



The FARC is back: Washington should beware

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On Aug. 29, Iván Márquez, one of the former commanders of the demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), announced a renewed call to arms via video, dealing the latest public relations blow to the long-running (and deeply troubled) Colombian peace process.

Citing the Colombian's government's "failure" to live up to its promises, Marquez stood alongside three other commanders and rattled off his plans for FARC 2.0: a kinder, gentler rebellion whose 21st century charter does not include kidnapping, extortion and kinetic offensives...unless such tactics are deemed absolutely necessary.

During his 30-minute speech, which was apparently taped somewhere in the jungles of Colombia or Venezuela, Márquez blamed the right-wing administration of Colombian president Iván Duque Márquez (no relation) for all of the problems in "post-conflict" Colombia. The former FARC commanders' call to re-arm and their disingenuous narrative of deep-seated grievances is the latest public relations blow to Colombian peace process — a process Washington has long supported in the hope that it would bring lasting stability to one of its strongest allies in the Americas.

Under the Obama administration, the U.S. backed then-Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos in his bid for political compromise with the once-powerful FARC — which had carried out a reign of terror in the South American nation since its emergence as a Marxist-Leninist grassroots protest force in the 1960s. When the Santos administration and the FARC finally succeeded in signing a peace accord in 2016, Washington pledged ongoing support and funding for its implementation. But even then, there were serious doubts about the feasibility of the peace accord's implementation — and about the extent to which the FARC, once firmly wedded to the use of violence to achieve its political aims, was truly committed to lasting peace.

The results were decidedly mixed. While the peace accords included provisions promising significant investment by the Colombian government in rural areas, sufficient funding was never provided, either by the Santos administration or by foreign sources. On the other hand, the agreement did lead to the peaceful demobilization of thousands of FARC fighters, something that represented a huge counterinsurgency "win" for the Colombian government. Meanwhile, as stipulated by the peace accord, the FARC founded a communist political party, the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) with ten unelected seats in the Colombian congress.

But, even though the agreement succeeded in transforming former militants into legitimate political players, that no longer seems to be good enough for the FARC's onetime commanders.

If Iván Márquez and his fellow commanders succeed in cobbling together a FARC 2.0 force that poses a significant threat to the Colombian state, it would signal a collapse of the 2016 accord — and presage a new cycle of violence in the historically troubled South American nation.

For Washington, Marquez's warning should be significant. It comes amid the ongoing crisis in Venezuela, where the corrupt regime of strongman Nicholas Maduro remains firmly ensconced despite America's best efforts. The two matters are linked, because Maduro (and before him, Hugo Chavez) has tacitly supported the FARC's destabilizing activities in regional rival Colombia. There's ample reason to believe, therefore, that the FARC's newfound activism is connected to the growing pressure now being exerted on Caracas by Colombia and others.

As such, it is crucial that a rejuvenated FARC be stripped of political legitimacy if it indeed turns to violence. Marquez's missive should not be seen as a brave political statement, but rather as a call to arms that holds the potential to greatly complicate Latin American politics — and could well usher in a new cycle of violence south of the U.S. border.

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