

U.S. Government Glosses Over War Crime Accusations Against Leading Guatemalan Presidential Candidate

By Annie Bird, April 27, 2011

A Wikileaks State Department cable, published April 14, 2011 in the Spanish newspaper El Pais, revealed current US Ambassador to Guatemala Stephan McFarland's dismissal of the possibility that current front running presidential candidate, former General Otto Perez Molina, participated in war crimes, despite widespread evidence to the contrary.

Criminals who gained control of political and economic power in Guatemala during the US-backed military governments that followed the 1954 CIA-coup in Guatemala continue to hold power even after almost 20 years of United Nations commissions focused on disarming, exposing and prosecuting the clandestine networks of criminal power.

The cable exposes one of the reasons why - the US willingness to conduct 'business as usual' with those implicated in these networks.

McFarland's whitewashing of war crimes charges is both not surprising and extremely concerning, given that McFarland is a player in the diplomatic team assembled by Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte to usher in the largest "aid" package for Central American security forces since the 1980s.

Washington's plan to remilitarize Central America, via the "Merida Initiative", is dangerous. It arms militaries which were never cleaned after the "dirty" wars, and police forces that were built from recycled dirty war soldiers. The Merida Initiative partners with the institutions controlled by the parallel, criminal networks that it purports to fight. The US is willing to undermine the rule of law by overlooking, or encouraging military coups and candidacies' by dirty war soldiers.

EMBASSY SHRUGS OFF WAR CRIMES ACCUSATIONS AGAINST PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

The cable describes a February 2010 meeting between McFarland and Otto Perez Molina who reported to the Ambassador that he expected his rival, Sandra Torres, to launch a smear campaign implicating him in war crimes, specifically the massacre of an indigenous family in the department of Quiche.

McFarland reasoned that, “opponents exhaustively reviewed his human rights record in the course of the 2007 presidential campaign, and were never able to develop evidence of wrongdoing.”

This false conclusion can only be based on political interests, not facts.

OTTO PEREZ MOLINA – GENERAL DURING TIME OF STATE TERRORISM & CIA ASSET

Perez Molina is a strong supporter of big business and free trade, and enjoys a long history of good relations with the US Embassy. Journalist Alan Nairn reported in April 1995 that Perez Molina had been on the CIA payroll. When Perez Molina last ran for president in 2007 he enjoyed easy access to the US embassy, gaining the reputation as being the embassy’s favorite candidate.

In his cable, McFarland acknowledged that Perez Molina was a former head of military intelligence and commanded the army detachment in the Department of Quiche during the conflict. These facts alone are sufficient to demonstrate Perez Molina’s participation in war crimes – certainly as an intellectual author, and quite possibly as a material author; almost 300 massacres were carried in the Quiche department during the worst years of State repression and genocide.

PEREZ MOLINA IMPLICATED IN MURDER, TORTURE AND MASSACRES

In addition, journalists have implicated Perez Molina in the 1994 killing of Judge Edgar Ramiro Elias Ogaldez, who was involved in the

investigation of the murders that year of two Mayan Presbyterian pastors, a crime for which military officials were being investigated, and also of the 1998 murder of Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi.

There have also been legal denouncements made to Guatemalan authorities in other cases that implicate Perez Molina. That he has never been prosecuted is not surprising given that no soldier has yet been prosecuted for the genocide and other war crimes during Guatemala's armed conflict which resulted in over 250,000 victims, according to the United Nations sponsored truth commission, ... at least 96% of those at the hands of State forces. The majority of victims were Mayan people and the overwhelming majority of victims were unarmed men, women and children.

That these accusations are not widely reported in the Guatemalan press is due to fear for the safety of the victim's family and fear of retribution for reporting. It is also due to widely recognized censorship by owners of Guatemalan national news sources.

Publicly denouncing Otto Perez Molina is a scary thing to do, especially since those who know about his implication in crimes during the years of State repression and genocide also know that many believe he may be implicated in gruesome crimes his former colleagues in the military intelligence and death squads continue to commit, now as part of organized crime networks.

Impunity is enforced and re-enforced by a marriage of interests between organized crime, agents of the State (particularly military intelligence, politicians and the justice system), and business and land-owning interests.

The predominant analysis of CICIACS (an international commission investigating Illegal Bodies and the Clandestine Security Apparatus) is that there are two principal illegal, parallel forces: the Cofradia and the Sindicato. Otto Perez Molina is frequently accused of being a member of the Sindicato.

PEREZ MOLINA REPORTS ANOTHER PLOT – TO FRAME HIM IN JENNIFER HARBURY'S MURDER

In a narrative disturbingly similar to the bizarre conspiracies surrounding the suicide-killing of Guatemalan lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg, it is reported that Perez Molina now claims that his political rival intends to murder US lawyer Jennifer Harbury, and blame him. The assertions could also be interpreted as threats against Harbury's life. Harbury notes that “posing as a victim of another's evil intentions is called a “gray campaign” in the CIA psy-ops manual.”

Harbury recently presented criminal charges against Perez Molina and other high ranking military officers who had control over her husband, guerrilla commander Efraim Bamaca, after his 1992 illegal capture, torture and disappearance. Harbury met with Perez Molina when Bamaca was still alive and under the control of the military intelligence agency that Perez Molina directed, and asked that her husband be presented to courts for a trial. Evidence later emerged he was secretly held and tortured over many months.

NEGROPONTE'S JUNE 2008 CENTRAL AMERICA TOUR AND THE APPOINTMENTS THAT FOLLOWED

The Merida Initiative diplomatic team was assembled following John Negroponte's June 2008 visit to Central America, and includes Ambassadors Stephan McFarland in Guatemala, Hugo Llorens in Honduras, Robert Callahan in Nicaragua, and Deputy Chief of Mission in El Salvador Robert Blau, along with William Brownfield, Ambassador to Colombia January 2008 to December 2010.

Negroponte is infamous in Central America for his support in the 1980s of militaries deeply implicated in massacres, torture, and other criminal activities, many of whom today are principal players in the organized crime networks that his “aid” package, the Merida Initiative, purports to combat.

The Merida Initiative was modeled on the infamous Plan Colombia, making Colombia the logical starting point for Negroponte's tour. William Brownfield, a diplomat who received the Colombia appointment shortly after Negroponte assumed the office of Deputy Secretary in February 2007, had a strong background in Plan Colombia as he was Deputy to Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere Peter Romero, who claims credit for devising Plan Colombia.

Brownfield first presented Plan Colombia, then not yet named, to the public via a May 17, 2001 New York Times article less than a month before Romero left his position in June 2001. Brownfield continued in the Bureau, receiving the next Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Otto Reich. It was not until the end of March, just two weeks before the attempted coup in Venezuela in which Reich is thought to have played a key role, that Brownfield assumed his next post as Ambassador to Chile.

THE CENTRAL AMERICA TEAM BROUGHT TOGETHER BY CUBA, VENEZUELA AND IRAQ

Brownfield and McFarland worked closely together when McFarland was Deputy Chief of Mission in the beginning of Brownfield's next Ambassadorship, to Venezuela, from August 2004 to July 2007.

McFarland left Venezuela to become Director of Cuban Affairs in Washington, where he served in 2006 when Cuban authorities claimed that diplomats in the US Interest Section in Havana, including Robert Blau, were ferrying cash payments to Cuban opposition figures conducting acts of violence in Cuba. US government support for terrorist actions by Cuban opposition has long been a source of tension.

In March 2007, McFarland left the Cuba desk for Iraq, to command a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) embedded in the second Regimental (Marine) Combat Team during the "surge" in the Anbar province. PRTs, four man units led by State Department officials

supported by USAID officers who worked the “civilian side of the counter insurgency campaign” to set up local provincial governments friendly to US interests with funds and other assistance, were an initiative launched by President Bush during John Negroponte’s term as the first Director of National Intelligence [2006-2007].

Robert Callahan, sworn in as Ambassador to Nicaragua on July 24, 2008, had also served in Iraq, as Press Secretary in the US Embassy in Baghdad under Negroponte, Ambassador to Iraq in 2004 and 2005. Callahan had been press secretary under Negroponte when he served as ambassador to Honduras in the early 1980s.

Hugo Llorens’ role in the June 2009 military coup in Honduras made him the ‘celebrity’ in the team. He is broadly perceived to have been supportive of the coup and was implicated in participation in coup planning by the former Minister of Development Planning Roland Valenzuela days before Valenzuela’s murder.

During the April 2002 coup attempt in Venezuela, Llorens was Director of Andean Affairs at the National Security Council, where he was the principal advisor on Venezuela to President Bush. The Venezuelan coup government briefly installed before the elected government regained control was quickly recognized by the Bush administration.

McFarland assumed his post as Ambassador to Guatemala on August 5, 2008. Just one month prior, Robert Blau arrived in the US Embassy in El Salvador to serve as Deputy Chief of Mission. Blau and McFarland had worked together when McFarland headed the Cuba desk and Blau worked in the US Interest Section in Havana, and was accused of funding terrorist cells in Cuba.

NEGROPONTE AMBASSADORS UP FOR ROTATION

The ambassadors of Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua are all now up for rotation. McFarland’s replacement has not yet been named, but on April 14, 2011 the White House announced the

nomination of Lisa Kubiske as the new Ambassador to Honduras and Jonathan Farrar as Ambassador to Nicaragua.

Farrar's last post was the Chief of Mission to the US interest Section in Cuba. He is considered a State Department human rights specialist, an interesting choice for Nicaragua, a Central American nation whose relatively positive current security and human rights situation contrasts starkly to its neighbors Honduras and El Salvador, where gross human rights violations are rampant.

However US relations with Nicaragua are strained for many reasons, among them that Nicaragua forms part of the ALBA initiative that limits US commercial access in Latin America.

While the human rights situation in Honduras is grim, the new Ambassador, Lisa Kubiske, has no experience in that arena, but does have a strong background in promoting biofuel interests and free trade. Latin American biofuels interests have been strongly implicated in grave human rights violations. State Department choices for ambassadors have more to do with transnational corporate economic interests than human rights.

OBAMA AND CLINTON – MORE OF THE SAME

Brownfield's continuing influence in the region was secured by his November 2010 nomination as Assistant Secretary of State on International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, a post from which he will manage the vast majority of Merida Initiative funds and a global annual budget of approximately four billion dollars.

The US is deeply tied to Central America, and US citizens would most benefit from healthy economies and stable, democratic governments that can only be guaranteed by full respect for and promotion of human rights.

The US State Department, with its revolving door to lucrative jobs in the DC lobbying business has for many decades favored the interests of transnational corporations and the “defense” industry.

Obama’s diplomatic legacy in Central America will be more of the same.

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RIGHTS ACTION DELEGATION: JULY 3 TO 10, 2011 “ELECTIONS; NO DEMOCRACY”

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- Land rights movements of communities that support each other against the appropriation of their lands by politically influential plantation owners and organized crime bosses;
- Indigenous rights movements that seek full recognition of their rights including recognition of traditional authorities and their territory;
- Justice reform activists who seek to reform legal mechanisms that maintain impunity and criminalize human rights defenders; and
- Communities defending their territory against transnational interests (mines, dams or biofuels) backed by political power holders.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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