

# Trump launches economic war after Colombian government denies entry to deportation flights

Andrea Lobo  
26 January 2025

President Donald Trump announced Sunday a series of trade, financial and diplomatic reprisals just short of a declaration of all-out war after Colombian President Gustavo Petro blocked two US deportation flights carrying Colombian migrants on military planes.

On Sunday morning, Petro announced on X the rejection of deportation flights, declaring, “The U.S. must establish a protocol for the dignified treatment of migrants before we receive them.”

The measure triggered a wave of vile commentary in US fascist circles led by former Republican representative Matt Gaetz, who was briefly Trump’s nominee for Attorney General. “Don’t fuck with us on this, dude,” wrote Gaetz on X. “You will be taking your criminals back the easy way or the hard way,” he added, calling migrants “shit.”

In the afternoon, Trump announced on his Truth social media platform a series of “decisive retaliatory measures,” claiming Petro had jeopardized National Security and Public Safety of the United States. These include 25 percent emergency tariffs on Colombian imports, increasing to 50 percent in a week, a travel ban and visa revocations on Colombian officials and their relatives, allies and supporters, and International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) financial sanctions.

“These measures are just the beginning,” Trump added.

With the US being far and away the main recipient of Colombian exports, over 25 percent of the total, the measures constitute a threat to devastate South America’s third largest economy. At the same time, naming Colombia a national security threat, which is also implied by the IEEPA, constitutes a warning of a military character.

Moreover, Trump’s declaration that “Colombia’s Socialist President” is “very unpopular amongst his people” takes place after Petro has warned for months of a coup plot to oust him by the far-right opposition and within the state. For the oligarchic regime headed by Trump, even Petro’s limited social policies and verbal criticisms of US foreign

policy, most notably denouncing US responsibility for the genocide in Gaza and Trump’s climate change denialism, are intolerable.

Petro replied with a mix of counter-reprisals and adaptation: a 25 percent tariff on US imports, which will increase prices or fully deprive Colombia of countless necessary imports, and a proposal to use “civilian planes,” including his own presidential jet, to repatriate Colombian migrants deported by the Trump administration.

The Colombian president also called on the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and its chair, Honduran President Xiomara Castro, to convene an emergency meeting to address migration and drug trafficking. Castro has been among the Latin American heads of state most critical of Trump’s agenda, threatening to expel the US military from its Soto Cano air base and turn closer to China if Trump carries out mass deportations of Hondurans.

Petro wrote on X, “You can, with your economic strength and your arrogance, try to stage a coup d’état as you did with Allende. But I will die under my right; I resisted torture and I resist you.” Petro, a member of the M-19 urban guerrilla movement in his youth, was tortured during two years of imprisonment. Chilean President Salvador Allende died during a military overthrow orchestrated by the CIA in 1973.

But Trump’s retaliation is aimed not solely or even chiefly at Petro. By targeting Latin America’s main US military ally and NATO “global partner,” the message is that no exceptions will be made.

The type of subordination demanded by Trump’s fascist agenda was hinted at by a report on CBS News that fascist President Nayib Bukele plans to declare El Salvador a “third safe country,” which would allow the US to deport non-Salvadoran immigrants there, blocking their right to request asylum, and placing them at the mercy of Bukele’s martial law regime.

Trump is also sending a message to America's neighbor and main trade partner, Mexico, amid US media reports that President Claudia Sheinbaum denied permission to land to one US military plane carrying deportees on Thursday.

The White House said Mexico agreed to receive a record four deportation flights on Thursday, and a State Department official said one was denied access to land due to "miscommunication." The Mexican government has not confirmed these flights or the denial of any of them. The following day, the Mexican government vowed to continue cooperating, even as the White House said Mexico had agreed to mobilize 30,000 National Guard troops to the border to oversee the "Remain in Mexico" policy.

On Thursday, three deportation flights arrived in Guatemala, including two on military aircraft.

The political use of Petro's denial of deportation flights has many implications. On the one hand, Trump seeks to bolster his preposterous claim of an "invasion" by unarmed and impoverished migrant workers—a claim upon which he has rested his entire edifice of dictatorial executive orders against migrants and basic democratic rights.

In his social media announcement, Trump claimed that these migrants have been "forced into the United States" by the Petro administration, suggesting an attack on US soil by another state. However, the number of undocumented Colombian migrants living or entering the US is a tiny fraction of the total.

More fundamentally, Washington's backing of the most fascistic layers of the Colombian ruling elite is the main cause of the Colombian diaspora historically. Since the 1960s, an estimated 8.6 million people have been displaced internally and externally as a result of the US-backed counter-insurgency wars against any opposition to brutal levels of poverty and inequality in the country.

The claim that migrants are all hardened criminals, moreover, is refuted by statistics showing that migrants are less likely than US citizens to commit violent crimes.

The placing of immigration policy in the hands of the military and the landing of Northern Command planes anywhere and at will sets a dangerous precedent as part of a strategy of integrating military operations, in the form of a "total war" against targets at home, including migrants and political opponents, and across the hemisphere, under the same fraudulent claim of an "invasion."

Conceived as a necessary step to escalate war against China, Trump has threatened to take direct control over key resources, cheap labor platforms, territory and infrastructure in Washington's "backyard," starting with Greenland, Canada, the Panama Canal and the Gulf of Mexico. He has also classified Mexican drug cartels and gangs in El Salvador and Venezuela as "foreign terrorist organizations,"

to provide a pseudo-legal framework for justifying US military operations in the countries where these organizations operate.

The pushback by Petro, Sheinbaum, Castro and others over the treatment of immigrant workers is driven by expectations of mass popular revulsion against Trump's policies and the fear of losing control over this opposition.

The brutality of the US deportation campaign was exposed over the weekend with the emergency landing in Manaus of a plane carrying Brazilian deportees who revolted after being kept on the tarmac without air-conditioning. Brazilian Federal Police boarded the plane after the deported immigrants managed to open an emergency door and cry for help. They found them handcuffed and in leg chains, complaining of having been denied food and water, being beaten and threatened with death. The Brazilian government refused to allow US authorities to continue the flight, denouncing the "flagrant disregard" of the immigrants' rights.

However, the mass deportations, the turn to fascism and the threat of imperialist aggression can only be opposed by a united political movement of workers on an international and socialist basis, not through any capitalist governments, including those that employ "left" nationalist rhetoric. No government, including Petro's, is attempting to resist the cruel and anti-democratic uprooting of migrant workers from their lives in the United States.

The real class attitude of the national ruling elites represented by these governments was summed up by Mexican Interior Minister Rosa Icela Rodríguez, who said callously: "Repatriation is an opportunity to return home and reunite with family." There are an estimated four million undocumented Mexicans living in the United States, compared to about 190,000 Colombians.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**