

Former Farc commanders say they are returning to war despite 2016 peace deal

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Men in YouTube video lambast the Colombian president, Iván Duque, and his government for not keeping its end of the deal

Two former commanders of the demobilised Colombian rebel group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Farc, have announced a that they are returning to war, nearly three years after [a peace deal which sought to end](#) South America's longest guerrilla conflict.

The two men, known by their aliases, Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich, released a video to YouTube early on Thursday morning in which they lambasted president Iván Duque and his government for not keeping its end of the deal, negotiated over four years of talks in Cuba.

Dressed in military fatigues and flanked by armed fighters, Márquez said: "This is the continuation of the rebel fight in answer to the betrayal of the state of the Havana peace accords. We were never beaten or defeated ideologically, so the struggle continues."

The 2016 deal sought to formally end [52 years of war](#) that killed over 260,000 people and forced 7 million from their homes, in a bitter conflict between left-wing rebels, government forces and state-aligned paramilitaries.

Márquez led the Farc's negotiating team, assisted in part by Santrich - who is currently wanted by US authorities for trafficking cocaine.

The deal initially failed to pass a public referendum by the narrowest of margins. Many took umbrage at the accord's guarantees of uncontested seats in congress for [Farc](#) leaders, and softer sentencing guidelines for those who committed atrocities.

Implementation of the process has been fraught with difficulties, and in many rural areas, the peace it promised has failed to materialise.

Seven thousand Farc fighters turned in their weapons to a UN monitoring body, but smaller rebel groups, Farc dissidents, and drug trafficking gangs have filled the void left behind. Mass displacements continue as rival groups contest territory.

Activists and social leaders, partly responsible for the grassroots implementation of the accords, are being murdered at alarming rates. Six hundred twenty-seven local activists have been murdered since the deal was signed, according to local watchdog [Indepaz](#).

About 150 former Farc fighters have also been killed. Ex-combatants and critics of the government say Duque has not done enough to protect them.

The Farc's political leader, Rodrigo Londoño - better known by his alias Timochenko - clarified on

Thursday morning that the Farc, now a legal political party, would continue to honour the deal.

The Duque government inherited the peace process when it came into power in 2018 and has long voiced skepticism of it, cutting funding to its transitional justice mechanism earlier this year.

Patricia Linares, the lead magistrate of the special transitional justice courts, said that “the wrong decision of a group of people – who betrayed their commitments to peace, to [Colombia](#), and to the world – cannot be enough to cut off the longing for peace which all Colombians share.”

Duque’s political patron, former president Álvaro Uribe, led the campaign to defeat the referendum in 2016. His tenure from 2000 to 2008 was marked with brutal military blows against the Farc, which critics say they came with little concern for human rights and collateral damage to civilians.

Duque downplayed the threat posed by the new guerrilla faction and repeated accusations that dissident rebels were being sheltered by Venezuela’s leftist president.

“We are not facing the birth of a new guerrilla force, but criminal threats of a gang of narcoterrorists who have the shelter and support of the dictatorship of Nicolás Maduro,” Duque said. “Let us not fall into the trap of those who today intend to hide behind false ideological clothing to sustain their criminal structures.”

In their announcement, Márquez and Santrich said they would be forming a “new guerrilla” to continue in arms against the government. Security forces estimate that they command up to 2,200 soldiers, according to Reuters. While the Farc depended on drug trafficking, extortion and kidnapping to fund their political ambitions, but Márquez said the new faction will not use ransom money for income.

The move was welcomed by a commander from another leftist rebel group the National Liberation Army (or ELN). “Better late than never,” said the masked guerrilla known as Comandante Uriel in a video posted to [Twitter](#).

Peace talks between the ELN and the government, collapsed in February after a rebel carbomb killed 22 people. Once overshadowed by Farc, the ELN has grown steadily stronger since the peace deal, [extending its reach far into neighbouring Venezuela](#).

Despite Márquez’s announcement, former rank and file Farc fighters – many of whom have started new lives and families – said they were committed to peace.

“Peace is the way forward,” said Manuel Bolivar, a demobilised fighter who now lives in Bogotá. “It has brought us reconciliation and forgiveness.”

Jorge Taverich, a former fighter living in the country’s southern Putumayo province, echoed the sentiment. “We respect the position of our brothers Márquez and Santrich but we have made a bet on peace and we are going to see it out,” he told the Guardian.

Juan Manuel Santos, the president who negotiated the deal and won the 2016 Nobel peace prize for his efforts, called on his successor to stick to the process. “90% of the Farc is still in the peace process. We must continue to comply. The defectors must be fought with all force,” he [tweeted](#) on Thursday morning. “The battle for peace does not stop!”

Adam Isacson, a security analyst at the Washington Office on Latin America think tank, said that the announcement should prompt the Colombian government to move faster to implement the peace deal.

“Duque can still avoid being remembered as the president who blew a historic opportunity for peace – but to do so, he has to change course now.”

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