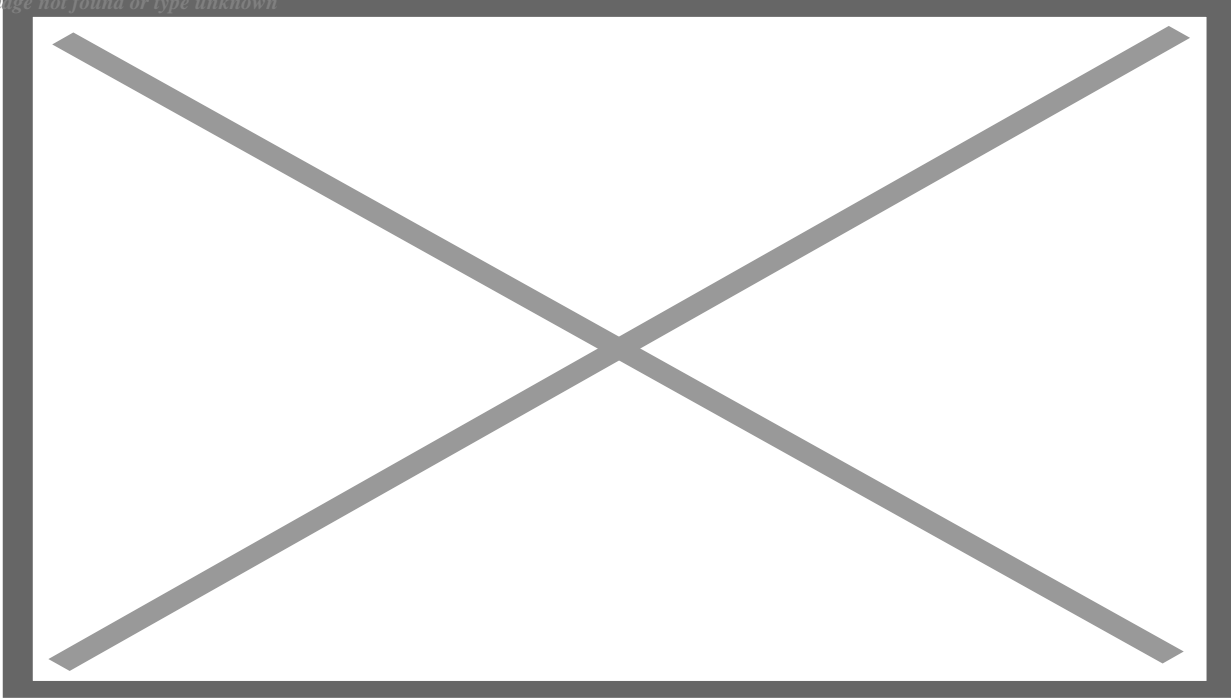


# *The great challenge*

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## **The great challenge**

By Guillermo Alvarado

As expected, Colombia's presidential candidate for the Historic Pact, Gustavo Petro, advanced to the second round of the elections, albeit against an unexpected rival, businessman Rodolfo Hernandez, who already began to receive the support of neoliberal and conservative right-wing forces.

The final round will take place on June 19, so that two radically opposed visions and programs are trying to attract the necessary votes, in a battle where the geopolitical and strategic interests of the United States are at stake.

Indeed, a key factor to achieve Colombia's development, consolidate peace with social justice and curb paramilitary groups linked to drug trafficking and landowners, is to get rid of the harmful tutelage of the North American power.

For Washington, the South American nation has always been the object of a dark desire, both for its position as a gateway to the south of the continent, with coasts in the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean, and also for being a major producer and exporter of drugs to the north.

Add to that the extensive border with Venezuela, whose crude oil reserves, now owned by the people, make the White House's heart race.

It is true that for technical reasons, the "forgetfulness" of then President Alvaro Uribe to ask for authorization from Congress, the plan to install seven military bases in very well chosen places on Colombian soil failed, but that does not mean at all that there is no foreign armed presence there.

They simply changed their strategy and from the large installations planned in Palanquero, Apiay, Bahía Málaga, Tolemaida, Malambo, Larandia and Cartagena, they moved on to what the intellectual Sebastián Bitar calls "quasi-bases", less conspicuous and much more operative.

These are U.S. military personnel and mercenaries, now sanctified as "contractors", who enter in small groups for specific tasks, for which complex agreements do not have to be signed, which do not go through legislative supervision or approval and try not to leave traces.

The complex network of radars with which the Pentagon covers most of Colombia, from where air traffic in South America is controlled and which are operated by Yankee specialists, qualifies under this denomination.

They can also be seen in mines, bridges, refineries and other works, where they are consultants or contractors, according to researcher Renan Vega.

It will be an extraordinary task that awaits Gustavo Petro if he manages to accede to the Casa de Nariño, where he will have to face the interests of the first world power if he expects to put into practice his project for the country.

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