

US-backed Colombian peace treaty grants impunity for war crimes

By Neil Hardt
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Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos on March 26 told a press conference in Bogota that the failure of his government and leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to sign a peace deal by the previously-announced deadline of March 23 was due to the guerrilla movement's inability to agree upon "a firm precise and clear date for disarmament."

For its part, the FARC leadership has maintained that it cannot set such a date for demobilizing its fighters and turning over their weapons because it has not received sufficient security guarantees from the Colombian government.

For decades, Colombia has been embroiled in a veritable civil war between the FARC, the armed forces, right-wing paramilitaries, and the National Liberation Army (ELN), another self-proclaimed "left" rebel group. Over 200,000 have been killed since fighting broke out in the mid-1960s, the majority civilians, and five million people have been left homeless by fighting in the last 30 years.

Despite the passing of the recent deadline, evidence is mounting that a deal may be close. Negotiations have been taking place for months between the FARC leadership and the government in Havana, Cuba, under the watchful eye of the Castro and Obama administrations.

US Secretary of State John Kerry met separately with government and FARC leaders during last month's visit by President Barack Obama to Havana. Speaking after the meetings, the State Department said Kerry told both sides he was "encouraged that the 'end of conflict' issues are now front and center in the negotiations, including a formal bilateral ceasefire monitored by the UN security council, a timetable for disarmament, and security guarantees post-conflict for all lawful political actors." Kerry said that the peace

process was a sign of "a profound transformation underway in Latin America."

The deal being worked out between the FARC and the government covers the crimes of both organizations and lays the foundation for a more "stable" investment opportunity for Wall Street and US corporations. Human Rights Watch recently released a report noting that the peace deal would provide immunity for government officials guilty of overseeing mass execution programs by the armed forces.

HRW's Americas director Jose Miguel Vivanco called the agreement "a checkmate against justice."

The agreement would create a special judicial unit giving the government the power to waive criminal proceedings against those high-ranking military officials who oversaw the infamous "false positives" cases. From 2002 to 2008, the Colombian military systematically and intentionally murdered 3,000 innocent workers and peasants and reported the dead as FARC combatants (hence the term "false positives"). The program was aimed in part as a campaign of government terror, in part a response to widespread opposition to ongoing low-level collusion between the government and FARC rebels, and in part to keep the funds flowing from the Clinton and Bush administrations' \$9 billion weapons and training program known as Plan Colombia.

"The web of loopholes and ambiguities in the agreement could guarantee that many of those responsible for false-positive killings, ranging from low-ranking soldiers to generals, will escape justice," HRW's Vivanco said.

In other words, the peace treaty will provide impunity for the criminals in the government and the FARC while providing negligible relief to the Colombian population.

Pleased with the opportunity to open up legal avenues for power and privilege with the help of US imperialism and the Colombian government, the FARC produced a groveling letter to John Kerry in the aftermath of the meeting in mid-March.

The letter begins: “John Kerry, United States of America Secretary of State: Through you, we thank the US Government for its support for the peace talks...”

The letter continued: “We have reasons to believe that the US is able to see in the FARC-EP a reliable partner for the construction of the continental peace and we hope that consequently we will be recognized as a political force committed to the expansion of democracy and social progress in Colombia.”

The FARC’s willingness to collaborate with US imperialism to establish “continental peace” in exchange for recognition as a legal political movement is the logical product of the FARC’s program based upon petty-bourgeois nationalism and guerrillaism.

Born out of a popular front alliance between the Stalinist Colombian Communist Party and left-liberal sections of the national bourgeoisie after the Civil War of 1948-58, the FARC was praised for decades by Pabloites, Guevarists, and Chavistas as “left” revolutionaries to be lauded for carrying out the “armed struggle.” Today, they are aiding the US in carrying out a “profound transformation” in Latin America that will be based on an intensification of US imperialism’s involvement in the region and an escalation of corporate exploitation of the Latin American working class.

The FARC is following the path of former guerrilla movements in countries like El Salvador and Nicaragua, where the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) and Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) long ago traded their weapons for parliamentary positions and lucrative political patronage machines. Today, these groups are majority parties whose ex-guerrilla leaders are heads of state. The FSLN and FMLN now are in charge of overseeing new attacks on social programs, wages, and living conditions in their respective deeply impoverished, violence-ridden countries.

There are powerful sections of the Colombian ruling class who remain opposed to making a deal and would prefer the mass extermination of the estimated 7,000 to 10,000 FARC fighters.

This section, led by former president Alvaro Uribe, view the handling of a 1980s ceasefire as a preferred option. In the mid-to-late-1980s, the Colombian government unleashed right-wing paramilitary forces and massacred thousands of FARC supporters who had attempted to transform themselves into a legal party known as Patriotic Union (UP).

Whatever the immediate outcome of the negotiations, the reactionary content of the proposed agreement shows the character of the US pivot to Latin America. The move is a further step toward countering the influence of China in the region and providing access to resources, cheap labor and profits for Wall Street and US corporations. US imperialism has long counted on the Colombian government as a key ally in pursuing these aims, to which it can now add the FARC as a loyal subsidiary.

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