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A Colombian Shakedown in Washington

President Santos is a better friend to Cuba and Venezuelan than to the U.S.

By Mary Anastasia O'Grady

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos goes to Washington this week to seek Donald Trump's blessing for his amnesty deal with the narco-terrorist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. He also wants the \$450 million that Barack Obama set aside for Colombia in this year's U.S. budget. Back home Mr. Santos gets few blessings—a poll published May 8 by the market research firm Yanhaas found he has 19% approval. Mr. Trump might like to consider why that is.

On almost all counts Colombia is worse off than when Mr. Santos took the helm in 2010. Important economic reforms have languished, but last year the government sharply hiked taxes. The economy grew a scant 2% in 2016.

Mr. Santos has presided over a corruption boom. Colombia has fallen 12 points in the Transparency International corruption rankings during his time in office. He denies knowing about illegal donations to his 2014 re-election campaign from the Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht, but last week the Colombian Congress announced a special commission that will open an investigation.

Nevertheless, Mr. Santos may feel smug when he arrives in Washington. He went around the Colombian Constitution to make his FARC deal law. Then he enshrined it above the constitution, even though the public rejected it in a national plebiscite. He also got his country's Congress, which he controls, to give him rule-by-decree powers during its implementation.

Colombia is now a place where the president's political enemies, or their relatives, often wind up in jail. Former President Álvaro Uribe's brother Santiago has been behind bars since early 2016, though he has never been convicted of any crime.

Coca production has soared under Mr. Santos. So he may think he has the U.S. over a barrel:

either hand over the foreign aid or watch narco-trafficking spin further out of control. Mr. Trump might want to inform Mr. Santos that while extortion runs wild in his Colombia, it is considered bad form in the U.S.

The dilemma highlights the foolishness of the U.S. war on drugs, which seeks to defoliate the South American continent to curtail narcotics demand in the U.S. The plan has failed and emboldened Andean criminal organizations, which pocket the profits from a lucrative cocaine business in the U.S., gain power in rural areas, and destabilize democracies.

Under Mr. Uribe Colombia regained wide areas of the country that had been lost to organized crime—primarily the FARC working with other criminal groups—and re-established the presence of the state throughout the country. When Mr. Santos took office the FARC had been defeated.

Mr. Santos told me in 2012 that the FARC initiated the peace talks. But according to his brother Enrique, long a friend to Colombia's terrorist left, that is not true. As I explained in this space last year, in his 2014 first-person book, "Así Empezó Todo" ("How It All Began"), Enrique writes that a settlement with the FARC was Juan Manuel's idea.

It was only one of many fibs Mr. Santos told at home and abroad in his zeal to appease FARC war criminals. Cuban dictator Raúl Castro hosted the talks in Havana, and Mr. Santos gave in to every one of the group's demands. They got full amnesty, seats in Congress and the right to govern. After decades of drug trafficking they claim to have no money to compensate victims. The agreement will cost Colombian taxpayers \$31 billion over 10 years.

Last week, the day after a dinner at the Colombian ambassador's residence, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio said "the United States supports the implementation of Peace Colombia but that it will be conditioned on full compliance of the agreement by the FARC and . . . we will work with the Colombian government, the democratically elected government chosen by the people of Colombia, to ensure that crimes committed by the FARC do not go unpunished and that victims are adequately compensated."

The Miami Herald reported that Mr. Rubio had endorsed the Santos-FARC treaty. Mr. Rubio defended himself on Twitter : "I never said anything about supporting the peace deal in my speech. I said I supported continued funding of Colombia with conditions."

Mr. Rubio is a champion of freedom in the region. If he is serious, Mr. Santos won't get a dime, because the centerpiece of the Havana agreement is "not one day in jail" for FARC. Money is fungible so there is no way to keep U.S. aid from going to, for example, special courts for FARC confessions, which Mr. Rubio says he opposes.

Mr. Rubio insists the FARC deal is an internal matter and shouldn't weigh on U.S. funding decisions to help the Colombian military. But Colombia is no longer the ally it was under Mr. Uribe. Mr. Santos's friends are Cuba and Venezuela. He has not been helpful in pressuring Caracas to return to democracy. Since when does Washington ignore an antidemocratic power grab when assessing whether a country is worthy of foreign aid?