

“False positives”: The cold-blooded murder of over 6,400 poor civilians by Colombian military assassins between 2002 and 2008

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In testimony given in recent weeks before the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), thus far 21 Colombian military personnel, including high echelon officers, and one civilian have pleaded guilty to having committed atrocious crimes against the civilian population in Colombia. The case is known as that of the “false positives,” a phrase used to describe civilians recruited from the most distant and poorest villages in order to pass them off as guerrillas and then shoot them.

The aim of this atrocity was to inflate the death toll in order to deceive the Colombian people as to the military’s success in the war against the guerrilla Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (the FARC), which based itself on retrograde Maoist and Guevarist conceptions of peasant war. The murders described occurred between 2002 and 2008, during the far right-wing presidency of Álvaro Uribe.

The revelations of the cold-blooded murders of 6,402 young peasants and unemployed people must be understood in the context of Plan Colombia, an agreement signed in 1999 between Colombian President Andrés Pastrana and US President Bill Clinton to fight “narcoterrorism.” Between 2000 and 2005, Plan Colombia received \$2.8 billion from the US. Later on, the US Department of Defense increased that sum to \$4.5 billion.

Additionally, in 2005, the George W. Bush administration, after meeting with President Uribe, requested \$463 million in additional funds from the US Congress for Plan Colombia, and \$90 million through the IMF. By then, Uribe and Bush had become personal friends.

While the war against the Colombian guerrillas was being waged, the US government issued to the Colombian Army a “certification” in Human Rights. This “recognition” of the work of Uribe’s executive qualified it for an additional \$62 million from the US for the fight against “narcoterrorism.”

These were the years in which the Colombian military carried out the “false positive” murders.

This past week, the Spanish newspaper *El País* wrote:

“[T]he militaries’ accounts of how they deceived unarmed peasants and poor, unemployed young people in need of work, and how they murdered them, dressed them in camouflage and put a gun in their hands, [show this was done] to meet the demands of their superiors to produce casualties in combat.”

Although the SJP has been taking testimony only since April 2022, this unpunished crime was already made known internationally a year ago. In February 2021, France24 described these “illegitimate deaths presented as combat fatalities,” and added that “the majority were carried out between 2006 and 2008, during the presidency of Álvaro Uribe, the political mentor of current President Iván Duque.”

That same month, the *Guardian* revealed that “Soldiers were rewarded for the manipulated kill statistics with perks, including time off and promotions.”

BBC NEWS also alluded to what the court has now described as a “macro-criminal phenomenon”—that “around 1,500 military personnel were allegedly involved.”

The SJP took the testimony of a recruiter, Alexander Carretero Díaz, the only civilian charged, who described how he carried out the recruitment of innocent civilians for these murders: “I am the person who brought all your loved ones from various parts of Colombia, I am guilty, I declare myself responsible for having brought people from Soacha, from Gamarra, from Bucaramanga, from Aguachica to hand them over to the Army to be killed.”

Carretero Díaz continued: “I am responsible for having lent myself [to this scheme], knowing what was going to happen to their loved ones; I am more responsible because they told me to convince different people.”

The Colombian newspaper *El Universal* published powerful statements of relatives given before the SJP.

Carmenza Gómez, mother of Víctor Fernando Gómez, 23, who disappeared on August 23, 2008 and was found dead on August 25 in Ocaña, Santander, exclaimed: “I do not come to speak only for my son, I come to speak for thousands of

victims who are not here today, but our voice is their voice, because they cannot speak, because they are afraid, because they are threatened, as they did with the mothers of Soacha.”

Idalí Garcerá, a mother and head of her household, spoke of the disappearance of her son from Cundinamarca in 2008: “I have been here for 14 years to find out about my son who disappeared in the Ducales neighborhood, in Soacha, on August 23, 2008. I have fought a lot and alone. ... I need to know who were those people who asked for results for their own benefit, we all need to know that and the country in general.”

Zoraida Muñoz, another mother from Soacha, pleaded with the witnesses to clarify precisely what happened: “Before this happened to me, I had no enemies. My enemies are the National Army ... You should not do anything with children or young people, because they already carry an accursed cross.”

Gloria Martínez, another victim of the war, stated: “The whole truth has not been revealed. ... You keep privileged information according to the position you held, you have repeatedly said that you want this history not to repeat itself, but I ask you: have you already returned the decorations, the awards you were given for these murders?”

Colombia’s capitalist elite waged a five-decade-long bloody civil war against the FARC guerrilla movement until September 2016, when the Peace Accords were signed between the Colombian government and the FARC. FARC turned in its weapons in 2017.

That struggle, and the one against the much smaller ELN (National Liberation Army) Colombian guerrillas, resulted in over 250,000 killed and over 7 million displaced civilians.

It is apparent that atrocities that were the norm have continued even after the creaky peace with the FARC.

The crimes of the “false positives” returned to the front page after Colombia’s current president and Uribe protégé Iván Duque admitted on March 28 to military misconduct that is now known as the “Putumayo massacre.”

Duque reported what he called a routine military operation in Puerto Leguizamo, Putumayo Department, which borders on Ecuador and Peru, against armed assailants as part of the #SinTregua [no truce] offensive against “narco-terrorist structures” that resulted in 11 deaths. Duque claimed those who were “neutralized,” i.e., killed, belonged to illegal armed groups, including FARC dissidents, the relatively small numbers who did not buy into the peace accords.

However, testimonies of the survivors and victims of the family members state that persons killed were civilians. According to the National Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon (Organización Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas de la Amazonia Colombiana, OPIAC), the army arrived dressed in black and wearing

hoods at a local market where individuals were raising funds for neighborhood needs, opening fire in an indiscriminate manner. The soldiers then manipulated the corpses of civilians to make them look like combatants.

BBC NEWS reported that a joint independent investigation by Colombian media *Vorágine*, *El Espectador* and *Cambio* concluded that Colombian military forces had tampered with evidence at the scene of the alleged fighting before investigators could arrive. After the investigation, these media concluded that what happened was a “massacre.”

Plainly, “false positive”-style military activity routinely continues as a practice in Colombia.

And despite the devastating and harrowing events recently narrated by the military in the “false positives” case, former President Uribe last week haughtily issued a communiqué entitled, “The Truth Commission or the political lie.” In it Uribe says that the crimes against Colombia’s poor civilians and peasants are perfectly justifiable.

The atrocious nature and scale of the “false positives” crimes in Colombia bring to mind the atrocities committed by the dictatorships of Pinochet in Chile and Videla in Argentina, among others. None of the crimes in these countries would have been possible without complicity and direct pressure from the US government.

As Philippe Nassif, the advocacy director for Amnesty USA, rightly put it, “The United States’ role in fueling ceaseless cycles of violence committed against the people of Colombia is outrageous.”

Uribe remains arrogant and defiant because he knows he acted in coordination with US imperialism, which continues to deem Latin America as its “backyard” for exploitation of the population and resources.



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