

## **Business-As-Usual With Guatemalan ‘Mafia State’: Drug Charges Against Guatemalan Officials Are Tip Of Iceberg**

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U.S., Canadian and European companies and investors (backed by our governments), the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank profitably do business-as-usual with the Guatemalan ‘Mafia State’, turning a blind eye to and condoning the resultant repression, corruption and impunity.

- Below: “Drug Charges Against Ex-Guatemala Officials are Tip of the Iceberg”, elPeriódico newspaper, 27 February 2017
- See also: “Special Investigation: Guatemala's Mafia State and the Case of Mauricio López Bonilla”, <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/guatemala-mafia-state-case-of-lopez-bonilla>

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### **Drug Charges Against Ex-Guatemala Officials are Tip of the Iceberg**

elPeriódico newspaper, 27 February 2017

<http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/drug-charges-against-ex-guatemala-officials-tip-of-the-iceberg>

Former Guatemalan Chancellor Edgar Gutiérrez spoke with elPeriódico about how the relationship between organized crime and political power has evolved in [Guatemala](#). Gutiérrez, who served as foreign chancellor during the administration of former President Alfonso Portillo, says [Guatemala](#) has reached a stage where politicians and organized crime mutually benefit from one other, making the fight against corruption that much more difficult.

The US Embassy in [Guatemala](#) announced on Friday that Roxana Baldetti, the former vice president, and Mauricio López Bonilla, former interior minister, are accused of drug trafficking by a US court and an extradition request is expected soon. Would this confirm the rise of power of organized crime in the country?

EG: For me, the evolution of crime in [Guatemala](#) and its relationship with political power has been remarkable in the last 20 years and has had three stages.

The first stage is often called the predatory stage, because it is where the criminal networks are installed to gain territory and power, and begin fighting with rival groups and security forces. It is a very violent stage with many heinous crimes that, for me in [Guatemala](#), began during the administration of Álvaro Arzú (1996-2000) and lasted until the middle of the Portillo administration (2000-2004).

Then there is a second stage, which starts in 2002 and ends in 2012, when Otto Pérez [Molina] was about to take over. I call that the parasitic stage because that is where violent tactics are replaced by corruption. Criminal groups began to think that instead of fighting, it's better to corrupt and make deals with politicians and the police.

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What is the cause of this evolution of crime in [Guatemala](#)?

EG: In [Guatemala](#), the transformation of drug trafficking routes made this possible. The Colombian cartels stopped being so powerful and fragmented, while the Mexican cartels went down to [Colombia](#) and began to control the routes.

Then there was a change in the value chain. In the previous stage, one kilogram of cocaine was bought in Colombia at \$7,000, but later the same kilogram was bought at \$2,000 or \$2,500. At this stage, in [Guatemala](#), the same kilogram comes in at \$11,000 and leaves to the United States at \$13,000. This amount of money allowed the state to be further corrupted.

Can you say that organized crime came to power with Otto Pérez and the Patriotic Party?

EG: The third stage is the one that I think arrived with the government of Otto Pérez, the so-called symbiotic. Organized crime and political power mutually benefit from each other and feed off one another. It is possible that organized crime, or parts of it, has become the central power of the state, and that we elected it in the 2011 elections.

Is it possible that only Baldetti and López Bonilla are involved in drug trafficking?

EG: The extradition order on Friday is just the tip of the iceberg and I think it will go further. I do not believe they were isolated actions of Baldetti and López Bonilla, but rather corresponded to a structured and much more strategic part of that government.

The US Secretary of Homeland Security visited the country this week and on Friday the accusation against Baldetti and Bonilla was announced. Does this mean that the United States' president has changed, but not their politics against crime and corruption?

EG: Many political and economic elites made a poor assessment of the arrival of Donald Trump. The designation of John Kelly as Secretary of Homeland Security, a man who knows the Northern Triangle very well, and his influence has been decisive in keeping the policy that was drawn up in 2014. The message is: We will continue to support the International Commission against Impunity in [Guatemala](#) (Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en [Guatemala](#) - CICIG), and the fight against corruption and crime will continue even stronger than before.

I do not know if there was coordination between Kelly's visit and the news surrounding the extradition, but the message was clear. They are going to force the elites to obey the rule of law, for better or worse.

Did previous extraditions play a role in this process?

EG: Definitely. Extradition is a very valuable resource for the United States because they remove the criminal from their comfort zone and put them in a place where they do not dominate anything. To ease the pain, they "spill the beans." Many of them are even already prepared with documents, recordings or

tapes that allow them to have a more advantageous negotiation. They know that's part of the United States' plan, to reduce penalties in exchange for information.

Could a drug trafficking case against Baldetti and López Bonilla be opened in [Guatemala](#)?

EG: I believe that once there is a request for extradition, the Attorney General's Office will delegate the case to another prosecutor, in this case the United States, who has already investigated the case. The only question here is that while they have open investigations [in [Guatemala](#)], they cannot be extradited unless the Attorney General's Office and CICIG give up on prosecuting, but that is very complicated and I do not think that will happen.

The last high profile extradition to the United States was Alfonso Portillo. Are the cases comparable?

EG: Drug trafficking for the United States is a national security problem, corruption is a much more widespread and even common issue. And in Portillo's case, according to the United States, the link was that he had used US banks to deposit Taiwanese checks. It's different. So far the most notable precedent for extradition was that of the former president of [Panama](#), [Manuel] Noriega. We have not seen anything with repercussions like this since 1990.

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