

# Colombia - A Case Study in Failed U.S. Intervention

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The Huffington Post  
Saturday, August 30, 2008

As Noam Chomsky had noted many years ago, the amount of U.S. military assistance to a particular country is, as a general rule, directly proportional to the level of human rights violations committed by that country's military. That maxim certainly holds true in the Western Hemisphere where the greatest recipient of U.S. military aid in that region by far - Colombia - is also that region's greatest human rights abuser.

This fact was brought home just last week by an L.A. Times article (by Chris Kraul on August 21) which explained that while Colombia has received over \$4 billion of U.S. military assistance since 2000, and while Colombian President Alvaro Uribe "has become the United States' No. 1 Latin American ally in its war on terrorism and drugs," Colombia is actually the greatest purveyor of terror against its own population in the region. To wit, as the article, citing the well-respected Colombian Commission of Jurists, notes, the Colombian military has been credibly accused of murdering 329 civilians in cold blood in 2007 - a 48% increase from the 223 reported in 2006. This brings to 997 the total of civilians murdered by the Colombian military since President Uribe, the U.S.'s top regional ally, took office in the spring of 2002. No other country in the Hemisphere even comes close to this horrendous record of state-sponsored violence.

Equally troubling is the fact that, as brought out in the same L.A. Times article, 47% of the murders carried out by the military had been carried out by army units which the State Department had vetted in 2006 and 2007 and had "determined had complied with human rights requirements."

Meanwhile, while there has been a near total blackout on the continued crisis of the labor movement in Colombia, that crisis is deepening as well. Thus, as of the writing of this article, 38 union leaders have been killed in that country so far this year. This is a rate of over one union leader killed a week. Should this pace continue until the end of the year, the rate of union killings in 2008 will far exceed the 39 union killings which took place during the entire year of 2007. As it stands right now, 2597 trade unionists have been killed in Colombia since 1986, making Colombia the murder capitol of the world for unionists.

If this were not bad enough, President Uribe's government continues to sink under the weight of the growing para-political scandal in which a number of Uribe's close political associates (around 60 in all), including a number of pro-Uribe congresspeople, have been arrested for aiding the violent right-wing paramilitaries - paramilitaries which were designated a "terrorist" group by the United States in 2001. Indeed, the chief prosecutor at the International Criminal court in The Hague, Luis Moreno Ocampo, is in Colombia now to investigate whether he can prosecute such pro-paramilitary officials under international law.

And yet, the U.S. continues to provide Colombia with gross amounts of military assistance, and, in the height of irony, continues to hold up President Uribe as a beacon of democracy and as a fighter of terror in the region. In addition, the U.S. has aided Uribe's attempt to cover up his crimes by recently extraditing a number of paramilitary leaders to the U.S. to stand trial for drug crimes only, while their murders of thousands of civilians, many times with the complicity of the Colombian state and military, go uninvestigated and unpunished.

For the U.S. to truly live up to its claimed principles of democracy and human rights, the U.S. must immediately end all military assistance to Colombia, reject the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia and set another course in its relationship with Latin America. In terms of this new course, the U.S. must now reject the Monroe Doctrine under which the U.S. has viewed Latin America as its "backyard" in which it can militarily intervene at will to protect its "interests." Colombia is just one case in point which illustrates just how damaging and counter-productive such U.S. intervention has been to the people of Latin America over more than a century.