

Book Review/Reseña

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John Lindsay-Poland. *Plan Colombia: U.S. Ally Atrocities and Community Activism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.

Fifteen years after *Emperors in the Jungle: The Hidden History of the U.S. in Panama* (Duke University Press, 2003), John Lindsay-Poland has written a second book that reflects the author's profound personal and professional contempt for the violence meted out by US military incursions in Latin America. Like *Emperors*, *Plan Colombia* draws on expert research in primary and secondary sources (though no archival investigation). Unlike *Emperors*, Lindsay-Poland is both the author of *Plan Colombia* and a protagonist of the story he tells. This latter feature emerges as both a strength and a less significant weakness in this latest book.

Plan Colombia concerns the goals, beneficiaries, actions, geographies, and violent conflicts of US military assistance in Colombia from the 1990s forward. Lindsay-Poland documents relevant human rights violations by way of extrajudicial executions committed by the Colombian Army and its allies. But far more important, this is a story of "solidarity, advocacy, and accompaniment" (23) of US individuals and nongovernmental organizations opposed to US-backed violence, and of the Peace Community of the community of San José de Apartadó.

At the root of it all, Lindsay-Poland sets out to understand US policy. The author itemizes his credentials. They include protesting US military intervention in Central America in the 1980s, accompanying relatives of the disappeared and activists who feared for their lives in 1980s Guatemala and El Salvador, and campaigning for the closure of US military bases in Panamá and Puerto Rico. The author was also inspired by grassroots resistance to the United States in many parts of Latin America, going back to Emiliano Zapata in 1910s Mexico and Augusto César Sandino in 1920s Nicaragua.

An excellent review of the military presence in Colombia from 1952 to 1995 is followed by a chapter on the Department of Urabá—sandwiched between the Caribbean region and Chocó along the Pacific coast—and how people there experienced US-sponsored military actions. This juxtaposition of Lindsay-Poland's broad analysis of US policy and his smart reading of how that policy changed lives on the ground is masterful and the book's strongest aspect.

Written in an engaging style, easily accessible for nonspecialists, Lindsay-Poland cuts through hundreds of published and unpublished works to make a compelling case for how communities organized at the local level to defend themselves. In chapter 4, the book takes a brief turn. For the first time, Lindsay-Poland introduces his own role in the unfolding late twentieth-century conflict in Urabá. At the time, he was a Healing Justice Associate at the progressive American Friends Service Committee. In addition, he coordinated the Task Force on Latin America and the Caribbean of the pacifist interfaith Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and served as FOR research director. Some of this information appears for the first time on page 64, and it is never exactly clear what roles these groups played as a human rights bridge between the United States and Colombia, or what precisely Lindsay-Poland did in those organizations.

That ambiguity filters immediately into subsequent book chapters where a heretofore convincing analytical approach is sometimes set aside in favor of stories of the author's own journeys to Colombia—physical, political, and philosophical—in the shadow of events he described previously. The result is at times a set of accounts about his work in relation to that of community groups fighting for survival, where interviews with Colombian peace organizers, US soldiers, and others become a function of whom he came upon along the way.

The methodological shift begins in 2000 when the Urabá community of Apartadó invited FOR to Colombia. Lindsay-Poland makes the mistake of descending into the minutiae of the story. Although he "thought it would take too much time to go" and believed "you needed to fly to Medellín, stay overnight, then take another flight to Carepa, get from there to the Apartadó bus station, then take an open-air *buseta* an hour and half up the road," no reader will be surprised to learn that Lindsay-Poland made the trip. On the plane from Miami to Medellín, the author sat next to a US Army Ranger. Like many other interviews conducted for the book, this one bears little analytical rigor and comes about by happenstance. While Lindsay-Poland's descriptions of his experiences in the town are helpful, they are no more than descriptions of what he experienced without reference to a program of interviews or other research.

Back in the United States, the author's encounters are at times equally a function of conversations here and there, with results that offer nothing others have not already

written about elsewhere. On his return from Colombia, for example, Lindsay-Poland spoke with Senator Diane Feinstein's foreign policy director who did not view Plan Colombia as an escalation of the war in Colombia. Not surprisingly, Lindsay-Poland does not have much time for either the Democratic Party or Republican Party leadership and their dismissal of the seriousness of the violence in Colombia deriving from US military aid.

Lindsay-Poland explains in detail the nature of protective accompaniment work by US human rights organizations with Colombian grassroots community organizations. Even so, it is all a bit hazy where the author tells the story of FOR's work through the lens of his own participation. His most explosive revelation in this regard dovetails with what we have learned elsewhere about the cynicism of US policymakers and their unwillingness to pull back the curtain on how US military aid rains violence down on Latin American communities. Like the US officials depicted in Costa Gavras' 1982 film *Missing* in reference to the Chilean dictatorship, the US ambassador in Colombia was disdainful of FOR criticisms of the unwillingness of Colombian authorities to respect human rights.

That said, Lindsay-Poland is at his best when he moves his human rights support work to the back burner to focus on Colombian community groups and how they negotiated their security in the larger contexts of Colombian government indifference and ongoing US government military aid. For example, his meeting with Colombian general Jaime Lasprilla about local killings is electric and one of many examples of Lindsay-Poland's expertise in bringing together a remarkable history of one Colombian community's struggles against a violent military infrastructure sponsored by the United States.

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