
FARC Leader: Meeting with Kerry in Cuba “Historic” and “Unthinkable”

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“(It was) a historic meeting with the U.S. secretary of state, something unprecedented and unthinkable. We received support from him in person for the peace process in Colombia, which fills us with optimism and makes us more certain that we’re moving toward peace,” Rodrigo Londoño, alias “Timochenko,” said in a video released Tuesday by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

Kerry, who accompanied U.S. President Barack Obama on his historic three-day visit to Cuba, held separate meetings Monday with Colombian government and FARC negotiators, who have been engaged in a peace process in Havana since November 2012.

The conversation with the FARC, in which Timochenko was present, marked the first time a U.S. secretary of state has met with a group included on Washington’s list of foreign terrorist organizations.

Also attending the meeting were rebel delegates to the peace talks and members of the guerrilla group’s high command: Ivan Marquez, Pablo Catatumbo, Pastor Alape, Ricardo Tellez, Joaquin Gomez and Carlos Antonio Losada.

The FARC’s top leader said in the video message that “those who financed, advised and promoted the greatest offensive that a guerrilla group has ever suffered” now extend their hand to achieve peace.

Timochenko was referring to Plan Colombia, the Andean nation’s U.S.-backed anti-drug strategy, which was conceived in the late 1990s and later expanded to combat leftist rebels.

“They’ve personally expressed their willingness to support us in what we need to achieve peace in Colombia,” the rebel leader added.

In that regard, Kerry said the United States would help guarantee the “safety of people who lay down their

weapons,” the Colombian government’s chief negotiator, Humberto de la Calle, said Monday.

But Kerry’s meeting with the FARC sparked controversy among opponents of the peace process in the Andean nation, with former President Alvaro Uribe writing on Twitter that “many Colombians feel offended” by the U.S. government’s talks with “the world’s biggest cocaine cartel, terrorist group.”

The Colombian government and the guerrillas have reached agreement on several key issues, including land reform, political participation for former rebels, the elimination of illicit drug production and redress for victims of the strife.

Last September, the two sides agreed on a March 23 deadline for signing a peace deal, but earlier this month they said that date would have to be pushed back because conditions were not yet in place for an agreement to end decades of conflict.
