

Repression in Colombia: Made in USA

written by Greg Butterfield
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U.S.-funded and trained police attack protesters in Bogotá.

May 7 — For the past 10 days, the people of Colombia have flooded the streets of their cities, towns and villages to demand that their most basic needs be met amidst the pandemic and a deep capitalist economic crisis.

And in response, the oligarchs who rule this Latin American country of 50 million have responded to their demands with brutal violence — including a bloody massacre of protesters by police in the city of Cali on May 3 that left over 20 people dead.

As of May 6, government forces had killed 37 protesters in all and committed 1,708 acts of police brutality, [according to human-rights organization Plataforma Grita](#).

At the forefront of the violence is the [U.S.-funded and trained Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squadron \(ESMAD\)](#), founded in 1999 at the direction of U.S. President Bill Clinton, to repress movements for social justice in Colombia. ESMAD works hand-in-hand with the Colombian Army, which has been deployed to occupy Cali and other cities.

But far from crushing the protests, the bloody reprisals have unleashed a popular uprising that stretches from the poorest neighborhoods and university campuses of Bogotá to the most isolated rural villages in the mountains, from the Afro-Colombian communities on the Caribbean coast to Indigenous homelands in the jungles, and everywhere in between.



From april 28th at 6:00 am to may 5th at 12:00 pm we have registered in our platform **GRITA** 📢

1708

Cases of
Police
Brutality

222

victims of
**physical
violence** by
the police

37

victims of
homicides in
hands of
police

831

**arbitrary
arrests**

312

**violent
interventions**
by the
public force

22

victims
with
**injuries
to their
eyes**

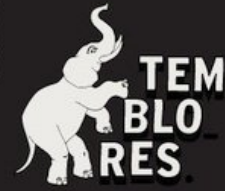
110

cases of
**firearm
shootings**
by the
police

10

victims of
sexual assault
by the public
force

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The [protests began April 28](#) in opposition to a plan of President Ivan Duque's government to privatize the healthcare system and "reform" Colombia's tax system to benefit the rich and big corporations. The protests forced Duque to withdraw his

tax plan, at least for now.

After the Cali massacre, the Central Union of Workers (CUT), Colombia's biggest trade union federation, joined in a series of national strikes during the first week of May.

But underlying the immediate demands of workers and communities reeling from the lack of government support during the pandemic crisis are decades of Draconian rule, directed from the true seat of power in Washington, D.C. Subservience to Washington made the whole country prey to the whims of foreign capitalists and big landowners, their death squads, and politicians reliant on narco-trafficking money for their positions.

For decades, Colombia's rulers and their U.S. masters have done all they can to divide the people — especially fomenting divisions between city and country. They encouraged city-dwellers, especially among the middle classes and students, to identify with U.S. imperialism and to disdain the peasants, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities.

They falsely branded revolutionary guerrilla movements based in rural areas, like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), as "narco-terrorists" — while themselves profiting handsomely from the drug trade.

Today the phony walls erected between working people of city and country are rapidly collapsing.

Colombia and the U.S. military

Israel is sometimes described as a big U.S. military base because of the role it plays as a loyal proxy for U.S. domination of the West Asian/North African region. Colombia plays a similar role in Latin America.

How much does U.S. imperialism rely on its domination of Colombia? A few examples tell the tale.

Since 2000, when Washington enacted “Plan Colombia,” supposedly to fight the drug trade but in reality to crush the growing revolutionary guerrilla insurgencies, the [U.S. has pumped nearly \\$11.6 billion](#) into Colombia to build up its repressive forces.

Today that money is on display for the world to see as Colombian police and troops use advanced weaponry to shoot out the eyes of protesters and straf poor neighborhoods from helicopter gunships.

Did you know that [Colombia is a member of NATO](#) — the “North” Atlantic military alliance dominated by the U.S.? It is the only Latin American member — the better to serve as a base of U.S. power in a part of the world Wall Street considers its “backyard.”

The Pentagon is deeply embedded in directing Colombia’s military. Along with “radar bases” staffed by Pentagon troops and a 2009 agreement allowing U.S. soldiers to be stationed on seven Colombian military bases, last May “the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) announced the deployment of the U.S. Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) to Colombia to advise and train Colombian units in anti-narcotic missions. Colombians have spoken out against the security agreement, and the U.S. role in the country’s militarized drug policy,” [NACLA reported](#).

“As a human rights defender and as a defender of the environment, the arrival of gringo troops to Colombia isn’t only a violation of our sovereignty, our constitution, and our nation’s laws,” said Isabel Zuleta, leader of the organization Rios Vivos, who lives near one of the areas where U.S. troops may be deployed. “It doesn’t take into account the whole history of armed conflict and socio-political violence that we’ve lived through.”

This latest growth of U.S. military presence comes years after the 2016 Havana peace agreement signed between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas, which was supposed to bring an end to the decades-long civil war and allow left and progressive forces to peacefully join the political system.

Instead, while the guerrillas followed the agreement and laid down their weapons, the Duque government reneged on its obligations and continued to terrorize people's movements. Nearly 300 former guerrillas and 1,000 activists, community leaders and trade unionists have been killed since the peace accords were signed.

Target: Venezuela

So why the new Pentagon build-up?

For years, Colombia has been used to attack its neighbor, Bolivarian Venezuela. When the Trump regime tried to stage a coup in Venezuela in early 2019, under the guise of bringing "humanitarian aid" across the border, it used Colombia as a staging ground. It failed.

Since then, Duque — first at Trump's direction, now at Biden's — has continued to threaten direct military intervention against Venezuela.

This year, tensions have escalated again, as Colombian mercenaries have engaged in a series of attacks on civilians and soldiers along Venezuela's northwestern border in Apure state. Most recently, on April 28, [12 Venezuelan soldiers were killed](#) in an ambush. Once again U.S. officials and media have falsely claimed that "leftist guerrillas" are responsible.

It's clear that the iron grip of U.S. imperialism and Colombia's treacherous oligarchy has brought nothing but pain and misery to the people, while threatening the peace and stability of the entire region. The current uprising is the cry of a people determined to end decades of suffering and demand a new Colombia based on social

justice and peaceful relations with its neighbors.

Victory to the Colombian people! Down with Duque! U.S. out now!

