

Video of summary executions exposes Peruvian police death squads

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A newly released video of uniformed Peruvian police shooting to death two wounded civilians in the northern city of Piura has deepened an ongoing crisis in the country's security forces fueled by revelations of death squad activity and rampant corruption.

One of the victims, a taxi driver wanted for robbery, is seen in the videotape moving his arms when he was shot, execution style. The other victim was an alleged criminal whose execution at the hands of the police was also captured in the video. As they lay wounded on the road, two policemen cold-bloodedly executed Gian Fistas Quino and Hugo Yajahuance.

The assassination of the two alleged members of the robbery gang known as "Los Nuevos Injertos del Norte" occurred on the morning of February 27, 2015. It took place at the end of a police operation in which four suspects were shot dead and two were captured.

The assassination was videotaped by a Colombian living in Piura, Henry Holguin, a director of local social and human rights programs. Holguin used a cellular phone to videotape the incident that took place in front of his house in Piura.

Initially, Holguin released the tapes to the local Public Prosecutor Office (Fiscalia). But the Regional Government took no action against what is known as an active "police death squad." Holguin waited until April of 2016 to release the videotapes to *Cuarto Poder*, a popular news TV program based in Lima, the capital, which has a large nationwide audience. Two days later, he returned to Colombia with his family, after receiving death threats in connection with the video.

Only in August 2016 did the Prosecutor Specializing in Organic Crime begin an investigation into the killing of Fistas and Yajahuance.

Family members of the two men killed are demanding an independent investigation and

punishment of the police executioners. The October 3 edition of the Peruvian daily *La Republica* describes Hugo Yajahuance being shot four times: the fatal shot to the head, along with bullets to the abdomen, right leg and hand. Eyewitnesses declared that he was asking for help when police fatally shot him.

The lawyer representing the families has denounced the killings as a crime against humanity. Extrajudicial murders at the hands of police death squads are known to have claimed dozens of victims.

At least 16 senior officers, including Peruvian National Police commander Enrique Prado Ravines of the Police Intelligence Division (DIRIN in Spanish), along with 80 policemen are under investigation on suspicion of having carried out extrajudicial executions, according to the daily *El Comercio*.

"Their objective," *La Republica* reported, "was to get personal advantages like decorations and promotions, as well as money destined for intelligence." To reach their objectives, the death squads falsified intelligence information and staged "mock confrontations" to kill their victims.

According to the television news program *Cuarto Poder*, the police identified alleged criminals based on tips from informants and then ambushed and murdered them, planting evidence and coordinating false testimony in order to make it look like the killings were the result of armed confrontations. At least 11 of the identified 27 victims of these death squad murders had no police records.

Given Peru's bloody history, including the dirty war waged from the 1980s at the cost of some 70,000 lives, the exposure of death squad killings has a particular resonance within the population. Mass graves are still being discovered, and the former president, Alberto Fujimori, is in prison for his role in the organization of

massacres of students and workers.

The exposure of recent killings has also come together with revelations of widespread corruption within the Peruvian National Police. It is reported, for example, that the two members of DIRIN who traveled from Lima to Piura to conduct an investigation into the killings were themselves involved in other similar police operations.

Between 2012 and 2016, 38 police officers have been placed under investigation for misuse of resources. Several held high posts within the police and have been suspended from active duty until the investigation is over.

Among the crimes committed is the purchase of explosives at 232 percent of their fair market value. Ten officers and seven junior police personnel falsified purchase documents worth 700,000 soles (US\$ 206,000). Another case involves 18 policemen who faked the purchase of 143 vehicles worth 2 million soles (US\$ 590,000).

Opinion polls have put personal insecurity as Peru's number one social problem. All the major political parties, from Peruanos para el Cambio of President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (PPK) and Fuerza Popular (FP) of Keiko Fujimori on the right, to the pseudo-left Frente Amplio (FA) of Veronika Mendoza, agree that crime is the main problem facing Peruvian citizens.

Left out of this political equation is the widespread corruption within the police itself. PPK has pledged that in the next four years he will construct 500 new police stations (commissaries), equipped with the most modern technology, at a cost of one billion soles (US\$300 million).

The new government has made no mention of police corruption or how it is planning to deal with it. One can only wonder how much of this substantial amount of money being made available to the police by PPK's government will be pocketed by corrupt policemen, especially the high-ranking officers.

Minister of the Interior Carlos Basombrio announced that within the first 100 days in government, PPK plans to execute 30 large-scale police operations. None of these includes going after the crimes committed by the police themselves.

The new president's recent comment that poverty is the source of crime doesn't mean much in the context of his proposals as well as the political changes in the

region and the needs of US imperialism that PPK so well represents.

For many years Peru's new president acted as the manager of a private equity fund, the most rapacious mode of Wall Street's exploitation of the working class. PPK made a fortune and was the favored presidential candidate of US imperialism. Needless to say, in practice, the first point on his right-wing agenda is to create conditions beneficial to foreign investors.

Thus, for PPK, as for similar right-wing governments that have recently come to power in Argentina and Brazil, for example, law and order will go hand in hand with measures designed to impoverish the masses. For Latin America as a whole, this means the systematic escalation of military and police repression against the working class as the economic crisis translates into unemployment, lower wages and cuts in social benefits, leading to mass unrest.



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