

Colombia and The Revolutionary Process

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In order to have a revolutionary process, it is necessary to go through revolutionary stages. First, what's needed is a raised consciousness that may trigger some outrage by a sector of society which may subsequently grow into sustained protests. The protests might gather a critical mass with the support of the general population and turn into general strikes. If the popular movement becomes large enough to impact the economy and the normal functioning of the government, and if the movement is able to seize critical institutions of the government and civil society under a strong and trusted political leadership, then we may have the foundations on which to build a Revolution.

Of course, this is a simplified scenario. The revolutionary process is much more complex and will depend on other factors such as the level of repression exercised by the government through its armed forces and police, or attempts at sincere diplomatic dialogue, the level of overt and/or covert interference by foreign powers, the likelihood of foreign military interventions, as well as the commitment to popular resistance including forceful or armed resistance.

One could pick almost any Latin American country through its history and recognise elements of revolutionary processes that succeeded or failed at any given time. But there is one country that currently stands out and is seldom reported about by the dominant media. That country is Colombia and its long standing struggle. As we observe a persistent popular challenge and confrontation with the rightwing government of Ivan Duque, we realize that there are times when the only word that makes sense in the geopolitical dictionary is "Revolution", and we ask, is Colombia initiating a revolutionary process?

Colombia has experienced one of the longest armed resistances against a dominant government anywhere in the world, which has been led since the mid-1960s by two major organizations, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army) and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army - ELN). The conflict has been mostly waged in rural areas outside the Bogotá urban area. That stage of armed resistance has confronted a strong repression responsible for thousands of Colombians, mostly civilians, killed in the large majority by rightwing paramilitary and Colombian security forces.

After a long peace process, in 2016-2017 the FARC-EP signed a [peace accord](#) with former Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos, disarmed itself and became the legal leftist political party Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (Common Alternative Revolutionary Force - FARC), preserving the acronym in Spanish as if to preserve the memory of its long struggle. However it decided not to participate in the elections of 2018 that were won by Ivan Duque of the Democratic Center party.

The peace accord signed by FARC-EP leader Rodrigo Londoño (nom de guerre, Timochenko)

and Juan Manuel Santos is still in place, but the necessary trust to maintain it is wearing thin and it is becoming one of the major issues that is at the root of the current civil unrest taking place in Colombia. The political link between the ideologically far-right former president Alvaro Uribe, whose administration had engaged in massive military and paramilitary attacks on the rebel forces that also resulted in indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population, and current president Duque has not been conducive to building trust, especially when the implementation of large portions of the peace accord are not progressing fast enough if at all. Restitution of farm land lost due to forced displacements during the civil war, the program of crop substitution from illegal to commercial crops, the facilitated reincorporation of former combatants to civilian life, and, most importantly, the disbanding of government-condoned paramilitary groups are moving very slowly and this is attributed to a lack of resources and political will by the Duque administration.

The [continued killing](#) of former rebels and popular leaders has not helped the peace process. In fact, while [Londoño remains in support](#) of the process but also [critical](#) of it, a faction of the newly formed political party FARC headed by Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich went into hiding and later [declared](#) that they would take up arms again against the state as a “new stage in the armed struggle.” It would be a great mistake on the part of the Colombian government to use this as a pretext to justify violent repression against the population that has occurred even after the signing of the peace accord and may ultimately be responsible for the armed reaction.

Parallel to this development and not in contradiction with it, Colombians are becoming more vocal and over time organisations and groups have swelled the mass movement that we have seen since November 21. In what is comparable to street protests in Chile, Brazil and Ecuador, for more than three weeks multiple thousands of people have taken to the streets in major cities, including Bogotá, to stage mass protests with no end in sight. The protests have grown to be “[long overdue](#)” general strikes organised by the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia (Central Workers Union of Colombia - CUT) and the [Comité Nacional del Paro](#) (National Strike Committee)

Besides unions, the mass movement includes students, social organizations, indigenous and Afro-Colombian people, farmers, cultural and environmental groups, and the political party FARC. The general population supports the protests in rejection of the Duque government’s neoliberal policies that include raising the compulsory retirement age, increasing workers’ contributions to the pension system, reducing the state’s role in social security, and lowering the young people’s minimum wage, among other things.

While the dominant media reports at length about the “pro-democracy” color revolution in Hong Kong they ignore the civil unrest taking place in Colombia. What is happening in Colombia is relevant news because it is part of the Latin American vociferous demands for peace and for opposition to unpopular government policies similar to those in Chile, Brazil, Ecuador, and soon in Bolivia, following the military coup.

Colombia has a 50-year long history of armed revolutionary process that is unique in Latin America but also ignored or some would say covered up. At the same time Colombia’s military budget is the second highest in the region, surpassed only by Brazil. The country has the largest concentration of US military presence in South America with nine military bases, out of 76 in the whole of Latin America as well as numerous US-funded organizations. Colombia has the infamous role of being the willing watch tower of the US’ Latin American

“backyard”.

Colombia is attempting to develop a peace process to end the long armed stand-off with the state, however the state is not making the necessary institutional and political changes to make peace happen as agreed to and ratified. So the popular resistance aiming to achieve revolutionary conditions appears to continue now on two fronts, one that recently rejoined the armed struggle and the other that hopes to move through the electoral political process. If we define the revolutionary goal as the non-violent break from the hegemonic foreign imposed neoliberal structures, the two fronts have more in common than we believe. In fact, the broader movement seems to be growing quite widely and fast. This should be a warning call to the Duque administration that seems to be comfortably feeling at ease and conceited under the protection of domestic and foreign military.

Colombia may well be initiating a revolutionary process given its own objective conditions or persistently following its revolutionary path initiated more than half a century ago. The actors at play are all taking up their roles determined to carry them on to the end. We are reminded of Antonio Gramsci: “Revolutionaries see history as a creation of their own spirit, as being made up of a continuous series of forceful tugs at the other forces of society – both active and passive, and they prepare the maximum of favourable conditions for the definitive tug (revolution).”

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