

Official autopsy report contradicts Georgia police claim that “Cop City” protester was killed in self-defense

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An official autopsy report released Wednesday on the body of 26-year-old “forest defender” Manuel Esteban Paez Terán gunned down in a hail of bullets by Georgia police on January 18, found that “gunpowder residue [was] not seen on the hands” after a gunshot residue (GSR) kit test was performed.

The report also further noted that “Soot, stippling, searing and gunpower residue were not found in association with any of the above described clothing or around any of the gunshot wounds.”

This is a crucial finding as it singularly demolishes the unrelenting claim by the Georgia authorities that Terán shot at the state-troopers first, in reaction to which the police were compelled to “defend themselves.”

Despite repeated requests by Terán’s family, the official report was only released three months after the autopsy was conducted by Dekalb County Medical Examiner’s office.

The GSR kit tests for the presence of distinctive chemicals that are deposited on a person’s skin or clothing or other nearby surfaces to confirm whether a person discharged a firearm.

Terán and numerous other environmental activists, were camped out to protest against the construction of a massive, militarized police training center dubbed “Cop City,” which the Atlanta city government wants to build to train its police in urban warfare, when they were assaulted by police carrying out a “clearing operation” on the morning of January 18.

Because of the inordinate delay in the release of the results of the official autopsy, Terán’s family commissioned a second autopsy in March. This second independent autopsy showed that Terán was sitting

cross-legged with hands raised when the police murdered the activist in a hail of bullets.

As reported by the *Guardian*, the GSR test was performed by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) which is the main investigative agency on Terán’s killing. The GBI has been in the forefront of pushing the narrative that the Georgia state troopers who killed Terán did so in “self-defense” after he first fired at them.

In addition, the autopsy revealed that Terán suffered at least 57 gunshot wounds. The sheer number of bullets fired by the police at the peaceful protester highlights the frenzied nature of the killing and the vicious nature of the police crackdown on opposition to Cop City.

In addition, the report notes, “Varying amounts of hemorrhage were associated with most of the gunshot wounds except for some of those involving the lower legs. This bleeding indicates that the deceased was alive with some element of pulse and blood pressure when the wounds were inflicted.”

This is a damning revelation as it shows that the Georgia troopers made no attempt to stop their assault and get medical help to save Terán’s life, however feebly alive he was. They were instead single-mindedly focused on clearing out protesters.

Reacting to the autopsy report, the devastated mother of the victim, Belkis Terán, stated emotionally: “We are devastated to learn that our child, our sweet Manny, was mercilessly gunned down by police and suffered 57 bullet wounds all over their body.”

The family attorney Brian Spears further noted that they still do not have a complete picture of what really transpired on that fatal January day. He released a

statement saying: “We cannot even begin to determine what happened on the morning of January 18 until the GBI releases its investigation.”

The GBI has indeed been deliberately withholding whatever evidence it has unearthed after three months of investigation. The family along with their attorneys have been repeatedly pleading with the GBI to provide them information so as to understand the circumstances surrounding the killing.

The fact that this agency has been put in charge of the investigation hardly inspires confidence. After all it is not a neutral party but is, in fact, the highest police agency in the state. From the beginning, the GBI has blamed the victim. It even released a picture of a soiled and scratched gun lying on the forest floor covered by pine leaves and cigarette butts claiming that it was the gun fired by Terán at the state troopers.

In fact, subsequent body camera footage released by the Atlanta police department indicates that a state trooper was more than likely injured as a result of shots fired by a fellow policeman.

Furthermore, the GBI has not released a ballistics report or any other evidence such as the sort of bullet wounds sustained by the injured state trooper. Nor has it confirmed that the serial number on the gun in the picture is the same as the one the GBI claims Terán had purchased back in 2020. In addition, the gun is also not shown as lying next to the tent where Terán was killed giving rise to the suspicion that the police may have planted this false evidence themselves.

The proposed massive 85-acre police training facility—expected cost \$90 million dollars, two-thirds of which is to be funded by private corporations such as Coca Cola and Norfolk Southern—is being energetically pushed by both the city and the state governments despite overwhelming opposition.

Both the city and the Dekalb County governments, led by Democrats, and the state government led by the arch reactionary Republican governor Brian Kemp are singularly united in violently suppressing the popular opposition the police training center has provoked.

The police and government authorities routinely describe protesters as “terrorists” and over the past months the authorities have indiscriminately rounded up 42 people and charged them with “domestic terrorism.” This has been justified on the flimsiest evidence such as the person having dirt on their shoes.

Several of these protesters are languishing in prison in the most terrible conditions, having been denied bail by judges who have actively sided with the government prosecutor.



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