



## Coercion Incorporated: Paramilitary Colombia

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### Intro

- [Coercion Incorporated: Paramilitary Colombia](#)  
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### Taking Note

- [Mexico's Ironic Democracy](#)  
Fred Rosen

In early May, while the international media's concern for Mexico fixated on the swine flu, two events heightened political tensions in the country, as July's legislative and local elections began to draw near. First, a tell-all memoir called *Derecho a réplica* (Right of Reply), written by a small-time swindler named Carlos Ahumada, credibly implicated much of Mexico's political class in fraud, deceit, and venality.

### Updates

- [After Sweatshops? Apparel Politics in the Circum-Caribbean](#)  
Marion Werner and Jennifer Bair

Garment and textile factories all over the circum-Caribbean have been shutting down in recent years as owners, undercut by competition from Asia, seek to cut labor costs by moving production elsewhere. The factory closures oblige us to reconsider strategies to defend workers' rights in the region.

### Report

- [Legalizing the Illegal: Paramilitarism in Colombia's 'Post-Paramilitary' Era](#)  
Jasmin Hristov

Although Colombian president Álvaro Uribe proudly announced in 2006 that the country's largest illegal paramilitary organization, the AUC, had been completely demobilized, the government's "peace process" with the AUC was a pure farce. The result of the "demobilization" has been the final, definitive incorporation of paramilitarism into the Colombian state and economy.

## • Durable Disorder: Parapolitics in Barrancabermeja

Lesley Gill

In 2000, paramilitaries began their bloody assault on Barrancabermeja, an oil-refining center in Colombia's Magdalena Medio region. They vanquished the guerrillas, killed labor and human rights activists, and terrorized the general population with massacres, threats, and disappearances. Today, daily life has regained a patina of normalcy. But selective assassinations, death threats, and various forms of coercion leave little doubt about who is in charge.

## • Embattled Cauca: A New Wave of Violence and Indigenous Resistance

Mario A. Murillo

In December, the Colombian military shot to death an unarmed indigenous rights activist, Edwin Legarda (Nasa), in what it officially branded an "accident." Fellow activists believe the bullets were likely meant for Legarda's widow, Aida Quilcué, one of Colombia's most visible indigenous leaders. The killing is part of a larger pattern of violence aimed at countering the Colombian indigenous movement's growing momentum.

## • The Oil Palm Industry: A Blight on Afro-Colombia

Garry Leech

With the government's encouragement, the cultivation of African oil palm in Colombia has exploded in recent years. Concentrated in the country's Afro-descendant heartland, the Pacific coast, palm cultivation has been coercively foisted on small growers, while workers on large corporate palm plantations struggle with an imposed regime of "flexible" labor.

## • Colombia and Ecuador: A Clash of Two Plans

Lina Britto

The Colombian military's incursion into Ecuadoran territory on March 1, 2008, was a consequence of the Uribe administration's decision almost a decade ago to "retake" its southern territory by force under the auspices of Plan Colombia. Ecuador, in contrast, has launched an alternative initiative in its border zone, one that emphasizes local development, the upholding of human rights, and national sovereignty.

## • Plan Colombia: Exporting the Model

Bill Weinberg

From its origins 10 years ago, the multibillion-dollar aid package and militarized anti-narcotics program known as Plan Colombia was understood by its proponents as a model to be applied elsewhere in the hemisphere, and it was—first in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, through the Andean Regional Initiative. More recently, Pentagon planners have been explicitly evoking Plan Colombia as a model for the war in Afghanistan, where counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics efforts have likewise become inexorably entwined.

## Reviews

### • The Venezuelan Coup Revisited: Silencing the Evidence

Gregory Wilpert

*The Silence and the Scorpion: The Coup Against Chávez and the Making of Modern Venezuela*, by Brian A. Nelson, Nation Books, 2009, 355 pp., \$26.95 (hardcover)

### • New & Noteworthy

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*Dictatorship, Democracy, and Globalization: Argentina and the Cost of Paralysis, 1973–2001* by Klaus F. Veigel; *Argentina: Stories for a Nation* by Amy K. Kaminsky; *Dirty Secrets, Dirty War: The Exile of Editor Robert J. Cox* (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1976–1983), by David Cox

## Open Forum

### • The FMLN Victory and Transnational Salvadoran Activism: Lessons for the

## Future

Alfonso Gonzales

Salvadorans in the United States helped create the conditions for a fair presidential election in El Salvador—particularly by undermining right-wing fear tactics that aimed to scare voters away from Mauricio Funes.

## Letters

- [Cuba, Racism, and Irresponsibility](#)

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## MALA

- [Hyping the New Media Buzzword: 'Spillover' on the Border](#)

Melissa del Bosque

In March, the mainstream media parachuted into El Paso, Texas, to hype the supposed “spillover” of drug war violence from neighboring Ciudad Juárez. There was only one problem with this latest rationale for further militarizing the U.S.-Mexico border: The El Paso murder rate remains a small fraction of that in Juárez, according to the FBI.