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## Colombia Accepts US Military Deportation Flights After Standoff

January 27, 2025 - by Thomas Dolzall



Flag of Colombia. Image - flickr/Nicolas Raymond

A bilateral dispute between the United States and Colombia over the terms of migrant deportation flights reached a tentative diplomatic resolution Sunday night after a flurry of escalatory negotiations brought both countries to the brink of imposing blanket tariffs on each other's economies.

The proximate source of the incident lay with the response of Latin American states to the newly elected Trump administration's decision to utilize U.S military transport aircraft to deport undocumented migrants back to their countries of origin. Repatriation flights [are not unusual](#) in and of themselves. Colombia accepted [over 120 flights over the preceding year](#), conducted predominantly via charter aircraft. However, the usage of military aircraft and other policy adjustments have generated resistance from on the part of some Latin American capitals, with several regional states objecting to the moves on grounds related to sovereignty and flight conditions.

On January 25th, [Mexico denied landing access](#) to a U.S military aircraft carrying undocumented migrants. Although Brazil accepted a non-military aircraft carrying deportees that same day, the country subsequently [lodged a diplomatic complaint](#) with the United States alleging that the conditions under which the deportees were transported violated the terms of a 2017 bilateral agreement governing standards of passenger treatment. In the wake of the Brazilian complaint over flight conditions, the Colombian presidential administration of Gustavo Petro denied landing approvals for two previously cleared U.S military repatriation flights on a similar basis, demanding that flight standards be revised.

Responding to Colombia's refusal of the two flights, President Trump took to the social media platform [Truth Social to announce plans to enact retaliatory diplomatic and economic measures against the Colombian government](#). Central amongst the proposals were 25 percent tariffs on all Colombian exports, with the option to raise them to 50 percent in a week, and the possible levy of financial and banking restrictions on Colombian entities under the auspices of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). Not long thereafter, the White House confirmed these plans with an official press release. In addition, U.S Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirmed that the United States would institute an enhanced customs regime for Colombian goods and nationals entering the United States and impose visa restrictions and a travel ban on Colombian government officials and their family members. Not long thereafter, President Petro announced in a post on the [social media platform X that Colombia would in turn levy 25 percent tariffs on all U.S imports, pending changes to flight standards](#).

However, only hours later both countries withdrew their tariff threats, with a flurry of bilateral diplomatic activity guiding the crisis to a partial resolution later that night. The White House Press

Secretary announced on January 26th that Colombia [had agreed to all of the Trump administration's stated terms](#), extending to “the unrestricted acceptance of all illegal aliens from Colombia...including on U.S military aircraft”. Correspondingly, the administration announced that its proposed IEEPA measures and tariffs would correspondingly be “held in reserve” rather than enacted.

In turn, the [Colombian Foreign Ministry's official press release](#) emphasized that the nascent deal guarantees ‘decent conditions’ for Colombian deportees moving forward and that the Colombian government would utilize its presidential VIP aircraft to ferry back the Colombian nationals who had been aboard the two previously rejected U.S Air Force flights. The Colombian statement also indicated that the Colombian Foreign Minister and ambassador to the United States would move to hold high-level talks with the U.S administration in order to follow up on the night’s diplomatic activities, leaving some room for lingering ambiguities surrounding the precise terms of the emerging bilateral deal. Pending further developments and until the “first planeload of Colombian deportees is successfully returned”, the U.S administration has indicated it will maintain the State Department’s enhanced customs regime on Colombian goods and visa restrictions on relevant Colombian nationals.

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A lifelong enthusiast of armored vehicles, Thomas serves as an analyst on Forecast International's Military Vehicles Forecast product. In addition, Thomas is responsible for updating the reports and analysis within Forecast International's International Military Markets – Latin America & Caribbean product. He also provides analysis for Forecast International's Airborne Retrofit & Modernization Forecast. Before this assignment, Thomas served as a research assistant for Forecast International's analytical team and has made written contributions to the Civil Aircraft Forecast, Military Aircraft Forecast, and Rotorcraft Forecast services. Thomas derives his knowledge from a multidisciplinary background, with a strong emphasis on the history and politics of Russia and the former satellite republics of the Soviet Union. He has studied in the Russian Federation at Saint Petersburg State University and is proficient in the Russian language at an advanced level.

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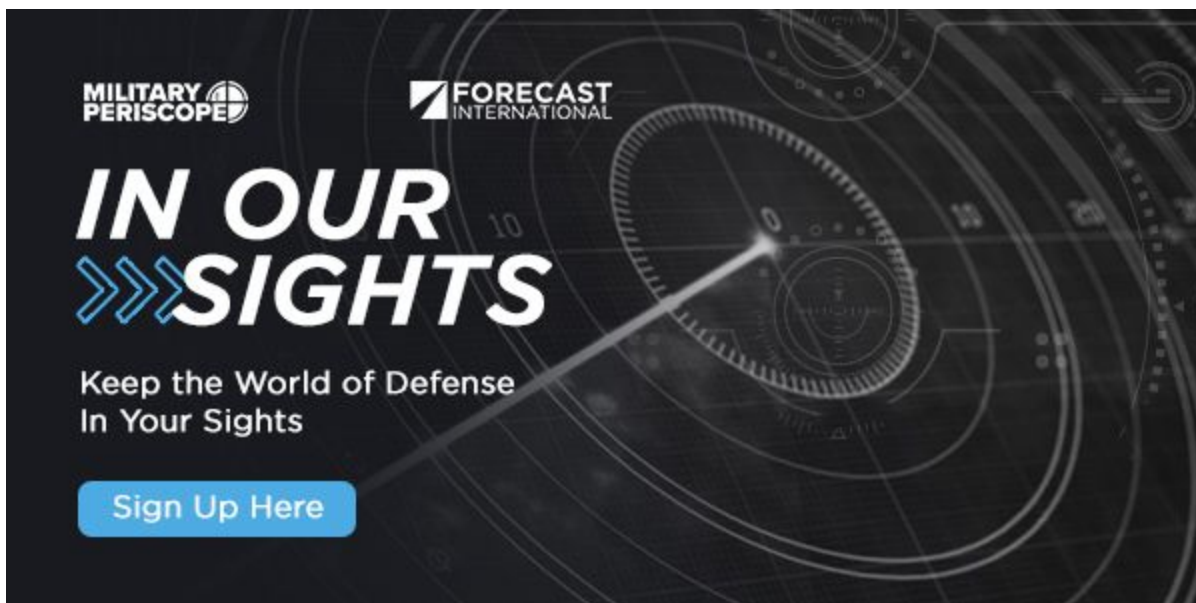
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