
More than 300 assassinations of Colombian leaders over the last two years

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It appears that death has taken over Colombia and is refusing to leave. How many more must die to satisfy the Moloch of greed, opportunism, and ambition?

In April 1948, the popular uprising known as “El Bogotazo” broke out in Bogotá, protesting the assassination of Presidential candidate and likely winner Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. The rioting and subsequent repression cost more than 3,000 lives and resulted in the destruction of entire neighborhoods of the Colombian capital.

“The assassination of the liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, in 1948, produced an organization of thugs affiliated with the police and the army... These henchmen of the conservative regime spread throughout the national territory with the aim of killing liberals and communists, atheists and Masons.”(1)

Belisario Betancourt – president of Colombia from 1982 to 1986 – referred to the persistent patterns of social, economic and political exclusion as “objective factors” of violence.(2) This sister South America nation became the battlefield of drug cartels, closely linked to U.S. secret services, which were complicit in the extermination of social and political leaders that could constitute a threat to imperialist interests and the Colombian oligarchy.

During the Belisario Betancourt administration, despite peace agreements reached with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the April 19 Movement (M-19), and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), paramilitary groups and political and Armed Forces sectors opposed to the agreements provoked a new escalation of violence that culminated in the Palace of Justice siege by M-19 guerrillas, at the end of 1985.

The government of Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) announced the continuity of the peace process initiated by the Betancourt government, on the basis of the reintegration of guerrillas into civilian life, but the surge in crimes against the Patriotic Union (political party formed by the FARC/UP) intensified barely a month after the new Congress began its sessions.

On August 30, 1986, the first of the elected UP leaders, Leonardo Posada Pedraza, was assassinated in Barrancabermeja (Santander), while UP Senator Pedro Nel Jiménez Obando suffered the same fate in Villavicencio (Meta).

The advance of paramilitarism and drug trafficking later added further victims: Judge Gustavo Zuluaga in October; the Director of the Anti-Narcotics Unit, Colonel Jaime Ramírez, in November; and the Editor of **El Espectador**, Guillermo Cano, in December.

With the breakdown of the peace talks and agreements, the UP became a direct target for paramilitary groups. On Sunday, October 11, 1987, UP leader and former Presidential candidate, Jaime Pardo Leal, was shot dead by hit men when returning to Bogotá with his wife and three children.

The year 1988 went down in history as “the year of the massacres,” as paramilitary groups acted with extreme violence and total impunity against anyone suspected of being of the left. The culmination was the assassination, on March 22, 1990, of the UP Presidential candidate, Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, and on April 26, the murder of the M-19 candidate, Carlos Pizarro, while traveling on a plane to Barranquilla.

Some point out that there are differences between those events and the recent incidents that have befallen the long-suffering land of Colombia, especially in the years in which attempts have been made to build peace. Although some elements may appear to be different, in essence what was sought then and now is to deprive social movements of leadership, and exterminate everything considered to be leftist, or that simply opposes the interests of pro-Yankee oligarchic power in Colombia.

Following the process that culminated in important agreements in Havana, it appeared that – at long last – an end to so many years of war was in sight. The

Colombian people breathed a sigh of relief, but the hope didn't last long, as the violence against left leaders was unleashed once again and the crime wave grew exponentially.

BLOCKING THE WAY FOR THE LEFT

The latest report from the Colombian Ombudsman's Office revealed that between January 1, 2016, and June 30 of this year, 311 human rights defenders and social or community leaders were killed, while 35 cases were reported in 2013.

This is a daily massacre, in which extreme right organizations seem to enjoy carte blanche, and the assassinations revive the specter of terror that hung over the country years ago.

Gustavo Petro, the 2018 leftist Presidential candidate, has demanded that President-elect Iván Duque speak out against the murders of those who supported his "Colombia Humana" movement in the recent elections. "His silence permits the empowerment of the murderers," he stressed.

Only a few days ago the assassination of Ana María Cortés, secretary of Petro's campaign in Cáceres, was made known. Alberto Brunori, Representative of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to Colombia, has stated that the defense of human rights in the country is practiced under siege.

There are already thousands of dead and disappeared, and the figure increases daily. The "condor" that bloodied Latin America seems to have spread its wings over Colombia, and the current criminal offensive attempts, without a doubt, to eliminate any opposition.

During the recent elections, the mass private media unleashed a strong smear campaign against the left, demonizing progressive leaders, former guerrillas, unscrupulously deceiving and sowing fear among the population. The objective was to block the way for the left.

The judicial persecution and subsequent accusations against former guerrilla leader Jesús Santrich is part of the neo-fascist offensive on the continent.

And as if that were not enough, President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos announced in a televised address to the entire country on May 26, as a great achievement, the imminent formalization in Brussels of the Colombia's entry into NATO as a global partner. "We will be the only country in Latin America with this privilege," Santos declared. The announcement became a reality on May 31.

In a region declared a "Zone of Peace," some right-wing governments seem to be

playing with something as sacred and necessary as life itself. The United States is attempting to turn Colombia into its South American aircraft carrier, a NATO missile against Venezuela, a bastion of its hegemonic interests, covering it with military bases. To achieve its aims, it needs to be able to act with complete calm, without any obstacles, which is why it is building Yankee *pax*, in a scenario in which social leaders are also a hindrance.

(1)From: Fidel Castro Ruz, **La Paz en Colombia**, (Havana: Editora Política, 2008): 67

(2)Marc Chernick, U.S. political scientist and researcher at Georgetown University, Washington, in his recent book **Acuerdo posible**. Taken from: Fidel Castro Ruz, **La Paz en Colombia**, (Havana: Editora Política, 2018): 257.
