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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

Caio Teixeira And Leonardo Wexell Severo,  
15.05.2022

***"Colombian media have generated the story that it is very positive political, military, economic and cultural interference of the United States in the country": Vega Cantor***

Perhaps the most systematic study I have presented – and the most synthetic – was the report I made as part of the Historical Commission of the Conflict and its Victims of the Peace Negotiation Table between the government and the FARC-EP, in which I evaluated the presence of the United States in multiple aspects throughout our republican life to this day.



According to social researcher [Renán Vega Cantor](#), a professor at the National Pedagogical University of Colombia, in this country there are approximately 50 US units, each with 200 to 300 military personnel, in addition to the personnel of 25 US secret

agencies, headed by the CIA and the DEA, which operate daily and freely to intervene in the country. *"also in economic, political, social and cultural terms". "All this is spread as very positive by the media," he warns.*

Doctor in Political Studies from the University Paris VIII, Master in History and graduation in Economics from the National University, Renán Vega recalls that *"in the last 25 years, Colombia has been the third country with the highest military investment in the United States"*, incorporating *"with its manuals, the counterinsurgency and anti-communist logic, in which they teach torture, kill and disappear"* opponents. Due to his representativeness and knowledge, this teacher and researcher was part of the Historical Commission of the Conflict and its Victims of the Peace Negotiation Table between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP). Vega has more than 10 books published, among which we highlight: *Very rebellious people* (4 volumes); *Capitalism and Dispossession*; *Colombia and contemporary imperialism*.

#### Scope of U.S. Interference in Colombia



*LEONARDO – based on your extensive experience and your studies on the US military presence in Colombian territory, how do you evaluate its impact on sovereignty, social stability and the guarantee of human and constitutional rights in the country?*

RENAN – I have been investigating the presence of the United States not only in military terms but in economic, political, social and cultural terms for many years. I refer to the mid-nineteenth century, a period over which I studied the role of the United States in the separation and independence of Panama from Colombia; in its responsibility for the [Massacre of the Bananeras](#) in December 1928 [when more than 3,000 Colombian workers of the American multinational United Fruit Company were murdered, according to the writer Gabriel García Márquez]; the automatic alignment with the United States when Colombia participated in the Korean War in the middle of the last century and, also,

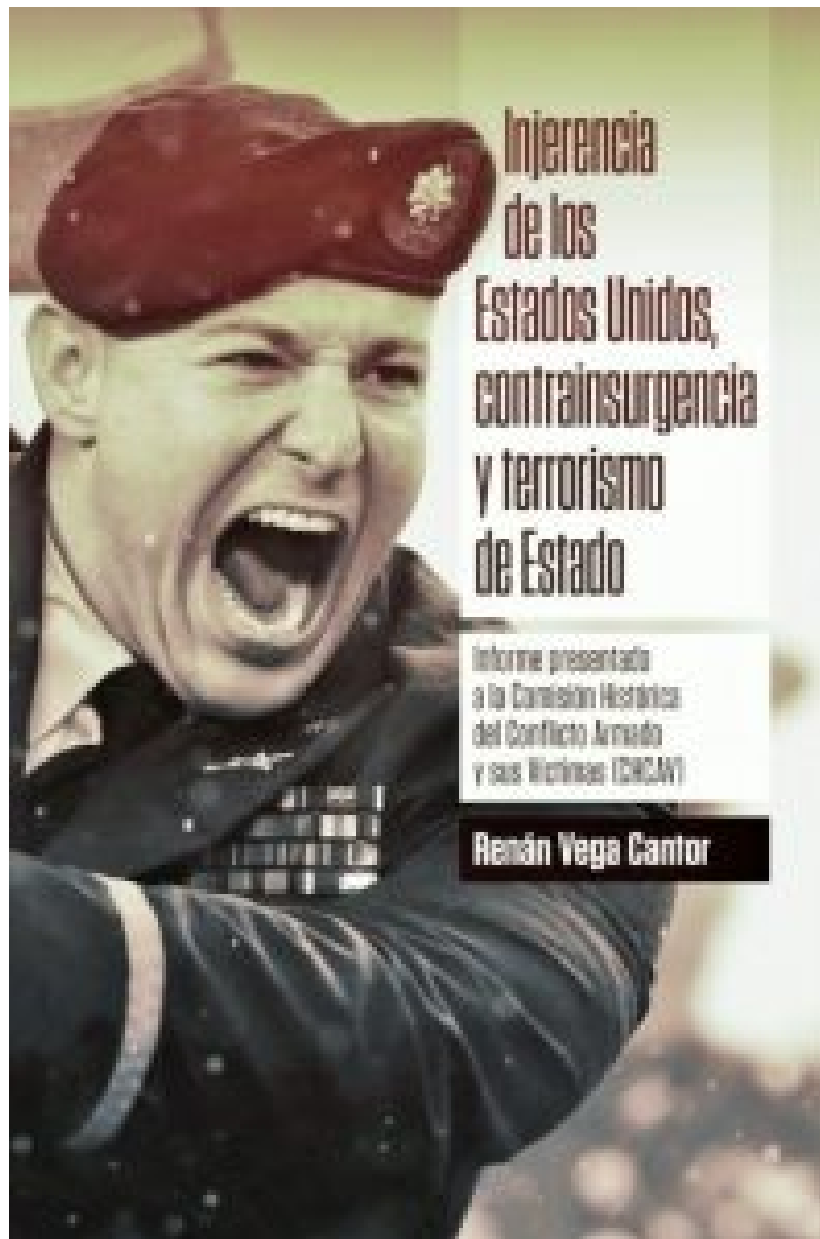
investigations aimed at different aspects of the American presence in our country in the last 50 years.

Perhaps the most systematic study I have presented – and the most synthetic – was the [report I made as part of the Historical Commission of the Conflict and its Victims](#) of the Peace Negotiation Table between the government and the FARC-EP, in which I evaluated the presence of the United States in multiple aspects throughout our Republican life to this day.



*CAIO- How do the operational and administrative structures of the U.S. military forces in Colombia work? Acting under whom? What is the role of the Colombian government in its actions? Are they autonomous? What kind of weapons and equipment do they have and what threat do they pose to other countries in the region?*

RENAN- Well, it's a very complex issue because there are two realities. There is a reality that is made public and a real reality that is secret. So, what is known is little, considering the harsh reality of what is not known. Between the U.S. and Colombia there are open military pacts and other secrets or little known. Since the mid-twentieth century we are talking about the continuous presence, of almost 80 years, during which Colombia became the main ally of the United States in the region and that pact is strengthened in the last 25 years with the signing of the so-called ["Plan Colombia"](#), which was drafted directly by the United States, originally written in English and later translated into Spanish. Through it, the direct presence of the United States in Colombian territory is increased.



In those last 25 years, Colombia became the third most important country in the world in terms of U.S. military investment. In 2009, shortly before the end of the second government of Álvaro Uribe, the signing of what appeared to public opinion as a shameful treaty for the country and for Latin America, through which [seven US military bases were opened and installed in Colombian territory, was made](#) public. Later, a judicial decision contrary to that taken in the country gave the impression that such bases could not exist, could not work. But in the government of Manuel Santos, another type of policy was chosen, which is to allow the arrival of U.S. military personnel to move into Colombian territory as if they were in their own home, without it being necessary to sign agreements approved by the Senate or by different organs of the Executive Branch of Colombia.

So, when it is said that the United States is present with seven military bases, that is not correct, because that presence is much greater than in just seven places in Colombian territory. There has been talk of the U.S. presence in more than 50 locations, with more than 50 military units. Here works what some scholars often call "almost bases". They are not presented as formal bases, although those also exist, as transit places, as places from which different U.S. forces operate permanently or temporarily. Some researchers say that, every day, between 200 and 300 U.S. soldiers move through Colombian territory from the main base, which is the U.S. embassy.



But as I tell you, there are a number of secret pacts that we do not know and there is here the presence of 25 secret US agencies in Colombian territory, among which, of course, the best known are the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration), but also, there are another number of agencies that move freely through the country without any type of complaint, without any control. Even in this sense, a positive image is presented by the media that show this presence as a guarantee of security in Colombian territory. Thus, it is very difficult to know exactly, due to its secret nature. And I have a fact to add: The U.S. Embassy in Venezuela works in Colombia! Recall that the neighboring country broke diplomatic relations with the United States and, a short time later, with the approval of the Colombian government, the United States reopened its embassy in Venezuela in the city of Bogotá. And what does this represent? A series of secret and not so secret apparatuses of sabotage against the Venezuelan government that operate from Bogotá with impunity and from here all actions against the Venezuelan government are planned. The best-known case was [Operation Gideon](#), in May 2020, when

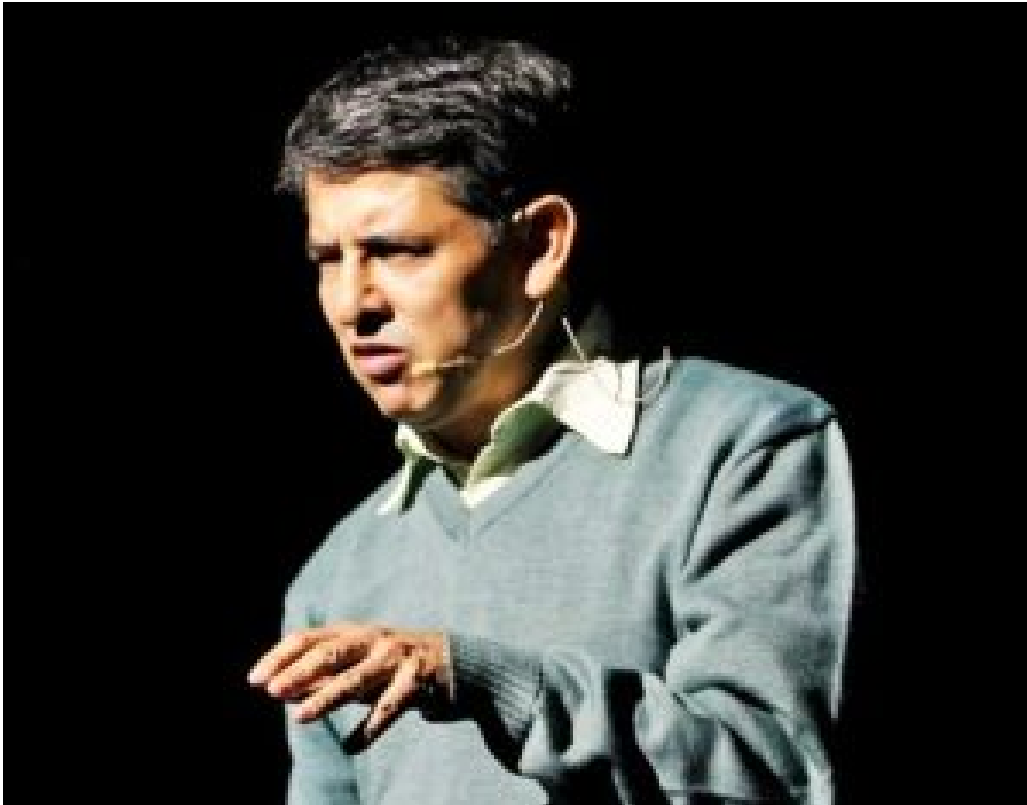
they tried to land in Venezuela US mercenaries prepared in the territory of Colombian La Guajira, with direct participation of the United States, to assassinate President Nicolás Maduro. [The operation was dismantled by the Venezuelan intelligence service and the mercenaries were killed or imprisoned.] This demonstrates the magnitude of the U.S. presence in Colombian territory, without it needing to comply with any formality.

Therefore, it is wrong to say that they are present only in seven places, in seven bases, because they are present in many more places of Colombian territory, in strategic areas, especially in the border regions with Venezuela. A tenacious device was created to encircle Venezuela with military bases that cover the entire Caribbean from Colombian territory. This is an issue that we always have to bring up when it comes to this issue.

*LEONARDO – There are reports of torture and teaching of techniques practiced against "opposing forces". Can these cases be identified? Do they relate to the National Security Doctrine and the identification of a supposed "enemy within"?*

RENAN – I'm going to start at the end. Colombia has adhered to the [National Security Doctrine of the United States](#) since the mid-twentieth century, and reproduces this same conception from which the Armed Forces have been nourished, educated and trained in this terribly anti-communist doctrine, created during the period of the Cold War. I have a thesis that in Colombia the Cold War did not end, and that it is one of the few countries in the world, and the main one in Latin America, where it did not end. Therefore, the treatment of security issues in Colombia is based on a counterinsurgency and anti-communist conception.

And this logic was taught by the U.S. military with its declassified manuals [previously sealed as reserved, confidential, secret and top secret, could not be consulted], in which they effectively taught to torture and kill. This is documented. We know there are exceptions, but this is the rule.



We know that more than 50,000 Colombian military and police officers were trained at the [School of the Americas in the United States](#), which teaches, among other practices, to kill, torture and disappear, and to see those they consider "*internal enemies*" as *despicable* animals that have to be killed. That is the language used in these training centers.

The Colombian military reproduced these teachings in various ways, but they have also outsourced this work. There is a sector that is directly linked to the military, which is the paramilitaries.

About 20 years ago, when there were five military divisions in the country, a document called "The Sixth Division" was drafted, which were the paramilitaries, linked to the Colombian Army. What is the particularity of this Sixth Division? That they are the prostheses of the Colombian Army, sponsored, financed, trained and supported by the United States, which have carried out all kinds of atrocities that the Armed Forces, openly, cannot legally carry out. So the paramilitaries are in charge of committing these crimes.

They kill and execute colossally, torture, behead, cut with chainsaws and throw the heads of opponents at crocodiles, even burning them alive in Nazi-style crematoria. All of this

has been seen in the country for the past 30 years. In all these criminal practices, the Army and the Armed Forces of Colombia [integrated by the Police] have a direct presence.

Let me give you an example: a few days ago the extradition of the [head of the Gulf Clan, Dairo Otoniel Úsuga, known as 'Otoniel', made headlines](#). The fact is that 'Otoniel' participated in a massacre in Colombia 25 years ago, carried out in July 1997. The [Mapiripán massacre](#) was the cold-blooded execution, with sadistic procedures, of peasants in a village in the Eastern Plains of the country.

How was this massacre carried out? Colombian Army planes transported paramilitaries who were on the other side of the country, in Antioquia. They were taken to the site of the massacre where at that time joint operations were taking place between green berets of the United States Army and Colombia. The fact is that the paramilitaries responsible for the massacre passed by.

Shortly before being extradited, Otoniel recalled this massacre, giving the full names of the Colombian military who participated in this action. So we have the same conjunction of forces: paramilitaries, the Colombian Army, and U.S. forces that were implementing training courses to kill guerrillas, and what they killed were "civilian guerrillas," as they call them, "accomplices of terrorists," as they say in the current language.

Those soldiers who allied themselves with the paramilitaries and who made the massacre possible said they had taught the guerrillas a lesson. And what was that lesson? Beheading, torturing, massacring children, women, the elderly and the young. More than 60 Colombians were killed there, with the complicity and direct participation of paramilitaries and the Colombian Army. The Colombian Army battalion that hosted the paramilitaries was being doctrinally formed by U.S. green berets. This is a very concrete example, one among many. Examples like this are repeated with massacres throughout the Colombian territory in the last 40 years. More recently, in March, we had the [Putumayo massacre](#), in which 11 Colombian peasants accused of being members of the FARC dissidents were killed. This was the last massacre carried out in broad daylight.





*CAIO – Plan Colombia was created with the excuse of combating drug trafficking in Colombia, but today it is clear that even with all this military and intelligence operation of the United States, drug trafficking continues to grow. Do you think that the Colombian people are beginning to understand this farce and that is why Gustavo Petro leads the polls for the presidential election of the 29th?*

RENAN- Well, let's start with Plan Colombia, which was a bunch of lies and fallacies. It has always been said, even in the most renowned academic studies, that it was a plan against drugs, when in reality, from the beginning, it was conceived as a counterinsurgency plan that aimed to destroy the social bases of the guerrillas, which at that time was very strong in Colombia and which was mainly in the territory in the south of our country. Plan Colombia was designed for that. But it disguised itself under the banner of the fight against the production and commercialization of narcotics. This became clear when economic resources and weapons were transferred to supposedly combat drug trafficking, which, in reality, were transferred directly to combat "terrorism", a name that came to be used after September 11 and that served precisely to try to confuse public opinion.

At that time, many people, including myself, denounced the true character of the Plan. The facts proved us right. In the end, the Armed Forces claimed it was a successful operation, not in terms of narcotics, but in terms of counterinsurgency. The thesis defended by the Colombian Armed Forces is that Plan Colombia forced the FARC to sit at the negotiating table. This is presented as a defeat of the FARC against the authority of the Armed Forces.

Drug trafficking was accessory, secondary. Plan Colombia militarized our society impressively, fostering the growth of the Colombian Armed Forces to unthinkable levels.

These forces have today, including the Police that in our country is military, with a contingent of 500 thousand troops, constituting one of the sixteen largest armies in the world. But it's not just that. Around the military there is an impressive power at the social level, at the civilian level, since they have broadcasters, universities, hospitals, airlines, transport companies, banks. Therefore, they are a very powerful force in a country that trumpets the condition of never having had dictatorships, although the power of the military is unimaginable.

This will manifest itself in the next government, regardless of who wins the elections, the first indications are already being felt that the Colombian Armed Forces, and certainly those of the US, are not satisfied with the possibility of Gustavo Petro's victory. They have already begun to show this nonconformity, even spreading rumors that there will be a coup d'état through the non-recognition of the electoral result. This is very possible in Colombia because here electoral fraud is "the daily bread". That there is fraud in this election would not even be new. It would be new if there were no frauds. The gang that came to the presidency in 2018 only arrived for electoral fraud.

Electoral fraud is not only possible as such, but also because of the non-recognition of the result of the elections in case Gustavo Petro wins. As well as by all the forces that move behind to pressure and blackmail and that are moving at the moment and that are the Armed Forces. Its commander, Eduardo Zapateiro, demonstrating politically, something that is prohibited by the Constitution, has said that he would not recognize a victory of Petro and that there were many "zapateiros" willing to oppose a former guerrilla reaching the presidency. That they are not willing to accept that anything of the unequal structure of Colombian society is touched. This is the current picture, speaking frankly and directly.



*LEONARDO – Within Plan Colombia there are many examples of atrocities. Would I like you to talk about the executions of thousands of civilians as if they were guerrillas, the so-called "[false positives](#)"?*

RENAN – These "false positives" are a euphemism, a lie, they are state assassinations. Much less were extrajudicial executions, a misnomer because there is no death penalty in the country. They are state crimes. They are old in the country, they did not start with Plan Colombia, it is an old practice of the Colombian Army. But they gained strength and became widespread in the two Uribe governments, under the logic that the war is won with liters of blood from the adversary.

So it was necessary for a lot of enemy blood to be presented. And what did they do? Many Colombians were disguised as guerrillas, even people with mental illness and physical disabilities were massacred. The figure is not known exactly, the [Special Jurisdiction for Peace \(JEP\)](#) speaks of 6,500 dead, but in reality they can exceed 12 or 15 thousand. The deaths became widespread to say that the Colombian state was winning the war against the guerrillas, especially the FARC. The killings became widespread.

This was presented as something very positive in front of public opinion, which initially accepted the idea, but now a criticism of these crimes arises, although without reaching the high responsible. And who are those high-ranking officials? The presidents of the Republic, several... Starting with Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010), but also with Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) and currently with Iván Duque. In other words, almost every president

of the last 50 or 60 years is responsible for these state assassinations. But limiting numbers were set for those directly responsible to be brought to justice. In this way, there does not seem to be justice to convict them, although there is the necessary documentation for this to happen.

Caio Teixeira and Leonardo Wexell Severo / [Comunica Sul](#)

Original: Embaixada dos EUA é a principal das suas bases contra a Colômbia, denunciao scholar

Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

Source: [CronicÓN](#) , May 12, 2022

**La Pluma.net 12.05.2022**