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[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

APRIL 17, 2018

by W. T. WHITNEY  
18.04.2018

## *Colombia and Cuba: a Tale of Two Countries*

Colombia and Cuba differ. Colombia is a good friend of the United States while revolutionary Cuba is a U. S. enemy. Individuals and groups of people are abused in Colombia. In Cuba they are safe.

The U.S. military uses Colombia as a springboard for control of a region. Officials in Washington easily tolerate the suffering and marginalization of many Colombians.

In 1948 Colombia hosted the continent-wide meeting in Bogota that, under U.S. auspices, established the Organization of American States. It was charged with preventing communists from taking power in the Americas.

Nevertheless, Cuba's socialist revolution happened. With new resolve, the U.S. government funded, advised, and provided troops and equipment to Colombian governments engaged in suppressing a Marxist-Leninist insurgency, the FARC.

Colombia participates in the global market economy. In 2015 its exchange in goods and services solely with the United States accounted for \$40 billion. In 2016 Colombia's exchange with the United States in goods ranked 25<sup>th</sup> among U.S. trading partners.

All the while the United States has assaulted Cuba's trade with other nations and Cuba's access to international banks and credit. Formerly it fostered terrorism against the island. Now the Trump administration has tightened travel restrictions and is causing new difficulties for Cuba on the basis of probably fictional "sonic attacks" against U.S. embassy employees.

What happens at the level of policy-making policy is one thing. What happens to people where they live is another. Conditions of life for most Cubans and for most Colombians are hardly the same.

In Colombia, [social and community leaders](#) have regularly been assassinated: 78 in 2013, 55 in 2014, 63 in 2015, 80 in 2016, over 100 in 2017, and 45 in the first three months of 2018. An increase after 2016 coincides with the end of armed conflict between the government and FARC insurgents. Former guerrillas are being killed at a great rate.

April 9 marks Colombia's "National *Day of Remembrance and Solidarity with Victims.*" Related publicity often cites the number of victims of armed conflict since 1985. Official records say that, as of 2017, [260,000 persons were killed](#), 60,000 were disappeared, and 7.1 million were displaced.

On April 6, reporter [Libardo Muñoz indicated](#) that "between January and March of 2018 16 Wayúu children in La Guajira had already died of malnutrition." Between 2012 and 2016, 244 indigenous children died of the same cause in that department. Citing UNICEF data, the report claims that, "one in ten children in Colombia suffers the consequences of under-nutrition." Supposed causes of malnutrition deaths in Colombia include "lack of food, drinkable water, medical care" and the role of "landholders, paramilitary violence, and indifference by the state."

Todd Howland, representative in Colombia of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, on March 16 released the 2018 version of an annual report on human rights in Colombia. It would be heading for the UN Council on Human Rights in Geneva.

[According to colombiaplural.com](#), the 17-page report (available [here](#)) "speaks of a country whose civil society suffers from the indolence of the state, incapacity to imagine a new way of doing things, ambitions of legal and illegal businesses, corruption, impunity, and the attitude of some elites more obsessed with politicking than with peace or the quality of life of the inhabitants."

The report focuses on rural Colombia where "the presence of the state, represented exclusively by security forces looking to impose authority through force, has contributed little to generating positive and sustainable changes for the communities." Violence has escalated due to "a precarious implementation of the peace agreement signed between the government and the FARC." Paramilitaries and Colombia's army have moved into territories formerly occupied by the insurgents.

Things are different in Cuba. There's ample documentation that under socialism, Cubans benefit from accessible, comprehensive health care; a widely-admired and accessible

educational system; guarantees for a secure old-age and housing for all; wide availability of cultural and sport activities, and comprehensive mitigation of natural disasters.

The difference in people's lives in Colombia and in Cuba is evident from individual's stories of oppression and of hopes for a better future as well as from summary reports and data.

Colombian Hernando Vanegas died April 6 in exile in Sweden. His close friend Dick Emanuelsson, a journalist there, [paid homage by](#) describing his political travails. As a young doctor, Vanegas provided health care to deprived indigenous peoples in the Sierra Nevada, close to Colombia's Caribbean coast, not far from La Guajira. By the early 1990s, he had joined the Patriotic Union (UP), a left-leaning electoral coalition formed in 1985 by former FARC guerrillas and Communist Party members.

Subsequently UP activists were massacred by the thousands, mostly by paramilitaries. Having been arrested and tortured, Vanegas in 1997 left for exile in Costa Rica. Later, assailants killed two brothers remaining in Colombia. With Colombian intelligence agents on his trail in Costa Rica in 2005, he departed for Sweden.

In 2017 Emanuelsson interviewed Vanegas about Cuba's offer to provide scholarships for 1000 former FARC guerrillas to study medicine at Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine. [Summarizing the conversation](#), Vanegas wrote that, "the Cuban revolution offers us one more demonstration of the significance of proletarian internationalism, or if you don't like the word, of eternal solidarity of the Cuban revolution with all the peoples of the world."

"The ones who gain would be the Colombian state that could resolve a problem threatening to turn into a social explosion and the Colombian people who would see their demand satisfied for accessible, high-quality medical care." "We know," Vanegas adds, "that medical education in Colombia is for the elite ... [T]he great majority [of students] are from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> strata (of socio-economic class, the 6<sup>th</sup> being [the top level](#)). They leave the university with a mercantile vision of practicing their profession.

He concludes: "Cuba, an exporter of health care, [is] an example of social peace, education, and of the humanitarianism of a revolution. As a people, the Cubans have no reservations about giving up part of the little they have ... in order to share it with their class brothers in Colombia."

Ultimately, it seems, the government of one country abuses its people and serves an imperial power, while the government of another country serves all of its citizens, fights to protect its independence, and, more, works to improve people's lives elsewhere.

Nevertheless, Colombia and Cuba are as one in having to respond in one way or another to the neighborhood bully.

Cuban political journalist Manuel Yepe [clarifies the difference](#) that is Cuba: “Among the many unique qualities of the Cuban political process ... is the achievement of social peace in Cuba. It’s a phenomenon unthinkable in most other nations of the continent including, of course, the United States.” Moreover, “Very few Cubans agree to align themselves ... under the directions of a foreign government that openly proclaims itself to be an enemy of the independence, identity and social justice objectives of Cubans.”