

Organized crime, including drug traffickers, linked to repressive Guatemalan president and government

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/organized-crime-including-drug-traffickers-linked-to-repressive-guatemalan-president-and-government>

Another “open-for-global-business” regime that is a “democratic allie” of the U.S. and Canadian led efforts to illegally oust the government of Venezuela

US Drug Probe Lands Guatemala President in Hot Water

by Parker Asmann, April 25, 2019

<https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/us-drug-trafficking-probe-lands-guatemala-president-hot-water/>



Guatemala President Jimmy Morales stepping off a plane owned by recently arrested presidential candidate Mario Amilcar Estrada Orellana

Controversy is swirling in Guatemala after evidence emerged showing that President Jimmy Morales used a helicopter owned by a presidential candidate recently arrested in the United States on drug charges — a case that has turned up the heat significantly on the Central American nation’s head of state.

President Morales, who will be replaced after elections this year, reportedly used a helicopter owned by candidate Mario Amilcar Estrada Orellana for official business in January 2018 and possibly on at least one other occasion, [Prensa Libre reported](#). Morales claimed in an [April 23 press release](#) that the helicopter was contracted by his government with a company called Maya World Tours, which brokers helicopter flights.

However, a legal representative for Maya World Tours said that the company never provided the use of Estrada’s helicopter to Morales, and that the president used the aircraft through some other arrangement, according to [Prensa Libre](#).

Just last week, US authorities [arrested Estrada](#), a former presidential candidate with the center-right National Change Union (Unión del Cambio Nacionalista — UCN) political party, on drug and firearms charges. Estrada allegedly sought millions in campaign funds from Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel in exchange for facilitating the group's drug trafficking activities.

Despite his arrest, Morales stated that [neither he or his country's intelligence officials](#) had any idea that Estrada was engaged in drug trafficking. A 2011 [US embassy cable](#), later released by WikiLeaks, dubbed Estrada's UCN a "[narco party](#)." Estrada and his party were also [investigated in 2015](#) for alleged illicit campaign financing and links to drug trafficking.

Morales confirmed that he met with Estrada April 2 of this year at a finca owned by the candidate in southeast Jalapa department, [Soy 502 reported](#). The announcement came after another presidential candidate, Sandra Torres of the National Unity of Hope (Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza — UNE) party, raised questions about the encounter in an [April 22 tweet](#).

After "insistent" requests from Estrada, according to Morales, the two talked about the transition process if Estrada were to win the upcoming June election — and nothing else. "I have no problem in saying it, because I have done it in a transparent way," Morales said.

Other associates of Morales and his National Convergence Front (Frente de Convergencia Nacional — FCN-Nación) political party are also alleged to have links to Estrada and the UCN.

Ernesto José Degenhart Asturias, the brother of Guatemala Interior Minister Enrique Antonio Degenhart Asturias, is [running for congress](#) on the UCN ticket. Degenhart has been [at the heart of Morales's battle](#) to weaken the United Nations-backed International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala — CICIG), which is investigating Morales for alleged [illicit campaign financing](#) during his 2015 presidential run.

A number of other [shadowy officials](#) with links to the Morales administration are also connected to the UCN or running for various government positions on behalf of the political party this election season.

InSight Crime Analysis

The United States government has played a bizarre role in backing President Morales' efforts to undermine investigations carried out by the CICIG and Attorney General's Office into the alleged criminal conduct of Morales and his political party. However, the Estrada investigation by US authorities has returned attention to Morales — even as he continues his attacks on the CICIG.

US Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) is the key supporter of Morales' drive to quash Guatemala's anti-graft unit. He has [halted US funds](#) for the CICIG — which accounts for just under half of the commission's budget — due to its alleged role in helping prosecute a Russian family in relation to a scheme to fabricate identification documents. Those allegations, however, were shown to be [unfounded and lacking any evidence](#). Yet Rubio alleged that the CICIG was [manipulated or possibly even working with](#) the Russian government in prosecuting the family.

While Rubio and [other powerbrokers](#) have hobbled the CICIG from abroad, Morales has waged a war against its prosecutors at home. Morales [ousted CICIG Commissioner](#) Iván Velásquez from the country and [later ordered](#) the expulsion of the rest of the commission's agents. In January 2019, he [terminated](#)

[the agreement](#) that founded the CICIG altogether, putting the country on the brink of a constitutional crisis.

Whether Morales' links to Estrada will force the US government to reconsider its relationship with Guatemala and its embattled president is impossible to infer, according to Mike Allison, a Central America expert and the head of the political science department at the University of Scranton. "It's tough to predict when the US government will work with people 'known' to be corrupt and when it won't," Allison said.

Indeed, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [praised Morales and Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández](#) for their cooperation on security last year. At the same time, some of Hernández's family members are alleged to be "[large-scale drug traffickers](#)." Previous US administrations also worked with the likes of disgraced former Guatemalan President Otto Pérez Molina until he was [arrested along with](#) his former vice president, Roxana Baldetti, on corruption charges.

However, support for Morales may be waning in some US government circles. Kimberly Breier, the United States' Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, is reportedly [not going to meet with](#) President Morales and Foreign Affairs Minister Sandra Jovel during her upcoming tour through the Northern Triangle region.

"Without increased pressure from the United States and the international community, I don't see Guatemalan authorities moving against Morales," Allison said. However, "it's somewhat more likely that if there is evidence behind the allegations against Morales, those charges could be pursued in US courts."

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Background info

- **Honduran Presidents linked to drug-trafficking & money laundering, since U.S. & Canadian-backed coup ousted Honduras' last democratic government,** <https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/honduran-presidents-linked-to-drug-trafficking-money-laundering>
- **Estimated 250,000 Hondurans & Guatemalans to be apprehended at U.S. border this year,** <https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/estimated-250000-hondurans-guatemalans-to-be-apprehended-at-us-border-this-year>
- **In Guatemala, are justice & the rule of law victims of a U.S.-Canada-Guatemala backroom deal?,** <https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/in-guatemala-are-justice-the-rule-of-law-victims-of-a-us-canada-guatemala-backroom-deal>

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Why are close to 250,000 Hondurans & Guatemalans fleeing this year alone?

The U.S., Canada and "international community" are helping keep in place the very conditions that force tens of thousands of Hondurans and Guatemalans to flee their countries, every year.

Forced migrants and the "Venezuela factor"

After a flurry of mainstream media reporting in 2018 on the 'caravans' of forced migrants, coverage has died off. A majority of the refugees are fleeing Honduras and Guatemala whose corrupt, repressive, exploitative governments maintain full relations with the U.S. and Canadian governments and are

considered “democratic allies” in the U.S. and Canadian-led efforts to illegally overthrow the Venezuela government. The hypocrisy is notable.

U.S. & Canadian problems

The U.S. and Canadian governments, the World Bank and global businesses and investors (privatized hydro-electric dams, mining extraction, African palm, sugar cane and fruit production, garment “sweatshop” factors, tourism complexes, etc.) maintain profitable relations with anti-democratic, corrupt, repressive governments in Honduras and Guatemala, turning a blind eye to and benefitting from exploitation and repression, environmental devastation and human rights violations, corruption and impunity.

There is no political or legal over-sight or accountability in the U.S. and Canada for our direct complicity with the Guatemalan and Honduran nightmares.

Write and call

Keep sending copies of this information, and your own letters, to families, friends and networks, to politicians and media, to pension and investment funds, asking: Why our governments, companies and investment firms benefit from and turn a blind eye to poverty, repression and violence, environmental and health harms that are directly causing the forced migrancy/refugee crisis in Guatemala and Honduras.

- Senators: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/contact>
- House of representatives: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Parliament members: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>

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