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Alvaro Gómez Hurtado

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# The leading opponent of Colombian President Samper is silenced

by Javier Almario

On Nov. 2, at 10:30 in the morning, 76-year-old Colombian political figure Alvaro Gómez Hurtado was assassinated upon leaving Sergio Arboleda University in northern Bogotá, where he had just given a class on Colombian culture for the law faculty. At least four assassins were involved in the hit. A leader of the Conservative Party for decades, Gómez was a Presidential candidate in 1974, 1986, and 1990. He was also a journalist, running the newspaper *El Nuevo Siglo* for many years and writing its editorials; a lawyer, graduated from Javeriana University; and a painter by hobby.

Gómez was one of the few Colombian politicians who was able to think for himself. This year, he tried in vain to get the Conservative Party to withdraw its support for President Ernesto Samper Pizano, who is currently under investigation for having financed his Presidential campaign with money from the Cali drug cartel. Gómez insisted that although nobody in the political class wanted to overthrow the President, "the President cannot stay." He severely criticized the "regime," that is, Colombia's political system, for lacking the necessary antibodies to purge itself of the corruption caused by its dependency on drug money.

Although it is not clear precisely who ordered the assassination, the message to all Colombians is clear: Whoever tries to fight, whoever tries to change the direction Colombia is going, will be assassinated. This is the same message that was transmitted to Colombians with the 1984 assassination (among many others) of Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, the brilliant justice minister who dedicated himself to fighting the drug traffickers, who were at the time preparing their takeover of the Presidency of the republic and of the other national institutions, and the 1989 assassination of Luis Carlos Galán, the nationalist leader whose 1982 senatorial campaign Lara Bonilla had managed.

Without the violent interventions of the drug traffickers and their allies in the national political class, who had the backing of the international networks of former U.S. President George Bush and his bosses in London, Colombian democracy would have elected Galán President in 1990, and Lara Bonilla President in 1994. Thanks to those violent interventions, we have had instead such Presidents as César Gaviria Trujillo and Ernesto Samper Pizano, who represented and

represent, respectively, the political and electoral machinery of the drug trade.

## Assassin! Assassin!

On Nov. 3, people came to Bogotá from all over the country to participate in the funeral procession. Gómez's body lay in state in the Elliptical Salon of the Congress, which Samper was smart enough to avoid visiting. Gómez's followers and students had spontaneously blamed Samper for the assassination, virtually from the moment it occurred. "Assassin! Assassin!" shouted the crowds when they thought Samper had visited the clinic where Gómez had just died.

Samper only attended the funeral mass at the cathedral, which he entered and left very discreetly, by the back door. The posters and slogans of the crowd, demanding, "President, Resign!" and "Samper, Assassin," had Samper's security team nervous. Some posters read, "General Bedoya, save the nation," a reference to Gen. Harold Bedoya Pizarro, Army commander, who has had a number of fights with Samper, but whom the government has been unable to fire, because he has the support and respect of both the Armed Forces and of public opinion.

Samper, meanwhile, seeks to remain in power at all cost. Granting sinecures and other perquisites, he has influenced the members of the congressional "Accusations Commission," which is in charge of investigating the President. He has used his Presidential power to silence his opponents, and protects his reign with the support of corrupt congressmen from both main parties, who enjoy the money of the Cali Cartel, as well as with support from Carlos Alonso Lucio, a congressman of the M-19 party (a legalized narco-terrorist group), and the Colombian Communist Party, founder of the narco-terrorist Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), which insists that Samper is an angel, and that the accusations against him are a plot by the U.S. government and the Colombian "ultra-right" to overthrow him.

This tacit alliance among Samper, the Cali Cartel, the FARC, and the M-19 has triggered serious clashes between Samper's government and Clinton's in Washington. The most recent such clash was when Interior Minister Horacio Serpa, a Samper intimate, insinuated that the U.S. Drug Enforcement

Administration was behind an assault against Antonio José Cancino, Samper's defense lawyer.

Now, this same alliance is gearing up a Goebbels-style campaign, claiming that Gómez's assassination was carried out by the same "ultra-right" which presumably seeks Samper's downfall. Before his death, the Communists had pointed to Gómez as one of the heads of the conspiracy. Now, they are in effect saying that Gómez ordered his own assassination!

It is worth remembering that, in 1988, the then-illegal M-19 kidnapped Alvaro Gómez, murdering his bodyguard in the process. The person who ran that kidnapping was Otty Patiño, today one of the heads of Samper's flagship "Solidarity" welfare program. The M-19 used that kidnapping as pressure to force the negotiations that eventually led to its legalization as a political party. The FARC and ELN narco-guerrillas, in several letters to the M-19, had demanded that the latter not release Gómez, but "execute him."

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## The Lessons of Shakespeare's Macbeth

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# Who benefits from Alvaro Gómez's murder?

by Maximiliano Londoño Penilla

*Maximiliano Londoño Penilla is president of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA) in Colombia. The statement was issued by the MSIA in Bogotá on Nov. 3.*

If the material and intellectual authors of the murder of former Presidential candidate and Conservative party leader Alvaro Gómez Hurtado intended to eliminate the broad national movement opposed to Samper Pizano remaining in the Presidency because of his Presidential campaign's known financial links to the Cali Cartel, then, once more, the enemies of Colombia have failed. That horrible crime could be the straw that breaks the camel's back. In the recent months, Alvaro Gómez had become the most prominent figure to demand that the "corrupt system be overthrown." With all certainty, the assassination of Alvaro Gómez has deeply moved the national conscience; now, even the most misled people understand that one cannot continue to coexist with the regime of terror that has been imposed by the drug traffickers, the narco-guerrillas, the common criminals, and the corrupt politicians.

In editorials published by the newspaper *El Nuevo Siglo* and in his public speeches, Alvaro Gómez strongly criticized the Samper government, both for its vacillations in facing

down the narco-guerrillas as well as for its pretended ignorance of the infiltration of drug money into his Presidential campaign. Alvaro had further proposed the dissolution, yet again, of a Congress he considered corrupt and non-functional. With spirit, Alvaro tirelessly defended the Armed Forces from the slanders and defamations of the non-governmental organizations, the narco-guerrillas, the "People's Defender," and the Attorney General's office.

Alvaro Gómez demanded that the investigations of Samper be made public, to avoid any deals being struck between the investigated and the investigator. He criticized all the little tricks and legal games played by Samper's defense lawyer Antonio José Cancino. He repeatedly demanded the resignation of the "Cerberus," or watchdog, of the regime, Interior Minister Horacio Serpa Uribe, not only for his proclivities in favor of the narco-guerrillas, but for being a coverup-artist regarding the "campaign of the ill-gotten money." In sum, Alvaro Gómez became the leading political prosecutor in the country of Samper's drug-financed electoral campaign.

In his editorials, Alvaro warned of the danger of the dismembering of Urabá from Colombia, as occurred with Panama, should the country fall into the trap of bringing in international inspectors and United Nations' "blue helmets." He stated in this regard: "The witnesses and the blue helmets would have to occupy all of geographic Colombia. The presence of the United Nations' forces in the ethnic war of Bosnia-Herzegovina achieved nothing. NATO had to militarily intervene, and the United Nations and other western powers had to propose a peace plan, still not perfected and still fraught with the occurrences of cruel confrontations, so that there could be talk of a cease-fire."

Alvaro added: "But this destroys national sovereignty, emphasizes the government's domestic inability to control public order, and could be an argument for splitting off from our territory one of the richest areas the nation possesses. That is, in the face of the ineptitude of our governments, the same rulers would promote another Panama."

Alvaro understood the importance of constructing a new interoceanic canal. "Urabá represents a zone of invaluable strategic importance. . . . Given its geographic location and because the world is always thinking in terms of trade and political strategies, the Chocó is seen as offering a new perspective for the construction of a new interoceanic canal, or what has been called a 'dry canal.' These circumstances have turned Urabá into a desirable place for those who think in terms of adventures that can procure them new wealth."

Alvaro slammed those who adopt "an attitude of moral indifference to the violence," and revived the notion of a "just war," so eloquently "expressed by those great theoreticians of the [Catholic] Church and of conservatism, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the doctors Vitoria and Suárez, who have so influenced the formation of Colombian legal criteria."

Alvaro Gómez was a political and combative man who sought in vain, on three separate occasions, to rule the destin-