that aimed, ultimately, to destroy it. The Pink Tide was a manifestation of imperialist strategies of incorporation through capitulation, with the Obama and Trump administrations using different strategies.

The Colombian vortex is complex, but its basis is in class and imperialism. While it is true that FARC was unable to seize power militarily, it is equally true that the parliamentary road for FARC in Colombia proved futile- as killings targeting social movements continue under a so-called peace.<sup>16</sup> At the height of the Pink Tide (in the mid-2000s) and the height of the power of the FARC (late 1990s and 2000s), regional influences preferring to neutralise the armed

14 "Protests across Latin America reflect a toxic cocktail of pandemic and recession." *CNN.com* (2020), available online at <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/20/americas/latam-covid-19-protests-intl/index.html> (accessed 12 March 2020); "An explosion of protest, a howl of rage—but not a Latin American spring." *The Guardian* (2019), available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/24/latin-american-spring-protests-chile-ecuador-bolivia-haiti>.

15 Capone, F. "An Overview of the DDR Process Established in the Aftermath of the Revised Peace Agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC: Finally on the Right Track?" *Global Jurist* 17(3) (2017), 161–185; Baez, S., H. Santamaría-García and A. Ibáñez, "Disarming Ex-Combatants' Minds: Toward Situated Reintegration Process in Post-conflict Colombia," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019), 73; Koopman, S. "Building an inclusive peace is an uneven socio-spatial process: Colombia's differential approach." *Political Geography* 83 (2020), 102252; Palma, O. "A Model for Counterinsurgency Success? The Good, the Bad and the Ugly in the Struggle against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (2003–2012)." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2020), DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2020.1780007; Torres Enk, L., V. Cano Mejía, D. Gómez Santamaría and J.D. Arias Suárez. "The Peace Process in Colombia: A Knowledge Management Approach." Paper presented at the European Conference on Knowledge Management, 2019.

16 "Increased Attacks against Community Leaders, Human Rights Defenders Pose Gravest Threat to Colombia Peace Process, Special Representative Warns Security Council" (2020), available online at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14252.doc.htm>.

struggle, chose not to press their advantage by assisting the FARC, ultimately strengthening the ruling class at great expense to the working and peasant classes. The history of Colombian violence informs us, that the class struggle is not reducible to armed insurrection. It demonstrates that armed struggle is necessary to achieve major social change in an environment of state terror.

## 2 The Peace Conference in Havana

By way of background, the long Colombian revolution moved through various periods. First, the *Bogotázo* uprising of 9 April 1948 and the beginning of the Cold War in Colombia. Second, *La Violencia* (1948–58), unleashing continuing rural violence between Liberals and Conservatives. Third, the *Frente Nacional* (1958–1974), when the Liberal and Conservative parties agreed to share political power and when John F. Kennedy's counterinsurgency against the FARC commenced. Then, US 'narcocolonialism' emerged in cocaine producing zones (in Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia), generated by Richard Nixon's 'war on drugs' and extended by Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush (1970–1980s). This was followed by Plan Colombia and the 'war on narcoterrorism' initiated by Bill Clinton in 2000, and maintained by George W. Bush and Barack Obama throughout their presidential terms.<sup>17</sup> Most recently, the official end to the Colombian conflict on 30 November 2016, which is the subject of this piece. More specifically, we critically analyse the role of US imperialism, the Colombian ruling class and regional power relations and politics in the context of the peace deal.

The General Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace to commence peace negotiations began in 2012, when six months of exploratory talks were held in Havana as well as Oslo, Norway under the auspices of Cuban and Norwegian governments, together with Venezuela, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico and the Dominican Republic.<sup>18</sup> After four years of negotiation, and thawing relations between the US and Cuba following President Obama's visit to Havana in 2016, a ceasefire and an agreement (The Final Agreement to End the Conflict and Establish a Stable and Long-lasting Peace) was signed between the Colombian government

17 Villar, O. and D. Cottle, *Cocaine, Death Squads, and the War on Terror: U.S. Imperialism and Class Struggle in Colombia* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2011).

18 Thomson, A. "The credible commitment problem and multiple armed groups: FARC perceptions of insecurity during disarmament in the Colombian peace process," *Conflict, Security & Development* 20(4) (2020), 497–517.

of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC leaders. A final agreement to end the conflict was announced on 24 August 2016.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the peace process was underway, President Obama pledged \$450 million to begin the transformation of the post-conflict country, calling this new program “Peace Colombia”. The funding for this program would only be paid after the successful implementation of the peace process with the FARC.<sup>20</sup> For Obama and Santos, the agreement was proof that the FARC could be defeated without any military victory. For the ailing 90-year-old Fidel Castro and the ‘Pink Tide’ which saw a range of socialists, social-democrats and radical liberals elected into office from the late 1990s in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Nicaragua, Argentina and Uruguay, it represented a Latin American unity against the forces of imperialism.<sup>21</sup> Every Latin American head of state, the European Union, Obama, Santos, Nicolás Maduro, FARC and the Castro brothers supported an end to the conflict.

Yet a referendum in Colombia to ratify the deal on 2 October 2016 was unsuccessful. Of those who voted, 50.2% voted against the agreement. This was an embarrassing result for the brokers of peace. A revised peace deal, signed on 24 November 2016, was sent straight to Colombia’s Congress for ratification and not submitted for a second popular vote.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the conflict ended by parliamentary means on 29–30 November 2016.<sup>23</sup> A missing dimension of the peace agreement was that it also marked an end to the consultation period between imperialism and leftist states, and an end to the Pink Tide itself.

A resounding “yes” vote from the Colombian middle class in the October referendum would have completed the latest phase of the North American imperialist project.<sup>24</sup> However, the unexpected “no” vote victory reflected the mixed views of the Colombian bourgeoisie, which led to the peace deal being

19 Torres Enk et al., *supra* note 15.

20 Rampton, R. “Obama pledges more than \$450 million aid to help Colombia peace plan” (5 February 2016), available online at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-colombia-idUSKCN0VD2XM>.

21 Harnecker, M. *A World to Build: New Paths toward Twenty-first Century Socialism* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2015).

22 BBC News, “Colombia signs new peace deal with Farc” (24 November 2016), available online at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-38096179>.

23 Partlow, J. and N. Miroff, “Colombia’s congress approves historic peace deal with FARC rebels” (30 November 2016), available online at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the\\_americas/colombian-congress-approves-historic-peace-deal/2016/11/30/9b2fdag2-b5a7-11e6-939c-91749443c5e5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/colombian-congress-approves-historic-peace-deal/2016/11/30/9b2fdag2-b5a7-11e6-939c-91749443c5e5_story.html).

24 Villar, O. “La Izquierda en Crisis?: Problemas de Estrategia y de Ideología en la Era del Imperialismo del Siglo XXI.” *Preguntas sobre América Latina*, 29 October 2016 (Sydney, NSW: Latin American House, 2016).

opposed and the most reactionary forces emboldened by the changing of the guard in Washington (i.e., the Trump administration). A total of 62.59% of Colombians—‘the real Colombia’ where the FARC is present—did not vote at all.<sup>25</sup>

What the Colombian referendum in 2016 reflected were continuing political struggles in the ruling class and an opportunity to pacify resistance to the regime, not ‘Latin American unity’. Pressure from Cuba, Venezuela and progressive forces, pushed the FARC to engage in peace talks and capitulate. Questions surrounding who the ‘real’ insurgents are, are not unique to Colombia—take for instance Northern Ireland, after the Good Friday Agreement.<sup>26</sup> Willie Carlin, a former British spy who infiltrated the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, explained in a BBC interview that ‘back channels’ were used with contacts inside the IRA to promote a parliamentary alternative to betray the armed struggle in Northern Ireland.<sup>27</sup> After the death of FARC founder Manuel Marulanda in 2008 and the assassination of other senior and battle-hardened FARC commanders, ‘parliamentary roaders’ took up senior positions of the FARC central command.<sup>28</sup>

Following the signing of the peace deal, Colombia’s cocaine trade exploded, financially benefiting the right-wing forces, drug cartels, paramilitary groups and other associates of former President Alvaro Uribe Velez’s ‘narcobourgeoisie’ that had aggressively executed Washington’s counterinsurgency plans.<sup>29</sup> The supporters of the imperial peace made a strategic error in groupthink with their uncritical support for peace talks. This error occurred because the Latin American left was distracted by the transitory success of the Pink Tide and had overlooked that Washington’s aim was to maintain its domination through its main pressure point for the region (Colombia), not to give concessions. On the right, more divided than the left on its support for the peace deal, Uribe’s narcobourgeoisie was snubbed after the dirty work had been completed. President Trump simply released ‘hard right’ forces across the continent as

25 WOLA, “WOLA Statement: Peace is Still Possible in Colombia” (3 October 2016), available online at: <https://www.wola.org/2016/10/wola-statement-peace-still-possible-colombia/>.

26 Sanders, A. *Inside the IRA: Dissident Republicans and the War for Legitimacy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

27 Carlin, W. “Former spy – Willie Carlin,” interview by Stephen Sackur (28 October, 2019), available online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3c3sy98m>.

28 Johnson, K. and M. Jonsson. “Colombia: Ending the Forever War?” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 55(1) (2013), <https://doi.org/https://doi-org.ezproxy.csu.edu.au/10.1080/00396338.2013.767407>.

29 Bristow, M. “As Cocaine Production Explodes, Colombia Tries to Appease Trump” (2019), available online at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-20/as-cocaine-production-explodes-colombia-tries-to-appease-trump>.

pressure mounted for Uribe to be prosecuted for war crimes, and at a time when Washington needs to consider whether he is a liability or an asset.<sup>30</sup>

### 3 The FARC Capitulates

The capitulation of the FARC and the crisis of the Latin American left in the past decade has strengthened right-wing and reactionary forces across the region. Reports indicate that, since the peace deal, more than 800 activists and social leaders have been killed in Colombia.<sup>31</sup> Those figures do not include the FARC tally of 236 former guerrillas who have been killed, along with 38 family members including children, with 80 of those guerrillas killed since President Duque took office in 2018.<sup>32</sup> Despite the right-wing violence, Julian Conrado, the FARC's troubadour, recently became mayor of the municipality of Turbaco in the Bolivar department. The popular musician was arrested by Venezuelan authorities in 2011 in a joint US-Colombian effort to arrest him on charges of 'narcoterrorism.' He was later released on the condition that he join the peace talks in Havana.<sup>33</sup>

After FARC founder Manuel Marulanda passed away in 2008 and the original commanders of the FARC were killed by Colombian security forces with advanced US satellite tracking technology, the Colombian ruling class has not faced serious resistance.<sup>34</sup> This, and the mounting local and regional pressure

30 "Colombian army killed thousands more civilians than reported, study claims." *The Guardian* (21 November 2019), available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/08/colombia-false-positives-scandal-casualties-higher-thought-study>. In 2018, revelations that the Uribe family was directly involved in training and directing the operations of paramilitary groups from their own ranch added fuel to ongoing Supreme Court investigations of the former president's ties to massacres in La Granja (1996), San Roque (1996) and El Aro (1997), and the February 1998 assassination of Jesús María Valle, an attorney and human rights defender working with families of those victims.

31 Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz. "Víctimas del conflicto," (2019), available online at <http://www.indepaz.org.co/> (accessed 2 December 2019).

32 López, *supra* note 11; Acosta, L.J. "Former FARC guerrillas march in Colombia to demand end to killings." Reuters (2020), available online at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-peace-idUSKBN27H1W0> (accessed 11 November 2020).

33 Alsema, A. "FARC member to become mayor after winning first election since peace deal" (28 October 2019), available online at <https://colombiareports.com/farc-member-to-become-mayor-after-winning-first-election-since-peace-deal/>; "FARC Singer Julian Conrado Freed by Venezuelan Supreme Court," *Venezuelanalysis.com* (2014), available online at <https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/10272>. The Venezuelan foreign ministry asserted that the Colombian government agreed to allow Conrado to join the peace talks in Havana.

34 Porch, D. and J. Delgado, "Masters of today': military intelligence and counterinsurgency in Colombia, 1990–2009." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21(2) (2010), 277–302.



against armed struggle, left the FARC with the choice to either capitulate or to keep fighting in political isolation, like Che Guevara in the 1960s. This is a divide and conquer strategy from Washington, aimed at forwarding US imperialism in Latin America.

The election of President Donald Trump emboldened the 'hard right' in Colombia and undermined the imperial peace plan developed by his predecessors. Trump, though, continued Clinton's Plan Colombia and Vice-President Joe Biden's 'Alliance for Prosperity', which imposed the harsh neo-liberal policies of privatisation on El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, and fostered trade agreements between Colombia, Mexico and the United States.<sup>35</sup> It was these failing neoliberal policies and de-stabilisation efforts in Latin America, combined with right-wing violence and crises that created a staggering 7.7 million refugees in Colombia, 1.5 million refugees in Venezuela and 539 500 refugees in Central America, whose only hope is to reach the United States.<sup>36</sup> The overwhelming majority of neoliberalism's victims are poor peasants and the unemployed, against whom the Trump administration promoted building a 'wall'.

Washington, however, was unsuccessful in forcing a class peace on Latin America, including Colombia, the world's largest Spanish-speaking population after Mexico. While Trump inherited the wars and plans of preceding administrations, none have been successful in defusing the class war in Colombia. Resolving the situation (and its dominance) in Colombia was vital to the US's interests in the region. With China and Russia's support of the Pink Tide, the US had unwelcome rivals in the region. Washington needed its most willing vassal state, Colombia, to threaten and, if need be, attack, Venezuela to maintain US dominance in the region and neutralise other states that were hostile to the US, as occurred in Bolivia.<sup>37</sup>

35 Blumenthal, M. "How Joe Biden's privatization plans helped doom Latin America and fuel the migration crisis" (2019), available online at <https://thegrayzone.com/2019/07/28/biden-privatization-plan-colombia-honduras-migration/>.

36 DW. "Colombia: Refugees in their own country" (10 November 2019), available online at <https://www.dw.com/en/colombia-refugees-in-their-own-country/av-48896055>; The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Central America Refugee Crisis" (2019), available online at <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/central-america/> (accessed 3 December 2019).

37 Sprague, J. "Top Bolivian coup plotters trained by US military's School of the Americas, served as attachés in FBI police programs" (2019), available online at <https://thegrayzone.com/2019/11/13/bolivian-coup-plotters-school-of-the-americas-fbi-police-programs/>.

Since the 'Pink Tide' of the late 1990s, Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia remain the only states defying US domination.<sup>38</sup> What they share is a political and economic alliance with China and a security relationship with Russia, adding fuel to Washington's claims of their meddling in its 'backyard', with Luis Almagro, secretary-general of the Organisation of American States (OAS), claiming that Venezuela and Cuba are Russian and Chinese-backed states who are interfering in the protests in Chile, Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia, and Haiti.<sup>39</sup> In reality, these protests erupted because of continuing economic inequality, and in Colombia by something more potent: the reigniting of revolutionary ferment in the country caused by the government of Iván Duque Márquez, including going back on promised reforms and the negative effects of his policies. All of this has emboldened parts of the FARC, which have now rearmed.<sup>40</sup> It is in the interest of the US to win the war in Colombia and to prevent independent-minded states from emerging. For China and Russia, it is in their interests to establish political, economic and security ties with states that defy Washington.<sup>41</sup> As Washington can no longer prevent the global rise of China, it must try to undermine Beijing's economic strategy by eliminating governments that conduct trade and commerce with China and buy weapons from Russia.<sup>42</sup> This could become the underlying basis for a new Cold War in the Americas. The FARC is the current expression of more than 150 years of rural resistance by landless peasants against a wealthy, landowning comprador oligarchy which is once again in conflict with itself.<sup>43</sup> On one side of this rivalry within the ruling class is the 'untouchable' narcobourgeoisie of former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, represented by the Democratic Centre Party and President Trump. Trump maintained the flow of US aid to Colombia whilst he

38 Blank, S. and Y. Kim. "Russia and Latin America: The New Frontier for Geopolitics, Arms Sales and Energy." *Problems of Post-communism* 62(3) (2015), 159–173.

39 "Global Protests: Russia and China Risk Ending Up on the Wrong Side of History" (2019), available online at <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/global-protests-russia-china/>.

40 Gutiérrez, J.A. "Toward a New Phase of Guerrilla Warfare in Colombia? The Reconstitution of the FARC-EP in Perspective," *Latin American Perspectives* 47(5) (2020), 227–244.

41 "Putin instructs Cabinet to adopt roadmap to implement military cooperation strategy" (2019), available online at <https://tass.com/defense/1099807>; Cui, S. "China's New Commitments to LAC and Its Geopolitical Implications." In *China and Latin America in Transition: Policy Dynamics, Economic Commitments, and Social Impacts*, eds. S. Cui and M. Pérez García (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan 2016), 15–33.

42 Gurganus, J. "Russia: Playing a Geopolitical Game in Latin America" (3 May 2018), available online at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-america-pub-76228>.

43 Villar and Cottle, *supra* note 17.

rhetorically attacked Colombia in the media for failing to reduce illegal drug shipments.<sup>44</sup>

On the other side is the urban, cosmopolitan bourgeoisie of Juan Manuel Santos, closely intertwined with the interests of US finance capital.<sup>45</sup> This 'respectable bourgeoisie' includes agribusiness and extractive industries such as mining and petroleum, the academic world and mass media, and progressives that back a peaceful settlement and Joe Biden for President of the United States. Both former presidents Obama and Santos are Nobel Peace Prize holders despite their leading roles in the 'war on drugs and terror' through state-terrorism. Santos was Uribe's Minister of Defence when crimes against humanity were committed by government commanders of brigades, battalions, tactical units and the paramilitary death squads that worked with them.<sup>46</sup> Encouraged by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez to begin peace talks with President Santos in 2011, FARC Commander Alfonso Cano was fatally shot and killed in a targeted Colombian military operation, codenamed 'Operation Odysseus' sponsored by President Santos.<sup>47</sup>

The 'peace process' was doomed to failure. Colombia's new president Iván Duque Márquez opposed the agreements negotiated in Havana throughout his 2018 presidential campaign, and has subsequently, violated them. Duque's mentor and advisor, Álvaro Uribe lobbied for a plebiscite that would be rejected by the narcobourgeoisie of death squads, cattle ranchers, landowners, right-wing politicians and narco-supporters with a clear message: if [middle class] Colombians support peace, Colombia will become a Castro-Chávez dictatorship.<sup>48</sup>

44 Nelson, S. "Trump slams Colombia's president: 'He has done nothing for us'" (29 March 2019), available online at <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/white-house/trump-abruptly-slams-colombias-president-he-has-done-nothing-for-us>.

45 Hylton, *supra* note 2.

46 Semana, "Las razones para declarar La Granja, el Aro y Jesús María Valle como crímenes de lesa humanidad" (3 July 2018), available online at <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/las-razones-para-declarar-la-granja-el-aro-y-jesus-maria-valle-como-crimenes-de-lesa-humanidad/569898>; Rojas Bolaños, O.E. and F.L. Benavides Silva. *Ejecuciones extrajudiciales en Colombia 2002–2010: obediencia ciega en campos de batalla ficticios*, 1 edn. (Bogotá: Universidad Santo Tomás, 2017). Uribe faces several investigations into alleged war crimes, though activists say that neither Santos nor Uribe have been called to account.

47 "Historia no contada del proceso de paz en Colombia." *Barometro Latinoamericano* (2019), available online at <https://barometrolatinoamericano.blogspot.com/2019/09/historia-no-contada-del-proceso-de-paz.html> (accessed 21 October 2019).

48 López, T. "Historia no contada del proceso de paz en Colombia" (2019), available online at <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/202018>.

The empowerment of the narcobourgeoisie under the leadership of Uribe and Duque took military advantage of the situation, as seen by the assassination of leftists and demobilised guerrillas. This does not signify a simple revival of 'hard right militancy' across Colombia or Latin America. It represents complex changes in the system of imperialism- principally, the heightening tensions between the US and China in the Western Hemisphere and the incorporation of Latin American states into the global economy. Colombia is a vortex because its ruling class is unable to exorcise the demons of the 20th century: narco-paramilitarism, and the narcobourgeoisie's political expression, narco-fascism.<sup>49</sup> Colombia remains the leading producer of cocaine, despite the media's preoccupation with Mexico, and the US is still the main financial beneficiary of the cocaine trade.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4 The 'Pink Tide' Capitulates

The Pink Tide, which began in the late 1990s, improved the livelihoods of millions in Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Argentina and Uruguay.<sup>51</sup> The FARC, however, was not viewed as a Pink Tide phenomenon, as their struggle preceded it and utilised armed struggle rather than the ballot box. The general objective of the Pink Tide was to improve living conditions under neoliberal capitalism, and, if possible, to roll back neoliberal policies.<sup>52</sup> However, in the most radical of the Pink Tide states, Venezuela, an uncomfortable power-sharing situation emerged, with some government functions remaining in the hands of the ruling class, with others being vested in the hands of the newly empowered masses. The Pink Tide, therefore, was paradoxical in nature: anti-capitalist-imperialist in rhetoric but regionally accommodating and state centric in practice. In 2008, Hugo Chávez's announcement that FARC should lay down its weapons and end the armed struggle was welcomed by all Latin American leaders, including Chávez's mentor and advisor

49 Villar, O. and D. Cottle. "One-Hundred Years of Solitude or Solidarity? Colombia's Forgotten Revolution." *A Contracorriente: Journal on Social History and Literature in Latin America* 10(2) (2013), 167–202.

50 Veltmeyer, H. and J. Petras, *Latin America in the Vortex of Social Change: Development and Resistance Dynamics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019).

51 Harnecker, *supra* note 21.

52 Enriquez, L. "The paradoxes of Latin America's 'Pink Tide': Venezuela and the project of agrarian reform," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 40(4) (2013), 611–638.

Fidel Castro.<sup>53</sup> Laying down their weapons and embracing parliamentary politics was embraced by the FARC's new commanders.

The region's Pink Tide was largely subsidised by China's economic rise—trade between China and Latin America increased from \$12 billion in 2000 to over \$275 billion in 2013.<sup>54</sup> Most of this trade was in raw materials and pushed up global prices for commodities such as minerals, fuels, and oilseeds. Chinese loans also helped fund leftist social development policies in countries like Argentina, Ecuador, and Venezuela, where leaders looked for alternatives to the neoliberal Washington consensus imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>55</sup>

The Chinese-fuelled commodity boom promoted regional integration in Latin America and gave rise to hopes of greater independence from US imperialism. During the Obama administration, the US became increasingly isolated and even willing to normalise relations with its Cold War enemy Cuba. This rapid economic growth led to a steep decline in poverty and a swelling of the middle class.<sup>56</sup> The commodity boom period could not last forever, though, and its end in 2014 was heralded by a significant drop in international oil prices and of the price of other key commodities.<sup>57</sup>

The peace process was not just promoted as an instrument to end the war and bring peace to Colombia, but also as a means of easing tensions between Venezuela and Colombia. In reality, it was about strengthening the hand of US imperialism. The peace that was forced upon Colombia reflected the changing nature of imperialism that was not solely focused on regime change and destabilisation, but also on control and incorporation which required pacifying the Colombian class war and neutralising the Pink Tide.<sup>58</sup>

US imperialism's achievements in Latin America under President Obama were considerable. The Colombian peace process included influential leftist states like Cuba and Venezuela and was conducted in a multilateral and regional manner. Juan Manuel Santos reversed Uribe's foreign policy to make

53 The Official James Petras website. "Fidel Castro and the FARC: Eight Mistaken Thesis of Fidel Castro" (2008), available online at <http://petras.lahaine.org/?p=1742> (accessed 10 May 2008).

54 Reid, M. "Obama and Latin America: A Promising Day in the Neighborhood." *Foreign Affairs* 94(5) (2015), 45–53.

55 Fornes, G. and A. Mendez, *The China-Latin America Axis: Emerging Markets and their Role in an Increasingly Globalised World* 2nd edn. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

56 Reid, *supra* note 54.

57 "Is the "pink tide" turning?" *The Economist* (8 December 2015), available online at <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=413753425&Country=Bolivia&topic=Economy>; Messina and Silva, *supra* note 8; Fornes and Mendez, *The China-Latin America Axis: Emerging Markets and their Role in an Increasingly Globalised World*; Fornes and Mendez, *supra* note 55.

58 Villar, *supra* note 5.

peace with Ecuador and Venezuela through the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Organisation of American States (OAS). The Colombian vortex contaminated the region like a virus.<sup>59</sup>

Whilst these rapprochements were occurring, the Obama doctrine developed a ‘targeted killing’ policy. This included the murder of the original commanders of the FARC secretariat and covert operations to remove democratically elected governments (e.g. Honduras, Paraguay, Ecuador, Brazil, and Haiti) and to assassinate opponents in Colombia and Venezuela.<sup>60</sup> It is also noteworthy that many leftist leaders got ‘sick’ around this time (e.g. Hugo Chávez, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, Fernando Lugo, Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner). When Donald Trump took office, those ill Latin American leaders were either jailed or faced false corruption charges, and the rapprochement with Cuba ended. The killing fields of Colombia remained unaffected by the peace process, but the agro-mineral, financial and manufacturing elites linked to Latin American and Asian markets now started to move into the territories formerly occupied by the FARC.<sup>61</sup>

## 5 The New Phase of Colombian Struggle

Despite the setbacks, gambles and poor strategic planning of the Latin American left, as well as the middle-class preoccupation with identity politics, electoral victories and regime survival, a new generation of social leaders has arisen to confront the astonishing gains made by the Latin American right. In large measure, this is because the Pink Tide of the electoral left became the centre of political gravity from the 2000s to the early 2010s.<sup>62</sup> The US

59 Kornbluh, P. “WikiLeaks: The Latin America Files” (25 July 2012), available online at <https://www.thenation.com/article/wikileaks-latin-america-files/>.

60 Hunt, E. “The WikiLeaks Cables: How the United States Exploits the World, in Detail, from an Internal Perspective, 2001–2010.” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 30(1) (2019), 70–98; Assange, J. *The Wikileaks Files: The World According to the US Empire* (London: Verso, 2015). WikiLeaks diplomatic cables from the early 2000s to 2010 show much of the story of the US government’s efforts to contain and roll back the Pink Tide.

61 Petras, J. and H. Veltmeyer, *Power And Resistance: US Imperialism In Latin America, Studies in Critical Social Science* 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Argentina’s political direction changed under president Alberto Fernández, who brought together progressive leaders from across Latin America to organise the *Grupo de Puebla* to challenge the right-wing *Grupo de Lima* that was organised to denounce the Socialist government in Venezuela. Dilma Rousseff (from Brazil), Fernando Lugo (Paraguay) and Ernesto Samper (Colombia), and other attendees including Uruguayan presidential candidate Daniel Martínez, of the leftist *Frente Amplio* are *Grupo de Puebla* members.

62 Harnecker, *supra* note 21.

counterinsurgency in Colombia was successful in that it contained the FARC in the countryside, but it failed to silence the revolutionary call to change the country.

A re-armed FARC is once again an obstacle to the smooth transformation of 21st century imperialism. Although the official FARC supports a parliamentary approach to challenging the power structure in Colombia, the changing face of 21st century imperialism has complicated the process. The FARC's leader Rodrigo Londoño 'Timochenko,' who succeeded the murdered Alfonso Cano in 2011, represents the capitalist reformist faction. He favours a centrist party that focuses on improving Colombia's institutions, rather than on transforming them.<sup>63</sup>

Timochenko came fifth in the election of the new party's leadership during its founding conference in 2017, but was selected to lead the party. This party, whose logo is a rose with a red star in the centre, is pursuing seats at a local, rather than a federal level, with more than 300 candidates running for mayor, local councillor or regional assembly representative roles.<sup>64</sup> Timochenko pulled out of the 2018 presidential race, apparently due to ill-health, but was running on a moderate political platform based on combating corruption and promoting national reconciliation.<sup>65</sup>

The revolutionary faction is represented by Iván Márquez, who was the head FARC negotiator for the peace deal, and who came first in the election of the new party's leadership during its founding conference in 2017 but was not selected as leader. Márquez had been assigned one of the FARC's five seats in the Senate but withdrew in protest on July 17, 2018 due to the arrest of senior FARC leader, Jesús Santrich, and the murder of ex-combatants. There was a long list of broken promises he pointed to, including: reparations to victims of the conflict, reigning in the death squads, and, most critically, the FARC's long held demand- land reform and substituting coca for alternative crops.<sup>66</sup>

63 Rebelion.org. "Rompamos la desinformación agenciada por el régimen sobre la llamada división de las FARC: Carta al Pleno del Partido FARC" (2018).

64 Dickinson, E. "Local Polls in Colombia Put Peace to the Test" (25 October 2019), available online at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/local-polls-colombia-put-peace-test>.

65 "Colombia election: Farc's Timochenko pulls out of race" (2018), available online at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-43335878>.

66 FARC-EP, *FARC-EP: Historical Outline* (Toronto, ON: International Commission, 2000); Reuters. "Colombian FARC leader Ivan Marquez declines to take Senate seat" (2018), available online at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-peace/colombian-farc-leader-ivan-marquez-declines-to-take-senate-seat-idUSKBN1K62Bz>.

Márquez now argues that it was a mistake to surrender their weapons and that armed struggle remains valid for self-defence, but that popular mobilisation and political alliances should be the focus of the new movement. He subsequently announced on 28 August 2019, via a YouTube video, the official rearmament of the Marxist-Leninist insurgency.<sup>67</sup> In a 30-minute-long statement, he called for rearmament in response to his perceived betrayal of the peace deal by the State. The growing Colombian protests appear to have followed Márquez's statement.

The dissident factions that never demobilised—under the leadership of Gentil Duarte, Iván Mordisco, and John 40—are concentrated mostly in Colombia's Southeast.<sup>68</sup> Of serious concern is the accusation that leaders of the FARC-EP that supported the peace deal ordered the execution of dissenters, such as comandante 'El Paisa,' in collusion with the army.<sup>69</sup> If true, this may make any reconciliation between the different forces difficult.

It was to be expected that the Colombian state would fail to live up to its promises, as the history of the *Union Patriótica* (UP) shows. In an attempt to combine "all forms of struggle", the FARC created a political party, the UP, in 1985.<sup>70</sup> By the mid-1990s, 5000 activists and leaders including elected officials, candidates and community organisers of the UP had been assassinated by the Colombian military and government.<sup>71</sup> This included two of the UP's presidential candidates, eight congressmen, 70 councillors, dozens of deputies and mayors and hundreds of trade unionists and peasant leaders.<sup>72</sup>

President Duque and Timochenko's responses have centred around accusations that Venezuela is assisting FARC dissidents, rather than re-aligning their

67 BBC News Mundo. "Duque rechaza el levantamiento de 'una banda de narcoterroristas' en Colombia y la vincula a Maduro" (2019), available online at <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-49517416>.

68 El País. "Quién era 'Rodrigo Cadete'? El guerrillero que desertó de la paz" (2019), available online at <https://www.elpais.com.co/judicial/quien-era-rodrigo-cadete-el-guerrillero-que-deserto-de-la-paz.html>.

69 Rebellion.org. "Carta abierta a la militancia revolucionaria de Colombia y a la dirección del nuevo partido FARC" (2017); "Informe al Pueblo Colombiano" (2018), available online at <http://www.cedema.org>.

70 Dudley, S. *Walking Ghosts: Murder and Guerrilla Politics in Colombia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

71 Amnesty International. *Colombia: Amnesty International Briefing Paper* (New York, NY: Amnesty International USA, 1988), 1.

72 Dudley, *supra* note 70; Brittain, J.J. *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The Origin and Direction of the FARC-EP* (New York, NY: Pluto Press, 2010).



approach to the peace deal.<sup>73,74</sup> Tensions between Venezuela and Colombia could escalate into a full regional crisis not seen since 1 March 2008, when Alvaro Uribe Velez' ordered the Colombian air force to bomb a FARC encampment near the Ecuadorian border, killing the FARC emissary Raul Reyes and 24 foreign sympathisers.<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, in 2008, Colombian security forces had embarked upon a systematic attack on the FARC's chain of command, notably excluding second and third generation combatants,<sup>76</sup> which provoked regional tensions and led to Chavez urging the FARC to end their armed struggle.<sup>77</sup>

Under the 2016 peace agreement only the FARC was required to surrender their weapons, with the government to rein in the paramilitary forces that had worked with the state security forces. A controversial issue, as the previous attempt to enter parliamentary politics resulted in the decimation of the revolutionary movement in Colombia and surrendering weapons is a breach of the FARC's policy according to its founder Manuel Marulanda.<sup>78</sup> In revolutionary Marxism-Leninism, the idea of surrendering arms is equivalent to capitulation as without a people's army, the people have nothing. This view was made famous in Mao Zedong's *Problems of War and Strategy*: "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun".<sup>79</sup>

Six thousand FARC fighters surrendered under the negotiated peace settlement, with 300 refusing to do so; about 2300 have now taken up arms again.<sup>80</sup> Echoing the 'narcoterrorist' label from Plan Colombia and the so-called post-conflict "Peace Colombia" program that only criminal bands (or 'Bandas criminales'- BACRIMS) exist, a Reuters report states that 31 FARC dissident

73 BBC News Mundo, "Duque rechaza el levantamiento de 'una banda de narcoterroristas' en Colombia y la vincula a Maduro" (2019), available online at <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-49517416>.

74 El Tiempo. "¿Por qué la Guardia Nacional ataca a disidencias de Farc en Venezuela?" (2019), available online at <https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/venezuela/el-extrano-enfrentamiento-entre-grupos-irregulares-en-la-frontera-con-venezuela-539162>.

75 Marcella, G. *War Without Borders: The Colombia-Ecuador Crisis of 2008* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), 2008).

76 Palma, *supra* note 15.

77 BBC News. "End struggle, Chavez urges FARC" (2008), available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7443080.stm>.

78 López, *supra* note 48; FARC-EP, *supra* note 66.

79 Zedong, M. "Problems of War and Strategy" *The Marxist Internet Archive* (6 November 1938), available online at [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_12.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_12.htm).

80 Acosta, L.J. and H. Murphy. "Exclusive: Thousands of Colombian FARC rebels return to arms despite peace accord – military intelligence report" (6 June 2019), available online at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-rebels-exclusive/exclusive-thousands-of-colombian-farc-rebels-return-to-arms-despite-peace-accord-military-intelligence-report-idUSKCN1T62LO>.

groups are operating in “regions that grow coca” and “areas of illegal gold mining”.<sup>81</sup> However, according to recent fieldwork, there were an estimated 4000 fighters in mid-2018 organised into 29 dissident groups, present in 120 municipalities of 18 departments, all regions of previous FARC-EP influence.<sup>82</sup> The Reuters report also showed the number of ELN fighters had increased by nearly 8% to 2400 fighters since the end of 2018 and asserts that 45% of the ELN’s fighters are sheltering in Venezuela, along with FARC commander Iván Márquez.

The Colombian state did not betray the peace settlement- the Colombian state is ruled by the Colombian bourgeoisie for the bourgeoisie, and land reform was never contemplated or even considered. This class has shaped, owned and controlled the centralised state power of Colombia, with its death squads and US-backed mercenaries, and uses these forces to keep itself in power. The parliamentary road advocated by Venezuela and Cuba fails. As Marx observed: “...the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.”<sup>83</sup>

It remains unclear whether the post-2016 FARC is adopting a dual strategy- if the parliamentary and diplomatic element are co-operating with the militarist element to bring about the fulfilment of the peace deal, or if there has been a real split within the post-2016 FARC. There are arguments both ways. An assassination attempt on Timochenko, for which Colombian security forces blame Márquez, is consistent with Colombia’s history of violence against left-wing politicians.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Timochenko taking the leadership of the new FARC political party without having won the most votes seriously damaged the party’s legitimacy in the eyes of combatants.<sup>85</sup> In his YouTube statement, Iván Márquez explained that taking up arms again was a defensive strategy and that he would seek to coordinate with ELN forces, including other democratic political forces, progressive groups and opposition to the government of Duque.<sup>86</sup>

Dissident insurgent groups have adjusted their strategy and guerrilla tactics to coincide with the peace agreement, such as renouncing kidnapping and

81 *Ibid.*

82 Gutiérrez, *supra* note 10.

83 Marx, K. “The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune” *The Marxist Internet Archive* (13 June 1871), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/cho5.htm> (accessed 3 December 2019).

84 “Colombia foils attempt to assassinate ex-Farc leader Timochenko” (2020), available online at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-51086526>.

85 Rebellion.org. “El Partido-Movimiento de la Rosa y la Estrella Roja” (2017); Gómez and Álvarez, Rebellion.org, *supra* note 63.

86 BBC News. “Colombia ex-Farc rebel Iván Márquez issues call to arms” (29 August 2019), available online at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-49508411>.

ransom as a source of financing.<sup>87</sup> Their objective appears to be the installation of a leftist government that will support peace with social justice, one that will fight corruption and the exploitation of Colombia's natural resources by unfettered capitalism (e.g. multinational companies) by way of steep taxes or demand for payments. The FARC party's membership is decreasing swiftly, but with other leftist leaders, has made some inroads into the cities, adapting to new political conditions, e.g., FARC's Sandra Ramírez and Julian Conrado, Colombia Humana's progressive Gustavo Bolívar, and former Bogotá mayor of the Greens Party Gustavo Petro and Ángela María Robledo.<sup>88</sup>

On 1 November 2020 hundreds of demobilised members of the FARC marched from the Colombian city of Medellín to the capital Bogotá to join a protest against state violence.<sup>89</sup> The Duque government grows in unpopularity and gives dissident groups legitimate reasons to reactivate the FARC's war of position, and to surround the cities, whilst at the same time reactivating their war of manoeuvre in the countryside.<sup>90</sup> Also, the political and academic debate regarding the nature of the Colombian insurgency (revolutionary actor or 'BACRIM'—so-called criminal bands) continues, but the fact that they have been nominally accepted into the parliamentary system tends to indicate that they are not criminal bands.<sup>91</sup> The peace process was supposed to destroy the FARC but served, ironically, to legitimise its political demands to Colombian society. While a Joe Biden presidency may adopt a conciliatory tone and not isolate the FARC party, it will denounce dissident groups as 'narco-terrorists' and enemies of 'democracy' as every predecessor since Ronald Reagan has done.<sup>92</sup>

87 Phelan, A. "When Insurgent Leadership Splits: Understanding FARC's Internal Crisis Amidst a Fragile Peace Agreement." *Small Wars Journal* (2020), available online at <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/mapping-the-pursuit-of-a-%E2%80%99combination-of-all-forms-of-struggle%E2%80%99-how-colombia%E2%80%99s-peace-agreem>.

88 Jacobin. "Colombia's New Awakening" (2019), available online at <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/12/colombia-protests-paro-nacional-ivan-duque-farc>.

89 Acosta, *supra* note 11.

90 Phelan, *supra* note 87; Gutiérrez, *supra* note 10.

91 Torrijos Rivera, V. and N. González Tamayo, "Fertilidad Revolucionaria: Evolución de la conducta estratégica de las FARC durante las negociaciones de paz en Colombia." *Política y Estrategia* 127 (2016), 75–103.

92 Ehrenfeld, R. *Narcoterrorism: The Kremlin Connection* (New York, NY: Heritage Foundation, 1986); Ehrenfeld, R. *Narcoterrorism and the Cuban Connection* (Miami, FL: Cuban American National Foundation, 1988); Ehrenfeld, R. *Narcoterrorism* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1990); Ehrenfeld, R. and A. Meisel. "Mycoherbicides and Alternative Development: How the United States Can Defeat Narco-Terrorism." *Chapman Law Review* 13(3) (2010), 509–519.

New FARC fronts continue to spread, making accurate numbers of fighters difficult to estimate. 250 000 Colombians have died during the Uribe and Santos periods alone, with 7.9 million people having died since *La Violencia* in 1948.<sup>93</sup> What could not be achieved through armed struggle can never be achieved in a narco-state or narco-economy either.<sup>94</sup> A referendum in Colombia or the introduction of parties to the Colombian political system cannot change the repressive character of 21st century capitalist-imperialism. A state which the 'official FARC' wants to be part of. An economic system that Venezuela has attempted to reform since 1999 despite consecutive electoral victories, for a seemingly revolutionary socialist goal. However, Fidel Castro argued that armed struggle only invites US imperialism to Colombia.<sup>95</sup> According to Cuban documents declassified the previous year, then leader of the FARC Manuel Marulanda had planned a lengthy war with US imperialism that could have eventually turned into a "continent-wide struggle",<sup>96</sup> which may account for the pressure that Cuba (and Venezuela) exerted on FARC to de-mobilise.

As Washington continues to push for regime change in Caracas through the Colombian vortex, it supports reactionary right-wing governments which strongly oppose the FARC, the socialist government of Nicolás Maduro, and the lifting of the economic embargo on Cuba. Meanwhile, as further proof of an ongoing US counterinsurgency the Colombian government of Iván Duque Márquez prepares for further military offensives in the cocalero regions and resumes glyphosate fumigation of illicit crops.<sup>97</sup> This will mean a return to the FARC's remarkable ability to survive and win in remote and rural regions, making it even more likely that revolutionary dissident movements will grow in the cities as well. The FARC's long tradition of struggle against Colombian state terror has already gained widespread acceptance, as killings against the left continue, creating what José Antonio Gutierrez's describes as the 'counter-insurgent paradox,' when counter-insurgent efforts reinforce the cause of

93 Counterpunch.org."Wikileaks Cables Reveal Killing Hits Record Levels: Slaughter in Colombia" (2012), available online at <http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/02/23/slaughter-in-colombia/> (accessed 23 February 2012); Amnesty International. "Colombia: 'No' vote a missed opportunity for peace" (2 October 2016), available online at [https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/10/colombia-no-vote-a-missed-opportunity-for-peace/..](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/10/colombia-no-vote-a-missed-opportunity-for-peace/)

94 Villar and Cottle, *supra* note 17.

95 Castro, F. *La Paz en Colombia* (La Habana: Editora Política, 2009).

96 "Marulanda creía en una inminente acción de EU en Colombia, según libro de Fidel Castro" (2008), available online at <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2008/11/14/index.php?section=munido&article=035nmun>.

97 "I Will Be Left With Nothing': Why Colombians Are Watching the U.S. Election Closely." *Político* (2020), available online at <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/11/02/colombia-us-election-trump-coca-eradication-433811>.

guerrillas.<sup>98</sup> A revitalised social movement with a new generation of protest and resistance will not believe the propaganda in the media and most political commentaries. A plausible scenario.

## 6 Conclusion: the Left in Crisis

Regional support for ending the conflict demonstrates a struggle for control and influence throughout the Western Hemisphere that is more complex than the current American goals and objectives. Latin American leaders have welcomed outsiders into America's 'backyard' for economic development and aid,<sup>99</sup> but this has not led to a peace with social justice.

US imperialism's machinations to finally destroy the FARC through a peace deal have failed. The FARC party has its own strategy that aligns with the left across the region, including outside forces challenging Washington's domination in the region. Plan Colombia was a plan for the Western Hemisphere, with Colombia as the pressure point for US imperialism in the region. The US strategy ultimately succeeded in dividing and conquering 'castrochavismo' and 'narco-terrorism', what appeared to be or could have become a 'Red Tide' of revolutionary change.

The US not only opposed the widespread 'Pink Tide' but sought to stop its expansion, undermine its effectiveness and to eventually destroy it. The Obama administration relaxed relations with Cuba, but supported coups that ousted leftists like Manuel Zelaya in Honduras and other leaders, supported war against the FARC guerrillas in Colombia as part of the 'war on drugs and narcoterrorism', and imposed an 'imperial peace,' severely sanctioning the regime in Venezuela.

Sebastian Bitar from the University of Los Andes in Bogotá argues that the era of US military domination in Latin America did not end, but merely transformed. Rather than formal bases, the focus has become a growing network of informal and secretive base-like arrangements, with only limited formal bases being maintained.<sup>100</sup> Joe Biden's 'Alliance for Prosperity' established tax breaks

98 Gutiérrez, J.A. "The counter-insurgent paradox. How the FARC-EP successfully subverted counter-insurgent institutions in Colombia," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* (2020), 103–126.

99 Madrid, R.L. "The Origins of the Two Lefts in Latin America," *Political Science Quarterly* 125(4) (2010), 587–609.

100 Bitar, S.E. *US Military Bases, Quasi-Bases and Domestic Politics in Latin America* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). According to Bitar, US military operations can be coordinated directly from the United States mainland or from aircraft carriers with drones.

for corporate investor funds, pipelines and resource extraction throughout the continent.<sup>101</sup>

US imperialism undermined the Pink Tide and has prevented the return of ousted leaders, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff, Fernando Lugo, Manuel Zelaya and, temporarily, the exiled Evo Morales. But the US's most devastating accomplishment was the forced capitulation of the FARC through the active support of Latin American governments, irrespective of their political allegiances. The defining character of US imperialism was, and continues to be, its ability to divide and conquer, but it remains unable to control the untouchable Colombian narcobourgeoisie that it helped to create.<sup>102</sup>

The US Republican party's *laissez-faire* approach towards Colombia, under Donald Trump, reignited popular discontent and anti-government mobilisation by unleashing reactionary forces. The US does not care for peace and condones war and destabilisation efforts in what it still views as its 'backyard.' The Democratic Party strategy under a Joe Biden presidency is likely to return to Obama's more effective strategy of 'peaceful' engagement and murder of dissidents.

The tumultuous events that have recently convulsed Latin America did not just represent capitulation and accommodation by the Latin American left. Rather, they represent a new Colombian vortex of struggle in a transitional process of 21st century imperialism itself to unleash the processes of resource extraction and the accumulation of capital. The year 2016 was a year of calamity, disagreement, and growing rivalry in virtually every facet of politics, when the Pink region diluted further to become White. Four years have passed, and the Colombian revolution has entered a new phase.

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<sup>101</sup> Blumenthal, *supra* note 35.

<sup>102</sup> At the time of writing this article, Uribe has been released from house arrest.