

US-backed Colombian military kills eight children in bombing, attempts cover-up

By Andrea Lobo
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The Colombian defense minister, Guillermo Botero, resigned after the release of a report indicating eight children were killed in a bombing in the southern department of Caquetá, whose execution and cover-up implicate President Iván Duque as well as the Colombian military and its main ally and sponsor, the Pentagon.

Seven other bodies were found, several “so mangled that technical analyses could only determine they were younger than 20,” as described by Senator Roy Barreras of the right-wing Social Party of National Unity, who made the reports public.

Botero had lied to Congress in September that “14 delinquents” had been killed by the bombing, which was carried out on August 29 against a dissident faction of the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC) that had announced hours earlier it had taken up arms again.

Duque himself said the following day, “Last night, I authorized the Special Operations Joint Command (CCOES) to carry out an offensive operation,” which he described as “strategic, meticulous, impeccable and rigorous, killing ‘Gildardo Lucho,’ leader of the organization.”

According to an international criminal law expert from the Grenada University in Spain, Anibal García, contacted by the Anadolu Agency, “Especially since he has a military body with its own dimensions to verify such situations, an alleged war crime would have been perpetrated.” Opposition senators in Colombia have proposed requesting an investigation by the International Criminal Court on Duque’s role.

However, beyond its “own” capacity, as indicated by the Joint Special Operations Command (CCOES) chief Major General Jorge Arturo Salgado in the latest edition of the military journal *Dialogue*, “With the US, we have a daily and personal relationship. We have a permanent and constant relationship with the special forces of the US Army in every component of capacity, since we have

their men within our organizations, who accompany us in every process, from doctrine, organization, training, personnel, sustainability and logistics.”

And beyond the capacity to “verify,” a municipal official at Caquetá, Herner Evelio Carreño, had warned in letters dated June 20, June 23, July 23 and August 26 that the guerrillas were “forcibly recruiting our children, girls and adolescents.” TeleSur confirmed subsequently with the parents of two of the victims, 12-year-old Ángela Gaitán and 16-year-old Diana Medina, that they had been forcibly recruited.

Amid the wave of mass protests sweeping Ecuador, Chile and the region, the response of the Colombian ruling class to the revelations has been marked by authoritarian threats and alarm, while Washington has remained silent. In recent months, strikes by teachers, transportation workers and others and mass student and indigenous demonstrations have been on the rise in Colombia.

The Caquetá revelations have increased calls for Duque’s resignation, which has become the main demand in a national strike announced for November 21, which the trade union confederations and the pseudo-left coalition Democratic Alternative Pole (PDA) hope to use to dissipate social anger against Duque’s austerity.

A national teachers’ strike in September and other demonstrations have condemned the killing of hundreds of social activists and other civilians by the state and paramilitary forces since the September 2016 “peace” accord with the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas.

In another warning, the weekly *Semana* wrote that November 21 could become a “transcendental date” since “one can’t discard the contagious effect” from Chile and Ecuador, adding, “There has not been a national strike in many years in the country.”

According to the Press Freedom Foundation (FLIP),

when a journalist first asked Duque about the revelations on Wednesday “the president appeared to panic” and his guards beat up the reporter.

Afterward, Duque sought to bury the issue, praising Botero on Thursday for “serving with so much willingness and patriotism that he won respect and fondness,” and blaming the incident on “terrorist groups who use minors as human shields.” The new acting minister, Gen. Luis Fernando Navarro then claimed, “We didn’t know that there were minors in the camp.”

By Saturday, Duque moved to openly threaten the growing opposition, indicating, “unfortunately a series of lies is being used to convoke a strike that has lots of risks and whose examples are Chile and Ecuador,” where states of emergency were enforced through deadly military force.

Duque’s statement came amid growing calls for censorship from the ruling elite. An editorial that day in the “liberal” *El Espectador* denounced Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg for having an “ambivalent attitude” toward censorship of “fake news.” The editorial Friday applauded the resignation of Botero, while warning that the military’s “messages are not calming the country” and demanding that “the confidence be rebuilt between the Armed Forces and Colombians.”

This is a central concern for US imperialism, which has turned Colombia into its spearhead for economic and military pressure in the regime change operation against the government of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, especially since the failure of efforts to instigate factions of the Venezuelan military to oust Maduro and install a US puppet regime.

Business Insider indicated late last month that the US has been pressuring Colombia to buy 15 of the latest F-16 warplanes, but “budgetary restrictions and a lack of public support for major defense expenditures also make that purchase less likely.” The Caquetá revelations have only increased popular opposition to militarism.

For over a century, Democratic and Republican administrations alike have threatened and carried out military invasions and coups to impose US diktats through military regimes. The brazenness of military repression in Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Honduras and elsewhere to defend the highest levels of inequality in the world is the result of this entire period of imperialist oppression and looting.

In 1965, the year the Democratic administration of Lyndon B. Johnson intensified the US war in Vietnam and began a murderous US military occupation of the

Dominican Republic, the Department of Defense wrote in a strategic document, that “in order to protect the sovereignty of their nations [the militaries must be ready] to remove government leaders from office whenever, in the judgement of the military, the conduct of these leaders is injurious to the welfare of the nation.”

At the time, the US military was training and directly controlling armies and death squads across the region, which were killing thousands. In Colombia, US diplomatic cables between 1959 and 1965 describe in detail the formation of “hunter/killer teams” against radicalized workers, youth and peasants.

“The [Colombian] Army has seemed to accent the death, rather than the often useless capture of violence leaders ... whatever the long-term effect these bandit deaths will have on the Colombian violence situation, certainly these deaths have boosted the morale of the army,” indicates a US embassy cable from July 7, 1961.

The long-term effect was the longest armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere in which the vast majority of the 267,000 killed and 7 million displaced were civilians. In August 1997, Washington labeled the FARC and ELN Colombian guerrillas “foreign terrorist organizations” and shortly after launched Plan Colombia, which has injected over \$10 billion into Colombia’s military forces. In 2009, William Brownfield, then Obama’s ambassador to Colombia, described it as “the most successful nation-building exercise that the United States has associated itself with perhaps in the last 25-30 years.”

According to the US Congressional Research Service, the 2019 budget request for aid to Colombia “would reduce post-conflict recovery programs and place greater emphasis on counternarcotics and security.”

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