

MEDIA FABRICATIONS OF THE FACTS: When the Respectable Become Extremists. The Extremists Become Respectable

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Introduction

By any historical measure, whether it involves international law, human rights conventions, United Nations protocols, or standard socio-economic indicators, the policies and practices of the United States and European Union regimes can be characterized as extremist. By that we mean that their policies and practices result in the large-scale, long-term systematic destruction of human lives, habitat and livelihood affecting millions of people through the direct application of force and violence. The extremist regimes abhor moderation, which implies rejection of total war in favor of peaceful negotiations. Moderation pursues conflict resolution through diplomacy and compromise and the rejection of state and paramilitary terror, mass dispossession and displacement of civilian populations and the systematic assault on popular sectors of civil society.

In first decade of the 21st century we have witnessed the West's embrace of the full spectrum of extremism in both domestic and foreign policy. Extremism is a common practice by self-styled conservatives, liberals and social-democrats. In the past, conservative implied preserving the status quo and, at most, tinkering with change at the margins. Today's 'conservatives' demand the wholesale dismantling of entire social welfare systems and the elimination of traditional legal protection of workers and the environment. Liberals and social democrats, who in the past, occasionally, questioned colonial systems, are now in the forefront of prolonged multi-front colonial wars ,which have killed and displaced millions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria.

Extremism, in terms of its methods, means and goals, has obliterated the distinctions between center left, center and rightwing politicians. Moderates opposed to the current policies of subsidizing the major banks while impoverishing tens of millions of workers, are now labeled the 'hard left', 'extremists' or 'radicals'.

In the wake of the government's extremist policies, the respectable, prestigious print media have engaged in their own versions of extremism[1]. Colonial wars, devastating civil society and stable cultures while impoverishing millions in the colonized country, are justified, embellished and presented as lawful and humane advances in secular democratic values. Domestic wars on behalf of oligarchies and against wage and salaried workers, which concentrate wealth and deepen despair of the dispossessed, are described as rational, virtuous and necessary. The distinctions between the prudent, balanced, prestigious and serious media and the sensationalist, yellow press have disappeared. The fabrication of

facts, blatant omissions and distortions of context are found in one just as well as the other.

To illustrate the reign of extremism in officialdom and among the prestigious press, we will examine two case studies. These involve US policies toward Colombia and Honduras and the Financial Times and New York Times coverage of the two nations.

Colombia: The 'Oldest Democracy in Latin America ' versus 'The Death squad Capital of the World'

Following the giddy eulogies of Colombia's emergence as Latin America's poster boy for democracy in an April issue of Time Magazine, as well as the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, and Washington Post, the Financial Times ran a series of articles including a special insert on Colombia's political and economic 'miracle' entitled, "Investing in Colombia"[2]. According to the FTs leading Latin American journalist, John Paul Rathbone, Colombia is the 'oldest democracy in the hemisphere'[3]. Rathbone's rapturous praise for Colombia's President Santos extends from his role as an 'emerging power broker' for the South American continent, to making Colombia safe for foreign investors and 'exciting the envy' of other less successful regimes in the region. Rathbone gives prominence to one Colombia business leader who claims that Colombia's second biggest city, Medellín, 'is living through its best of times'[4]. In line with the opinion of the foreign and business elite, the respectable print media describe Colombia as prosperous, peaceful, business friendly, charging the lowest mining royalty payments in the hemisphere, and a model of a stable democracy to be emulated by all forward-looking leaders.

Under President Santos, Colombia has signed a free trade agreement with President Obama, his closest ally in the hemisphere[5]. During the term of Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush, trade unions, human rights and church groups, as well as the majority of Congressional Democrats, were successful in blocking any similar agreement because of Colombia's sustained human rights violations. Any such opposition from the AFL-CIO and Democratic legislators evaporated, when President Obama embraced free trade, claiming a vast improvement in human rights and President Santos commitment to ending the murder of trade union leaders and activists[6].

Colombia's peace, security and prosperity, praised by the oil, mining, banking, and agro-business elite, are based on the worst human rights record in Latin America. With regard to the murder of trade unionists, Colombia exceeds the entire world. From 1986-2011 over 60% of the all killings of trade unionists in the world took place in Colombia by combined military-police-paramilitary death squads, largely at the behest of foreign and domestic corporate leaders[7]. The 'peace', so enthusiastically praised by Rathbone and his colleagues at the Financial Times, comes with a heavy price tag: Over 12,000 arrests, attacks, assassinations and disappearances of trade unionists occurred between January 1, 1986 and October 1, 2010[8]. In that time span nearly 3,000 trade union leaders and activists were murdered, hundreds more disappeared and are assumed dead. The current Colombian President Santos was the Defense Minister under the previous President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010). In those years, over 762 trade union officials and activists were murdered by state or allied paramilitary forces[9].

Under both Presidents Uribe and Santos (2002 - 2012), over 4 million peasants and rural dwellers were driven into internal exile and their homes and lands were taken over by big landlords, speculators and narco- traffickers[10]. The Colombian government's counter-insurgency strategy serves a dual function of repressing dissent and accumulating wealth

for its supporters. The Financial Times journalists gloss over this aspect of Colombia's 'resurgent growth' as they applaud the results of death-squad 'security', including the over \$6 billion dollars of large-scale foreign investment which flowed into mining and oil regions in 2012 – in areas 'formerly troubled by unrest'[11].

Some leading drug lords, clearly linked to the Uribe-Santos regime, were jailed and extradited to the US . They have testified how they financed and elected one-third of the Congress members affiliated with Uribe-Santos party – in what the Financial Times describes as Latin America's 'oldest democracy'. Salvatore Mancuso, ex-chief of the 30,000-member United Self-Defense of Colombia (AUC), described how he met with then-President Uribe in different regions of the country to give him money and logistical support for his re-election campaign of 2006. Mancuso, who led the largest paramilitary death squad army in Colombia (now fragmented but still active), also affirmed that national and multi-national corporations (MNC) financed the growth and expansion of the death squads.

What Rathbone and his fellow journalists at the FT celebrate as Colombia 's emergence as an investor's paradise is writ large with the blood and torture of thousands of Colombian peasants, trade unionists and human rights activists. The brutal history of the Uribe/Santos reign of terror has been completely erased from the current account of Colombia 's 'success story'. Detailed records of the brutality of the killings and torture by Uribe/Santos sponsored death squads, describing the use of chain saws to mutilate peasants suspected of leftist sympathies are available to any journalist willing to consult Colombia 's leading human rights organizations[12].

The death squads and military act in concert. The Colombian military is trained by over one thousand US Special Forces advisers. They wage counter-insurgency style war on the Colombian countryside, arriving in villages in waves of US-supplied helicopters, cordoning off targeted areas from the guerillas and then sending in the AUC and other death squads to destroy the villages, torturing and murdering peasant men, women and children suspected of being guerilla sympathizers and committing widespread rape. This state-sponsored terror campaign has driven millions of peasants out of the countryside allowing the generals and drug lords to seize their land.

Human rights advocates (HRA) are frequently targeted by the military and death squads. Presidents Uribe and Santos usually first accuse human rights workers of being active collaborators of the guerillas because of their work in exposing the regime's crimes against humanity. Once labeled, the HRA became 'legitimate targets' for death squads and the military operating with complete impunity. From 2002-2011 there were 1,470 attacks against HRA, with a record number of 239 in 2011, including 49 killings under President Santos.[13] Over half of the murdered human rights workers are Indian and Afro-Colombians.

State terrorism was and continues to be the main instrument of rule under Presidents Uribe and Santos . The Colombian 'killing fields', according to the Fiscalía General, include tens of thousands of homicides, 1,597 massacres and thousands of forced disappearances from 2005 – 2010[14].

Courageous members of the Colombian press revealed a practice, known as 'false positives', numerous instances in which the military secretly kidnapped young peasants and poor urban males forcing them to dress as guerrillas, murdered them in cold blood and then

displayed their bodies to the respectable Colombian and international press as 'proof' of Santos/Uribe's combat successes against the guerrillas. There are 2,472 documented cases of military 'false positive' murders[15].

Honduras: New York Times and State Terrorism

The New York Times featured an article on Honduras, emphasizing the regime's 'co-operation' with the US war on drugs.[16] The Times writer, Thom Shanker, describes a 'partnership' based on the expansion of three new US military bases and the stationing of US Special Forces in the country.[17]

Shanker reported on the successful operation of the Honduras Special Operations forces under the direction of US Special Forces trainers. In Shanker's coverage, a US Congressional delegation praised the Honduran Special Operations forces 'respect for human rights', quoting the US ambassador description of the Honduran regime as 'eager and capable partners in this joint effort'.[18]

There are blatant parallels between the NY Times white-wash of the criminal extremist regime in Honduras and the Financial Times' crude promotion of Colombia's death squad democracy.

The current extremist Honduran regime, headed by 'President' Lobos, which invited the Pentagon to expand its military control over huge swathes of Honduran territory, is a product of the US-backed military coup that overthrew a democratically-elected liberal President on June 28, 2009, a recent historical point Shanker avoids in his coverage. Lobos, the predator president, retains control by killing, jailing and torturing his critics, including journalists, human rights advocates and lawyers, as well as now-landless peasants demanding a return of their properties after they were violently seized by Lobos' big-landlord allies.

Following the military coup, thousands of Honduran pro-democracy demonstrators were killed, beaten and arrested. According to conservative estimates by Human Rights Watch, 20 pro-democracy dissidents were openly murdered by the military and police.[19] From January 2010 to November 2011 at least 12 journalists, critical of the Lobos regime, were assassinated.

In the countryside, where NY Times reporter Shanker describes a love fest between the US Special Forces and their Honduran counterparts, 30 farm workers in northern Honduras Bajo Aguan valley were killed by death squads hired by Lobos powerful allies.[20] Not one military, police or death squad assassin has been brought to justice. The original coup leader, Roberto Micheletti and his successor, President Lobos, repeatedly attacked pro-democracy demonstrations, particularly those led by school teachers, students and trade unionists. Hundreds of jailed political dissidents have been tortured. During the period of NY Times most euphoric articles on the cozy relations between the US and Honduras, the death toll among pro-democracy advocates rose precipitously: Eight journalists and a TV commentator were killed during the first 4 months of 2012.[21] In late March and early April of 2012 nine farm workers and employees were murdered by pro-Lobos landlords.[22] With impunity reigning in the Central American land of US military bases, no one has been arrested for these murders. The NY Times coverage of Honduras follows the Mafia rule of omega - silence and complicity.

Syria: How the Financial Times Absolves Al Qaeda Terrorists

As Western-backed Islamist terrorists savage the secular regime in Syria , the Western press, especially the Financial Times, continue to absolve the terrorists use of huge car bombs, which have killed and mutilated hundreds of Syrian citizens. With crude cynicism Western reporters shrug their shoulders and parrot the claims of the London-based anti-regime propagandists, that the Assad regime was destroying its own cities and killing its own citizens and security forces.[23]

Conclusion

As the Obama regime and its European allies publically embrace extremism, including state terror, targeted assassinations and the car bombings in crowded urban neighborhoods, the respectable press has joined in. Extremism takes many forms –from the refusal to report honestly about the use of mercenary force and violence to overthrow

another anti-colonial regime to the blatant cover-up of the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians and the dispossession of millions of peasants and farmers. The ‘educated classes’, the respectable affluent reading public are being continuously indoctrinated by the respectable Western media to believe that the smiling and pragmatic President Santos in Colombia and elected President Lobos in Honduras have succeeded in establishing peace, market-based prosperity, mutually beneficial free trade agreements and military base concessions with the US—even as these two regimes currently lead the world in the murder of trade unionists and journalists. On May 15, 2012 the US Hispanic Congressional caucus awarded Lobos a leadership in democracy award – the same day the Honduran press reported the murder of the news director of radio station, HMT, Alfredo Villatoro, the 25th critical journalist killed between January 27, 2010 and May 15, 2012.[24]

The respectable press’ embrace of extremism and its use of demonological and vitriolic language to describe critical regimes opposed to imperialism are matched by its euphoric and effusive praise of state and pro-western mercenary brutality. The systematic cover-up of crimes by extremist journalism goes far beyond the cases of Colombia and Honduras . Financial Times reporter Michael Peel ‘covered’ the assault on the Libyan government of Gaddafi without mentioning the NATO-led bombing campaign that destroyed Africa’s most advanced welfare state. Peel presented the rise of armed gangs of fanatical tribal and Islamic terrorists as a victory for democracy over a “brutal dictatorship”[25]. Peel’s mendacity and cant is evident in his outrageous claims that the destruction of the Libyan economy and the mass torture and racially motivated murders, which followed NATO’s war, was a victory for the Libyan people.

The totalitarian twist in the respectable press is a direct consequence of its long-term toadying to the extremist policies pursued by the western regimes. Since extremist measures, like the use of force, violence, assassination and torture, have become routine by the incumbent presidents and prime ministers, the reporters have no choice but to fabricate lies to render ‘respectable’ such crimes, to spit out a constant flow of highly charged adjectives in order to convert victims into executioners and executioners into victims. Extremism in defense of pro-US regimes has led to the most grotesque accounts imaginable: Colombia and Mexico ’s Presidents are the leaders of the most thoroughly narcotized economies in the hemisphere yet they are praised for their war on drugs, while Venezuela , the most marginal producer of any drug, is stigmatized as a major narco-pipeline.[26]

Articles with no factual basis, which are worthless as sources of objective information, direct us to seek an underlying rationale: Colombia has signed a free trade agreement, which will benefit US exports over Colombian by over a two to one ratio[27]. Mexico 's free trade policy has benefited US agro-business and giant retailers by a similar ratio.

All forms of extremism permeate Western regimes and find justification and rationalization through the respectable media whose job is to indoctrinate civil society and turn citizens into uncritical accomplices to extremism. By endlessly prefacing 'reports' on Russia's President Putin as an authoritarian Soviet era tyrant, the respectable media avoid any discussion of the doubling of the Russian standard of living and Putin's over 60% electoral triumph. By magnifying an authoritarian past, the murdered Libyan President Gadhafi's vast public works, social welfare programs and generous immigration and foreign aid programs to sub-Sahara Africa can be relegated to the oblivion. The respectable press's praise of death squad Presidents Santos and Lobos is part of a large-scale, long-term systematic shift from the hypocritical pretence of pursuing the virtues of a democratic republic to the open embrace of a virulent, murderous empire. The new journalists' code reads 'extremism in defense of empire is no vice'.

Notes

[1] There's a general consensus that the respectable print media include The Financial Times, The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal.

[2] Financial Times (FT) 5/8/12; See also FT (5/4/12) "Colombia looks to consolidate gains in country of complexities"

[3] FT 5/8/12 (p. 1)

[4] FT *ibid*

[5] BBC News , May 5, 2012

[6] *ibid*

[7] Renan Vega Cantor Sindicalicidio! (Un cuento poco imaginativo) de Terrorismo Laboral Bogotá, Feb. 25, 2012.

[8] *ibid*.

[9] *ibid*.

[10] Informe CODHES Novembre 2010.

[11] FT 5/8/12 p. 4.

[12] See the Annual Reports of CODHES, Reiniciar and Human Rights Watch

[13] Claroscuro Informe Aual 2011; Programa Somos Defensores Bogota 2012; Corporacion Colectivo de Abogados. Jan. - March 2012.

[14] Fiscalia General. Informe 2012

[15] <http://www.falsos.positivos.blogspot.com>

[16] Thom Shanker "Lessons of Iraq Help US Fight a Drug War in Honduras " New York Times, May 6, 2012.⁶

[17] *ibid*

[18] *ibid*

[19] Human Rights Watch, World Report 2012

[20] Honduran Human Rights, May 12m, 2012.

[21] *ibid*

[22] *ibid*

[23] The notorious cover-up of the car bombing is the handiwork of the FT's star middle east journalists. See Michael Peel and Abigail Fielding-Smith "At Least 55 Die in two Damascus Explosions: Responsibility for Blasts Disputed", FT 5/11/12.

[24] Honduras Human Rights, April 24, 2012.

[25] Michael Peel, "The Colonels Last Stand" FT 5/12 - 13/12

[26] One of Colombia 's most notorious paramilitary narco traffickers described the close financial and political ties between the Colombian United Self Defense terrorists and the Uribe-Santos regime. See La Jornada 5/12/12.

[27] BBC News, 5/15/12. According to the US International Trade Commission estimates the value of US exports to Colombia could rise by \$1.1 billion while Colombia 's exports could grow by \$487 million.

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