

THE POLICY OF "DEMOCRATIC SECURITY" IS NOT DEMOCRATIC*

Senator Jorge Enrique Robledo addresses the topic of extrajudicial executions and "false positives" [e.g. the Colombian army killing innocent civilians and claiming they are guerillas] before the Colombian Senate Plenary, October 29, 2008.

We are faced with a frightening, horrifying news story, one of those that go around the world via the yellow press because, according to the accusation, we are talking about an alleged criminal organization working inside the Colombian army to kidnap people, take them elsewhere and kill them there in exchange for medals, bonuses, and leaves on Mother's Day. You'd really have to be very evil, and society must have fallen to a record low, for such things to occur. These events make us ashamed to face the world. These are the kind of news stories you can't get away from when you travel outside the country and get asked, "What's going on?" We're talking about 25 Colombian military officers who were fired: three generals, eleven colonels, four majors, a captain, a lieutenant and seven other officers. The numbers are really impressive. Mr. President, allow me to make a few comments about today's events that have to do with the Colombian army. It's a topic that's worth taking the time to address and analyze in its different aspects. It's clear that we're dealing here with a serious crime. I can't remember a precedent for this in Colombian history, and it would probably be difficult to find a situation like this in the entire world.

Society must have fallen to a considerably low level of disintegration for these things to have occurred. It's proof positive that the policy of "democratic security" is antidemocratic. Did Defense Minister Santos know what was happening? Is Colombia the only country where political responsibility never reaches the top levels of State leadership? This event has implications that we are going to discuss in a meeting with Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos requested by Polo Party Senators Parmenio Cuéllar, Luis Carlos Avellaneda, and Jaime Dussán, because this event casts an enormous shadow of doubt over the policy of democratic security.

We are not debating security itself --no sane person would deny that States must have security policies. The debate is whether that security is democratic. President Uribe named his security policy "democratic", but the Polo Party has always had major doubts. We have analyzed it and, frankly, we don't think it's democratic. There are many negative accounts stemming from it, and what we are seeing confirms concerns from democrats in Colombia, human rights organizations, OAS officials, Human Rights Watch, etc., because this is something like the smoking gun that shows how anti-democratic this security policy is.

Let's not forget that these are not the first events or the first reports.

No. There are many accusations. And here is the million-dollar question: Did Mr. Juan Manuel Santos know what was going on? Where does political responsibility end? Because, let's be frank here, these army officers were not fired as a result of losing some kind of trial against them, but rather due to a discretionary power in the army similar to what some of us call political responsibility. In a well-

founded army, officers who are in command of detachments or contingents where these abuses are happening are supposed to be held responsible, which begs the question: why does political responsibility from the top end with the three fired Generals? Why doesn't it keep going up, why doesn't it reach the defense minister? I wonder, in any civilized country, if the defense minister would be able to run away from their responsibility? And I repeat my first question: did Mr. Santos know? If so, not only does he carry an immense political responsibility, but he could also end up facing criminal charges. If he did not know, the accusation is omission, negligence, and ignorance of what was happening with the troops under his command. Because it's unacceptable that when troops of the Colombian Army carry out an action that ends up winning the applause of the Colombian people, Mr. Santos stands proudly in the front row to reap the political benefits for himself, but when a horror like the one we're talking about happens, Mr. Santos doesn't show up, doesn't respond, and doesn't show his face.

Another question arises: Is Colombia going to set the world record for being the only country where political responsibility never reaches the top levels of the State? Are none of the top government officials going to be forced to resign despite what we have discovered? Or is political responsibility only for certain functionaries, only for the director of the DAS (the Colombian Secret Service) and a few generals and colonels, while at the same time there's a group of untouchables at the very top who don't have to answer for anything, but who are of course ready to reap the rewards of government designated successes?

Finally, this morning I heard the director of a news outlet praising the firings of the military officers almost as if the pinnacle of democracy itself had been reached. So what we should focus on here is not the degree of decomposition that these events reflect but rather the actions of President Alvaro Uribe, who decided to fire these officers. This is indeed the world turned on its head --just what we needed. Events have been distorted in such a way that neither the responsibility of the national government nor the failure of the democratic security policy can be analyzed. Once again the Head of State lands on his feet as does the Defense Minister, and Colombians are fed another story. Because there is a chain of command and responsibility here than runs right up to Juan Manuel Santos and to President Uribe himself. We're not talking about a trivial matter; we're talking about the policy of democratic security, the very cornerstone of Uribe's policies, and about three generals, eleven colonels, four majors, a captain, a lieutenant and seven lower level officers, all fired. And the president doesn't explain why, as he should.

I ask the senators: Does all this horror not have anything to do with the disproportionate, excessive, tyrannically imposed pressures on the army and on Colombian troops to come up with killed enemy combatants at any price? Don't we also have here a case in which these military men, these officers, these soldiers, carry out these actions under the threat that if they don't show enough enemy kills they will not receive leave time or promotions? Is it acceptable that those who don't come up with enemy kills practically have no right to sleep and even come under suspicion of being in complicity with FARC guerrillas? This should be a topic of serious discussion because it is closely related to democracy. For security to be democratic it should be democratic with respect to

all Colombians, even with respect to the functioning of the armed forces themselves. The government should not be able to hound the military and drive them to desperate measures and then when they commit the horrors that are now being committed, the president and his defense minister wash their hands and say publicly that nothing has happened here, as the media continue to propose, either the reelection of President Uribe precisely for these "security accomplishments", or the election of Mr. Juan Manuel Santos as his replacement.

*(Text translated, slightly edited, and condensed for English-speaking readers by Natalia Fajardo, Daniel Whitesell and Raúl Fernández).