

Rights Action – May 2, 2011
Impunity Watch in Guatemala & Honduras

THE “WAR ON DRUGS” & CORRUPTED NARCO STATES IN GUATEMALA & HONDURAS

Below: two ‘mainstream’ news articles about how the drugs, violence and the “war on drugs” have infiltrated and infested many aspects of life in Central America, particularly in Guatemala and Honduras.

Though these articles censor out any reference to the historic and on-going role the governments of the USA and Canada in supporting unjust, military-dominated regimes in Honduras and Guatemala – like today -, they do paint a somewhat accurate portrayal of the infiltration of narco violence and wealth into the corrupted institutions of the State, let alone to the “parallel networks” of power.

North America business and investment interests in Honduras and Guatemala (mining, textiles, tourism, fruits, coffee, etc) all operate in these undemocratic contexts, where the rule of law is illusory.

On request, Rights Action can provide extensive information about on-going State repression and impunity in Honduras and Guatemala: info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org

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DRUG GANGS MUSCLE INTO NEW TERRITORY: CENTRAL AMERICA

Tim Johnson, McClatchy Newspapers, Thursday, Apr. 21, 2011

<http://www.sacbee.com/2011/04/21/3570480/drug-gangs-muscle-into-new-territory.html>

Even by the brazen standards of cocaine cowboys, what happened a few months ago at an air force base here set new levels for audacity: Drug traffickers snuck onto the heavily guarded base and retrieved a confiscated plane.

Confederates at the airbase had already fueled and warmed up the motors of the Beechcraft Super King Air 200, a workhorse of the cocaine trade. Within days, it would be again hauling dope from South America.

The stunt was a black eye for the Honduran military, and just one of many signs that parts of Central America have fallen into the maw of international organized crime, threatening decades of U.S. efforts to stanch the tidal wave of drugs headed to American cities and towns.

Washington has spent billions of dollars to help push drug cartels out of Colombia, and to confront them in Mexico. Now they've muscled their way into Central America, opening a new chapter in the drug war that almost certainly will exact further cost on U.S. taxpayers as American authorities confront drug gangs on a new frontier.

The extent of the infiltration is breathtaking. Drug cartels now control large parts of the countries of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, the so-called Northern Triangle of Central

America. They've bought off politicians and police, moved cocaine processing laboratories up from the Andes, and are obtaining rockets and other heavy armament that make them more than a match for Central America's weak militaries.

Air Force Gen. Douglas Fraser, chief of the U.S. Southern Command in Miami, told a March 30 Pentagon news briefing that Central America "has probably become the deadliest zone in the world" outside of Iraq and Afghanistan. Homicide rates in cities such as San Pedro Sula in northern Honduras are soaring, making them as deadly as Mogadishu, Somalia, or the Taliban home base of Kandahar, Afghanistan.

The political influence of the drug gangs is burgeoning. One former member of Honduras' Council Against Drug Trafficking estimated that fully 10 percent of members of the Honduran congress have links to drug traffickers.

[...]

By many accounts, the tide of cocaine through the region has become a sea. "We have evidence that about 42 percent of all cocaine flights that leave South America for the rest of the world go through Honduras. That's a pretty staggering number," U.S. Ambassador to Honduras Hugo Llorens said.

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DRUG GANGS HELP THEMSELVES TO CENTRAL AMERICAN MILITARY ARSENALS

Tim Johnson, McClatchy Newspapers, April 26, 2011

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/04/21/112616/drug-gangs-help-themselves-to.html>

Crime groups in cahoots with venal army officers are looting military arsenals in Central America, giving them powerful weapons that allow them to outgun police and challenge the region's regular armies. The weapons run the gamut from assault rifles to anti-tank missiles, some of which the U.S. supplied during regional conflicts more than two decades ago. The slippage from military armories occurs regularly.

The feared Mexican organized crime group known as Los Zetas has stolen weapons from military depots in Guatemala three times in recent years, Guatemalan Deputy Security Minister Mario Castaneda told an anti-narcotics conference in early April in Cancun, Mexico. In February, U.S. prosecutors unsealed a five-count indictment against a retired army captain from El Salvador for allegedly selling or offering C-4 plastic explosives, assault rifles, grenades and blasting caps to undercover agents.

U.S. diplomatic cables obtained by WikiLeaks and passed to McClatchy show that American envoys have repeatedly voiced concern over lax controls on military weapons depots in Guatemala and Honduras. One cable from June 2009 carries a simple message line: "Rogue elements of Guatemalan military selling weapons to narcos."

The cable was sent after a narcotics raid on a warehouse south of Guatemala City on April 24, 2009, when agents clashed with "a number of heavily armed Zetas," leaving five agents dead. Inside the warehouse, the unit found 11 machine guns, a light antitank weapon, 563 rocket-propelled grenades, 32 hand grenades, eight landmines and abundant ammunition in crates with the seal of a Guatemalan military industrial facility.

U.S. defense analysts determined "with a high degree of confidence that many of these weapons and munitions came from Guatemalan military stocks," the cable said. "The involvement of Guatemalan military officers in the sale of weapons to narco-traffickers raises serious concerns about the Guatemalan military's ability to secure its arms and ammunition," it added. Moreover, it puts police tasked with confronting the cartels at a sharp disadvantage, the cable said, because they "now have to go up against weapons from Guatemala's own military."

Further piquing U.S. officials, Washington furnished some of the munitions. That turned out to be the case in Honduras, where U.S.-supplied grenades and light anti-tank weapons turned up as far away as Ciudad Juarez, the narco-infested Mexican city on the border with Texas, and on Colombia's San Andres Island, an entry point for weapons going to drug-trafficking guerrillas.

The slippage prompted the Defense Intelligence Agency to publish a report entitled, "Honduras: Military Weapons Fuel Black Arms Market," an October 2008 cable said. It noted that the Pentagon investigators determined from lot and serial numbers that six light anti-tank weapons found in Colombia "were part of a shipment of 50" sent to Honduras in 1992 under a U.S. Foreign Military Sales program.

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