



Justifying Militarisation; 'Counter-Narcotics' and 'Counter Narco-Terrorism'

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Key Points

- Three inter-related developments within US foreign policy have emerged in recent years: the militarisation of Central America states under the auspices of confronting drug trafficking organisations and improving human security; the deployment of militarised DEA agents overseas; and the emergence of 'counter narco-terrorism' as a means of justifying such policies.
- The DEA's Foreign-Deployed Advisory Support Teams (FAST) carry out investigations and targeted interdiction operations overseas. They are an upgrade to a similar programme begun in the 1980s and later abandoned, and emerged in their recent form in Afghanistan in 2005 as a funding-focused counter-insurgency initiative. FAST have since been deployed in Central America where agents work alongside repressive security forces and have been implicated in a number of civilian deaths.
- A surge of US aid to Central American security forces justified largely as 'counter-narcotics' funding continues a well-established trend: 'counter-narcotics' is often a synonym for militarisation. Through its parallel support for 'iron fist' policies, Washington has deepened the repressive capabilities of the local security forces. The concern with drug trafficking and human security is superficial. The overarching aim of US funding is the opening of the local economies to foreign investment, and the support of local political groups amenable to this agenda.
- In justifying the increased aid to Central America, US officials present a simplistic interpretation of the local situation: drug trafficking and gangs are responsible for violence, and this means the 'cartels' must be 'confronted' militarily. The interpretation is useful in facilitating the fulfilment of strategic goals. In reality, the conditions in Central America - the rising levels of violence and trafficking, the poverty, the economic inequality, marginalisation and political repression - are in large part the result of Washington's intervention.
- Linking these developments is the use by US officials of 'counter narco-terrorism' as a justification for chosen policies. In Afghanistan, FAST has been touted as such a programme - regardless of the fact that Washington does not officially consider the Taliban a terrorist group. In Central America, officials have publicly offered the same explanation for their policies without providing any substantiating evidence. A strenuous effort to generate such a connection appears to be underway, whether any link exists in reality or not.
- It is too easy to say 'counter-narcotics' operations are failing or misguided. Washington's policies in Central America may well have disastrous results for many, but through the maintenance of a certain status quo and the improvement of the climate for business and investment, they are undoubtedly a success for others.

INTRODUCTION

In the decades since the US government designated illicit drugs a threat to national security, overseas counter-narcotics policies have become synonymous with militarisation. Funding justified under counter-narcotics has served primarily to bolster local security forces, while Washington has advocated and directly taken part in a militarised approach to supply-side control, with an emphasis on fumigation and interdiction. Three recent and related developments within this general trend will be discussed in this report. The first is the creation of FAST (Foreign-Deployed Advisory Support Teams), a relatively new Special Forces-style interdiction programme run by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The programme signifies a continued commitment to militarised interdiction, a method recognised as being ineffective and extremely cost-inefficient if the goal is reducing levels of drug production. Second is the militarisation of Central American governments over the past decade via US aid ostensibly designed to confront drug trafficking organisations and reduce violence. The impact has been the emboldening of regimes supportive of US strategic objectives, including security forces often guilty of severe human rights abuses. In Honduras, the case studied extensively here, the impact has been to lock-in a post-coup government friendly to Washington and committed to economic policies that prioritise the interests of foreign investors and local elite groups. On investigation, there is little evidence of a genuine concern with counter-narcotics and violence in Central America. But real strategic goals are being achieved. Third, and deeply entwined with the other developments, is the growing use of ‘counter narco-terrorism’ to justify the continuation and expansion of old policies. With the War on Terror and the War on Drugs coming under increasing scrutiny and losing their efficacy as motivators of public opinion, this amalgam appears to provide a new means of garnering funds for the policies Washington wants. Like

these other ‘wars’, it also serves to obscure context; to reduce the objective to fighting or confronting an issue. FAST, which is touted as a spearhead of the counter narco-terrorism effort, provides a useful departure point for the discussion.

THE RISE OF FAST

The first of the US Drug Enforcement Administration’s Foreign-Deployed Advisory Support Teams began operating in Afghanistan in 2005.¹ According to Michael Braun, a former Chief of Operations at the DEA and one of the founders of the programme, the Afghan team was created following a request from US Special Operations Command, which wanted assistance ‘building criminal cases against Afghan drug traffickers with ties to the Taliban.’² The team has the following tasks: ‘[to] plan and conduct special enforcement operations; train, mentor, and advise foreign narcotics law enforcement units; collect and assess evidence and intelligence in support of US and bilateral investigations.’³ While building cases against traffickers, FAST members are free to use ‘informants, [undercover] operations, interdiction operations, financial investigations, and telephone intercepts’. The Afghan-based operatives, who focus exclusively on insurgency-linked traffickers, are justified on grounds of ‘counter narco-terrorism’ and are closely integrated with the military campaign. Quoting Braun: ‘virtually all counter narco-terrorism operations are now conducted by the DEA jointly with the U.S. Military Special Forces, Afghan Army Commandos and the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan’ and the local team are ‘responsible for providing counter narco-terrorism support to the remote U.S. Military Forward Operating Bases spread throughout the country’.⁴ Given the mandate, it is unsurprising that FAST members are often ex-military; Richard Dobrich, the current head of the programme, is a former US Navy Seal. Armed like soldiers, FAST members are trained

like them too: before being sent overseas they undergo an 18-week programme hosted by US Special Operations that includes training in 'close quarter combat, shooting, surveillance detection, small unit tactics, combat lifesaving, IED (Improvised Explosive Devices) and demolitions identification, counter-threat driving, land warfare, escape and evade methods, convoy operations, and counter-narcotic tactical police operations.'⁵ In 2009 the Afghan team drew some attention after they were involved in the capture of a well-known drug trafficker and Taliban supporter named Haji Bagcho. Capitalising on the high-profile arrest the DEA requested funding from congress to expand the programme.⁶ The funding was granted. Reports suggest five teams are currently active, one of which remains stationed permanently in Afghanistan, the others based in Virginia and operating in the Western Hemisphere - in Honduras, Haiti, Guatemala, Belize, and the Dominican Republic. The focus is on interdiction, although the tasks and level of involvement vary across the theatres of operation; according to available information, in Haiti and the Dominican Republic FAST members are based in-country for just a few weeks, operating helicopters and fixed wing aircraft with the sole aim of tracking and intercepting drug flights.⁷ FAST agents have also been involved in interdiction around the coast of West Africa, although there is as yet no evidence they operate on the mainland in the same capacity as elsewhere.

FAST is a Bush-era initiative and, like many such programmes, it has expanded under Obama. But it was not until FAST members were involved in a number of killings in Honduras that the first serious questions were asked about the presence of heavily militarised US law enforcement agents in a growing list of foreign countries. In June 2012 a FAST operative shot and killed a suspected drug trafficker while on a mission with local Honduran forces. Operatives are restricted to using their weapons in self-defence or

if their local counterparts are attacked. According to a US embassy spokesman the victim had reached for a holstered gun during the operation in which four individuals were arrested and 360 kilograms of cocaine seized, leading the US embassy to praise what they called 'a great example of positive US-Honduran cooperation'. A month later FAST agents killed another suspected trafficker in equally murky circumstances. Self-defence was again the justification. Those killings followed a more prominent incident in May, near the village of Ahuas, when a group of civilians travelling along a river at night were fired upon by Honduran forces officially being advised, although evidence has since suggested it was more like led, by FAST operatives.⁸ Four innocent people were killed in the attack. Villagers told reporters that after the shooting had subsided local forces and 'English-speaking commandos' swept the area, breaking into homes and handcuffing residents.⁹ The killings caused outrage in Honduras; protestors in the region demanded the foreign forces be expelled from the country. But in standard Special Forces tradition there has been no accountability for killings in which FAST members played both direct and indirect - although still substantial - roles. In the May 2012 case the DEA has refused to cooperate fully with the Honduran investigation.¹⁰ As in other theatres of operations the US has consciously tried to avoid accountability for its forces. US helicopters flown in Honduras, for example, fall under the remit of the State Department and Counter-Narcotics operations, rather than the military, and foreign pilots are used to avoid restrictions on weapon use applicable to US military forces; during the fatal operation in May, FAST operatives and local forces were accompanied by US State Department helicopters equipped with machine guns and piloted by Guatemalans. If past experience is a guide there will be no repercussions for US agents. At the core of the problem is the team's legal status: FAST members are DEA employees, and hence

domestic law enforcement agents, but they are trained like soldiers, armed like soldiers, often used to be soldiers, and are more free to use their weapons than US soldiers in-country, who, outside of war zones, are only permitted to open fire in self-defence. In a slideshow presentation to a symposium on Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, FAST programme head Richard Dobrich confronts the critical question: ‘Is it a law enforcement mission or is it a military mission?’ And he answers succinctly and enthusiastically: ‘Both!!!’ Policing and warfare are thereby conflated with one core implication: US domestic law enforcement agencies are now acting like the military overseas, even in countries not officially at war.

In Afghanistan, as officials have made clear, FAST concentrates exclusively on Taliban-linked traffickers: it is a funding-focused counter-insurgency programme, not a serious attempt to impact the drug trade. The leader of the Afghan team has explained that the focus is the insurgency: ‘It’s never just about seizing and destroying the drugs, it’s really more about the taking down, dismantling, the disruption of organizations’.¹¹ The involvement of the Afghan government in the trade is substantial, as is the role of allied warlords, but they are not the targets. As the leading expert on opium production in Afghanistan, David Mansfield, has pointed out, ‘A strategy that prioritises the “kill or capture” of traffickers with links to the insurgency is most likely to eliminate competition and increase the market power of those government officials involved in the trade.’¹² The aim of FAST in Afghanistan should not be separated from the wider strategic goals: it is part of a counter-insurgency campaign, itself the military arm of an attempt to secure a client regime in Kabul. To determine the goals in the Western Hemisphere, it is worth considering the case of Honduras, host to one of the DEA’s new militarised teams and the local hub of the recently renewed US ‘Drug War’ in Central America.

THE MILITARISATION OF HONDURAS



Honduras

For the past decade or so US funding has been flowing to Central America governments with the ostensible aim of confronting drug trafficking organisations and improving security in a region beset by rising levels of violence. The focus of US funding is on the modernization of the security forces and interdiction operations targeting trafficking organizations. In Honduras (see map), there has been a parallel expansion of the US military presence. On analysis, it is evident that recent militarisation continues an established trend, and serves long-held strategic goals. The local context in which the funds are flowing is imperative in understanding Washington’s objectives.

Like many countries in Latin America, almost two centuries after independence Honduras remains burdened with the basic economic and political dispensation of colonialism. A small elite clique holds the vast majority of the wealth and land, dominate the country’s political life, and dictate the national economic agenda. At the other end of the social scale are the roughly two thirds of the population who live in poverty. In January 2006 the cycle of oligarchic dominance was interrupted by the election of Manuel Zelaya. Zelaya had a conservative background and was hardly a radical, but on assuming office

he did institute various progressive reforms: he substantially increased social spending and the minimum wage, and passed an agrarian reform law to try and correct the historic concentration of land among a small elite. He also entered Honduras into ALBA, the coalition formed back in 2006 by Cuba and Venezuela as a counterweight to the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas, which was being led by the US.¹³ Zelaya lasted just over 3 years in office before being removed in June 2009 in a coup.¹⁴ The reason was surmised afterwards by a local supporter: 'In Honduras, we are accustomed to a government of the rich. And the problem for our president, Mel Zelaya, was that he worked for the poor.'¹⁵ Although the coup was widely condemned, it is clear from Washington's behaviour at the time and the subsequent support for the regime that US policy makers approved of the outcome.

¹⁶ Moves towards land reform and other progressive measures were halted by a post-coup interim government. Protesters went to the streets, and were violently suppressed. A crackdown on political opposition began: the security forces and resurgent paramilitary groups linked to powerful sectors of society targeted opposition activists and the press, terrorising and killing with impunity; within a year of the coup Reporters Without Borders had identified Honduras as the world's most dangerous country for media workers, and in 2011 the Inter American Press Association reported that 'freedom of expression and the press have suffered an alarming reversal.'¹⁷

Assisted by rising levels of poverty and unemployment, and by a state and security apparatus heavily involved in the trade, drug trafficking and organised crime have flourished in the post-coup environment.¹⁸ The movement of drugs through Central America to satisfy the US market is not new - trafficking has existed in Central America since the 1970s, and activity increased in the 1980s alongside massive US financial, diplomatic and military support for regimes involved in the trade - but recently

the route has become more prominent, and the presence of Mexican 'cartels' in the region has grown. This shift is the standard response from traffickers to militarised crackdowns elsewhere, most notably in Mexico after 2006; the famous 'balloon-effect'. According to the US State Department, in 2012 'more than 80 percent of the primary flow of the cocaine trafficked to the United States first transited through the Central American corridor.' Estimates are that 'as much as 87 percent of all cocaine smuggling flights departing South America first land in Honduras.'¹⁹ More recently, as perhaps would be expected with a greater presence of trafficking organisations, there is evidence of increased levels of illicit cultivation and drug production, including of opium poppy, taking place on Honduran soil.²⁰

Expressing open opposition to state policies, or defending those on the blunt end of them, remains a dangerous endeavour. Human rights advocates, trade unionists, journalists, environmental activists, opposition political activists, community leaders and others working for the poor and marginalised continue to be killed, threatened and harassed by paramilitary groups and the state security forces, who collaborate and are often the same people.²¹ Impunity for these attacks is the norm; a situation that is unlikely to improve any time soon: 'After it arbitrarily dismissed four Supreme Court judges in December 2012,' note Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'Congress passed legislation empowering itself to remove justices and the attorney general, further undermining judicial and prosecutorial independence.'²² According to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders:

'The 2009 coup d'état aggravated institutional weaknesses, increased the vulnerability of human rights defenders and provoked a major polarisation in society. Due to the exposed nature of their activities, human rights defenders continue to suffer extrajudicial

executions, enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment, death threats, attacks, harassment and stigmatisation.’²³

Openly opposing the regime, explained local radio station director Reverend Ismael Moreno Coto following the murder of a colleague, ‘means living with anxiety, insecurity, suspicion, distrust, demands, warnings, and threats. It also means having to come to grips with the idea of death.’²⁴

The US government has been a staunch ally of the post-coup regime. In the four years following the removal of Zelaya, Tegucigalpa received a total of \$350 million in assistance from Washington. Between 2010 and 2012, \$50 million in aid was given to the security forces guilty of widespread abuses against the population.²⁵ Citing this abuse, the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, which has filed a lawsuit against the leaders of the coup, called for funding to be stopped:

‘The Honduran military and police have engaged in systematic threats and violence against a number of groups and professions, including organized farmers, journalists, lawyers, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, members of the political opposition, and human rights activists. The United States continues to fund the Honduran police and military despite this atrocious human rights record and despite numerous calls from members of Congress to cut the funding.’²⁶

More than 60 members of congress also signed a letter requesting aid be cut, arguing the continued funding of the local forces encourages the abuse. In their latest World Report, Human Rights Watch find, ‘the institutions responsible for providing public security continue to prove largely ineffective and remain marred by corruption and abuse, while efforts to reform them have made little progress.’ Corruption in government

institutions is rife. Evidence suggests the public statements made by the former police commissioner Alfredo Landaverde are correct: the police are closely linked to drug trafficking organisations, which also enjoy the protection of officials. In making such accusations publicly, and claiming he had evidence that ‘major national and political figures’ were involved in trafficking, Landaverde ‘uttered what few people have the courage to say out loud in this poor Central American nation’, reported the Miami Herald. The 71 year old appears to have paid the price: he was shot to death when his car stopped at traffic lights.²⁷

The police are notoriously corrupt, have been implicated in torture²⁸, and regularly commit extra-judicial killings: between January 2011 and November 2012, 149 civilians were reported to have been murdered by the police, although Human Rights Watch consider the real figure to be higher. Public complaints about these abuses go nowhere.²⁹ There is a growing body of evidence that the police do not just look the other way but are closely integrated with criminal gangs and drug traffickers, even acting as assassins-for-hire.³⁰ Landaverde was not an isolated case: many former high-level officials have accused the government and the police of involvement in the drug trade and cooperation with traffickers.³¹ The defence minister has even gone so far as to claim 40 per cent of the police force is involved in trafficking.³² Efforts at reform have been half-hearted and ineffective.³³

The military forces have a similar history of abuse and corruption. Alongside side the official forces are the growing number of paramilitary groups ‘often associated with government officials, private companies and the security forces, and linked to disputes over land and illegal mining concessions in rural areas.’³⁴ Their role in these disputes has been to enforce the agenda of the local oligarchy, and to remove unwanted people from their land so that it can be exploited for business interests - a familiar

occurrence in Latin America.³⁵ According to a study by the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre there are 17,000 internally displaced people in Honduras. In the cities, displacement is often the result of violent disputes among local gangs ‘who provide security for drug trafficking cartels, often with the complicity of local police forces’. Other factors driving displacement are ‘agrarian conflicts, territorial disputes over trafficking corridors and the political persecution of those who opposed the 2009 presidential coup’, and the paramilitary and ‘private security’ forces who displace communities ‘at the behest of mining companies’.³⁶ And, as in many other Latin American cities, the displacement of people to and within urban areas - overcrowding cities, bringing inequalities into sharper contrast, creating a generation of disenfranchised youth - has contributed to growing levels of violence.³⁷ Poor, scared, lacking government assistance and protection, many people have fled from the violence to the US - an illustrative development that will be discussed later in the report.

Given a free hand by the state, paramilitary groups are enforcing the interests of elite sectors; a UN Working Group has condemned the government’s refusal to regulate what are known as ‘private security firms’ and their ‘alleged involvement ... in widespread human rights violations including killings, disappearances, forced evictions, and sexual violence’. One result is that land grabs by local elites and international corporations are on the rise. ‘Hundreds of thousands of peasants and indigenous people are being violently displaced to make way for massive agrofuel projects, hydroelectric dams, paper mills, gold mines and tourist resorts’, writes Eric Holt Gimenez, the director of Food First, a US based NGO focused on global hunger.³⁸ Likewise, HRW found, ‘Over 90 people have been killed in recent years in land disputes in the Bajo Aguán Valley, most of them since 2009’. These disputes ‘often pit international agro-industrial firms against peasant organizations

over the rightful ownership of lands transferred following a reform to the country’s agrarian law’. The situation in Aguan is dire: between January 2010 and February 2012 there were 88 murders in the region, and while the US State Department described these as clashes between private security firms and farmers trying to reclaim their land, the statistics imply something more sinister. Seventy-eight of the murders, the international NGO Rights Action found, ‘were targeted assassinations, 8 of those preceded by abductions, their tortured bodies found later’. The report continues:

‘All of this points to one explanation: a death squad is operating in the Aguan. This is not news to anyone who lives there, where it is considered common knowledge and it is widely understood that police and military participate in the killings. Dozens of acts of violence and intimidation have been carried out by the Honduran military against campesino communities over the same time period and geographical area where the death-squad killings have targeted campesinos, lending greater credibility to the charge. While masked gunmen have been killing campesinos, the Honduran military’s 15th Battalion special forces unit and units or joint taskforces associated with it, have been receiving training from the U.S. armed forces Special Operations Command South, SOCSOUTH, which is also funding construction on the 15th Battalion’s base in Rio Claro, Trujillo.’³⁹

At the crux of the conflict in the region are the vast inequities in the distribution of land and the suppression of local opposition struggling against land grabbing. And in the background are the decades of neo-liberal economic policies that have ‘set the stage for a massive re-concentration of land in the Aguan into the hands of a few influential elites,’ quoting Food First researcher Tanya Kerssen in her book on the topic.⁴⁰ ‘Militarization, supported by the U.S. government, will not resolve the underlying conflict and it clearly increases, rather than

decreases, the bloodshed,' the Rights Action report concludes. In an attempt to justify the terror, local authorities have claimed, with no evidence, that a guerrilla group linked to drug trafficking is operating in the Aguan. With equal empirical support the Israeli press has claimed Hezbollah is active on the Nicaraguan border, something the local government picked up on and tried to use as justification for military operations. 'The dangerous, unsubstantiated and opportunistic accusations of narco-terrorism levied against the campesino movement in the Aguan by the military', Rights Action observe, 'fit neatly into the U.S. objective of expanding its military reach in the region'.

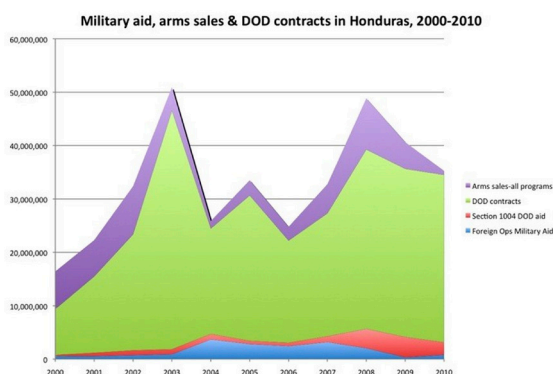
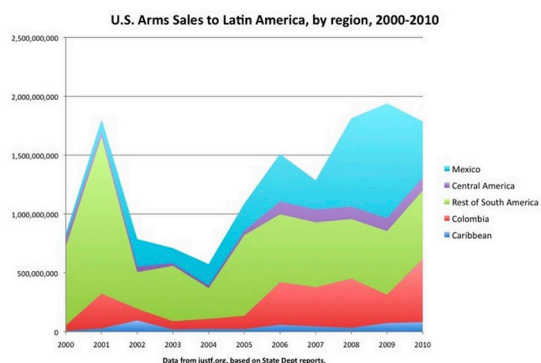
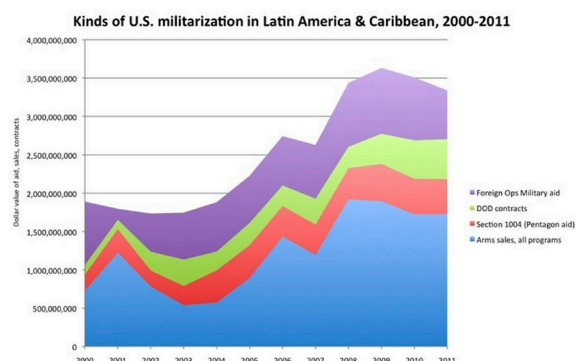
Despite the record of the local security forces, Washington's ambassador to the country, while accepting 'the police do not enjoy the confidence of anybody in the country right now', has stated they have shown themselves to be 'eager and capable partners', thereby allowing the flow of money and the military cooperation to continue. Some pauses on aid have taken place, but the funding is barely interrupted.⁴¹ A temporary freeze on aid to a police reform programme was put in place in 2012 when the head of the Honduran National Police, Juan Carlos Bonilla, was revealed to have previously been involved with death squads. The freeze was soon amended so that only the police chief and his direct subordinates were technically denied direct funding. And while US officials claimed they had no more involvement with the police chief, 'press reports suggest that US assistance continues to flow to police officers who report to Bonilla,' notes Human Rights Watch, citing a subsequent interview with the Associated Press in which Bonilla 'said that he receives ongoing logistical support from the US Embassy for police operations'.⁴²

The cognitive dissonance in respect to the security forces extends to the nature of the government and the political climate. US officials have, for example, praised 'the tremendous leadership President Lobo [2010

- 2014] has displayed in advancing national reconciliation and democratic and constitutional order'. Laura Carlsen, director of the Americas Program for the Center for International Policy, visited Honduras just before these comments were made (early 2012) and took away a different impression of the situation on the ground. In an article titled 'When Engagement Become Complicity: Honduran security forces are murdering, raping, beating, and detaining Hondurans – with U.S. Aid', Carlsen quoted the official statements and commented, 'You'd think they were talking about a different country from the one we visited just weeks before on a fact-finding mission on violence against women. What we found was a nation submerged in violence and lawlessness, a president incapable or unwilling to do much about it, and a justice system in shambles.'⁴³

Throughout the region, the militarisation of local security forces with US funds is occurring under the umbrella of a fight against drug trafficking and criminal organisations, and an attempt to improve citizen security. Writing in the London Review of Books recently, Nicaragua-based journalist John Perry points out, 'The US under Bush and Obama has ramped up security spending to levels not seen since the "dirty wars" of the 1980s, in what amounts to the remilitarisation of Central America'.⁴⁴ Between 2008 and 2011, the Central American Regional Security Initiative was allocated \$1.2 billion in US funding. A further \$708 million went to 'non-CARSI funding that supports CARSI goals'; a report from the US Government Accountability Office found that data on this extra funding was 'not readily available'.⁴⁵ In 2008, \$4,469,000 was allocated to Honduras, by 2012 this had reached \$17,613,000. (In Guatemala the increase was even greater: \$5, 464,000 in 2008; \$20,812,000 in 2011). Last year, an Associated Press investigation, 'tracking a drug war strategy that began in Colombia, moved to Mexico and is now finding fresh focus in Central America', found the \$2.8 billion worth of materiel - including guns,

radar equipment and tear gas - authorised to Western Hemisphere countries in 2011 was four times the amount a decade earlier. Over the same decade, 'defense contracts jumped from \$119 million to \$629 million'.



Graphs compiled by the Fellowship for Reconciliation.

According to the State Department, CARSI, which was created in 2010, 'supports development of a regional capacity to respond to drug traffickers and other transnational criminal organizations'.⁴⁶ Honduras also receives funding through the International

Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) programme. 'There is virtually no reporting on how much funding different security initiatives in Honduras receive through INCLE,' reports the Security Assistance Monitor. It is known that 'support has gone to initiatives such as an elite military-trained police force, community policing, increased border patrols, drugs and arms interdiction, and drug demand reduction. It has also supported training for military and police carried out by Colombian security forces in topics like drug interdiction, intelligence and asset forfeiture.'⁴⁷

Collating information from State Department and other federal agency reports, an investigation by the Fellowship for Reconciliation maps a vast increase in foreign operations military aid, defence department contracts, Pentagon contracts (for US operations), and commercial arms sales to Central America between 2001 and 2012 (see graphs).⁴⁸ In Honduras, 'Pentagon contracts overwhelm the amount spent on both military aid and arms purchases, reflecting the lopsided military relationship between Honduras and the United States, and the level of activity on U.S. bases in Honduras.' The published figures are not the full extent of the assistance: 'An increasing amount of military aid, administered by both the Pentagon and the State Department, does not specify the country of its destination.' Between 2010 and 2012 more than \$300 million a year in Department of Defense and foreign operations funds went to countries that were not named.⁴⁹

'Counter-narcotics' is the primary conduit for the money to the local security forces: in 2012, 'almost \$9 out of every \$10 of U.S. law enforcement and military aid spent in the region, went toward countering narcotics, up 30 percent in the past decade'.⁵⁰ In 2008, when the US reactivated the 4th fleet in Panama - a clear message to an increasingly independent region, and vocally opposed by a number of states including Brazil - the US Naval Operations

chief explained it would ‘conduct varying missions including a range of contingency operations, counter narco-terrorism, and theater security cooperation activities’.⁵¹ The US Government Accountability Office, in a report to the Caucus on International Narcotics Control within the Senate, found that while enormous amounts of money are being given to the security forces in Central America there has been little attempt to assess the impact on the security of the population, one of the purported aims of the money.⁵² Thus, if the goal is improving human security in Central America, Washington appears uninterested in measuring the success of its own policies. This is not new. There has never been much interest in assessing the impact of policies justified under counter-narcotics in genuine counter-narcotics terms. The findings of the Government-linked National Research Council Committee on Data and Research for Policy on Illegal Drugs, published in 2001, are typical: ‘Overall the committee finds that the existing drug use monitoring systems and programs of research are useful for some important purposes, yet they are strikingly inadequate to support the full range of policy decisions that the nation must make ... It is unconscionable for this country to continue to carry out a public policy of this magnitude and cost without any way of knowing whether and to what extent it is having the desired effect.’⁵³ Past experience shows that often, when the facts are too obvious to deny, officials will simply praise ‘counter-narcotics’ policies as successes, even though they may be failing by almost every conceivable metric if their public justification is accepted.⁵⁴ The praise, however, serves to keep the money flowing, ensuring the achievement of strategic objectives.

Funding Repression and Regression

Funding has increased substantially across the region in recent years, but Honduras, reviving its role during the wars in the 1980s, has emerged as the hub of US operations.⁵⁵ Alongside the political and financial support

for the new regime, Washington has expanded and upgraded its military facilities in the country since the coup, spending millions on its two naval bases and six military bases, including \$25 million to upgrade the Soto Cano air base - home to a US force of 600 and located near the capital, it is the only US air base in Central America. The Associated Press investigation quoted earlier found that in 2012, ‘the U.S. Defense Department spent a record \$67.4 million on military contracts in Honduras, triple the 2002 defense contracts there [and] well above the \$45.6 million spent in neighboring Guatemala in 2012’.⁵⁶ A further \$2 million went on training local Honduran military forces through 2011, and \$89 million was granted to US forces stationed there for operations in the country. That same year, \$1.3 billion was authorised for the export of military electronics to the country, which ‘would amount to almost half of all U.S. arms exports for the entire Western Hemisphere’. According to AP, both the State Department and the Pentagon refused to provide any further details relating to the export authorisation.

To defend the situation since the coup - the management of the economy in the interests of local elites and foreign capital - the Honduran government relies on a repressive security apparatus and pro-government militia and, crucially, US funding. As in the past, this money has served to lock-in certain policies. In November 2009, in the midst of the government’s attacks on political opposition, a new president, Porfirio Lobo, was ‘elected’; the four main election observation organisations - the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the European Union and the Carter Center - boycotted in protest at the conditions. The Lobo regime continued the repression of political dissent, at the same time pushing through neoliberal economic policies with the expected results. ‘During the period 2006-2008,’ reports the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research, ‘Honduras saw the implementation of a number

of new social programs, an increase in social spending by the central government and a near 100 percent real increase in the minimum wage. These hard fought gains were, however, reversed in just the first two years after Zelaya's removal from office'. Indicators of human development that had improved briefly with Zelaya have been worsening steadily since the coup. Poverty levels took off after 2010; between 2010 and 2012, extreme poverty, which had decreased by more than 20% during the Zelaya administration, increased by 26.3%. 'Poverty has since increased to 66.5 percent, the highest rate in the previous 12 years for which there is data', noted CEPR. The effects of cuts in social spending as a proportion of GDP are being felt in the health and education sectors, while 'unemployment and underemployment have also both increased' since the coup, 'with over 43 percent of the labor force working full time but earning less than the minimum wage'. But not everyone is losing out: 'In the two years after the coup, Honduras had the most rapid rise in inequality in Latin America and now stands as the country with the most unequal distribution of income in the region.'⁵⁷ Between 2006 and 2009, during Zelaya's term, 'both the top 10 percent and bottom 90 percent of households had rising real income; but those at the bottom captured a larger share of the gains'. In the two years after the coup, 'over 100 percent of all real income gains went to the wealthiest 10 percent of Hondurans' and 'the bottom 90 percent experienced a sharp contraction in their incomes.'⁵⁸ Average real incomes for the bottom 90 percent are now at their lowest level since 2006, the first year of Zelaya's presidency.' The post-coup governments have reversed gains in labour rights and enacted a wave of privatisation measures, including of schools and utilities, leading to widespread protests and then repression in response. The overarching aim is to improve the climate for investors. While then-President Lobo was declaring the country 'Open for Business' to much international fanfare and applause, the Honduran Congress

was approving a law that would 'guarantee capital repatriation, access to foreign currency, equal treatment of the assets of nationals and foreigners, patent protection, and a ban on land expropriation', quoting an analysis by the Center on Hemispheric Affairs.⁵⁹ Critics pointed out that the initiatives 'were merely another scheme to exploit the country's resources, debauch its natural beauty by selling its treasures to foreigners, and further concentrate power and wealth in the hands of a few'. Observed Lauren Carasik, the Director of the International Human Rights Clinic at Western New England University School of Law: 'These laws made Honduras friendlier to resource extraction, biofuel production, "eco-tourism" developments and hydroelectric dam projects that are dispossessing campesinos and indigenous peoples and engendering repression against those defending their land, their livelihood and their lives.'⁶⁰ An opposition political party criticised 'the total surrender of our natural resources and national territory to foreign investors' in a country that has been dominated by foreign business interests since the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶¹ One widely touted initiative was the establishment of a number of 'model cities' to be managed by international corporations in their interests, subverting any semblance of national sovereignty on large sections of Honduran territory. The Supreme Court did initially deem the cities illegal, but after four of the total five judges who voted the wrong way were illegally removed, the legislation passed in 2013.⁶² 'The project was opposed by civic groups as well as the indigenous people', observed an Associated Press report. Since these changes were implemented Foreign Direct Investment from the US, Honduras' largest trading partner, has been flooding in: from \$135.5million in 2010, to \$199 million in 2011 and then \$232 million in 2012.⁶³

A key step in Washington's economic agenda in the region was the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement, known as DR-

CAFTA, passed in 2005. The agreement was pushed through the US House of Representatives under dubious circumstances: after a long delay and suspicions of backroom deals it was passed by two votes. Afterwards the NGO OXFAM put out a press release. ‘In forcing passage of an unpopular trade agreement,’ read the statement, “the administration chose to ignore widespread concerns raised by many members of Congress and their constituents, as well as by farmers, trade unions, and church and community groups in the US, Central America and the Dominican Republic...Development and democratic processes are being undermined through DR-CAFTA.’ ‘The Bush administration,” OXFAM noted, “bullied Central American governments into signing on to a bad agreement that will have serious repercussions for those who are already disadvantaged in these highly unequal societies where most of the poor live in rural areas, rely on income from agriculture, and must pay for medicines out-of-pocket.’⁶⁴ OXFAM had previously called on Congress to reject the agreement, arguing it would ‘endanger the livelihood of many thousands of small farmers who already live in poverty’. Protests had taken place throughout the region prior to the agreements passing, while civil society groups in the US used the example of the impact of the NAFTA agreement on the poor in Mexico, and explained how ‘CAFTA threatens the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of small-scale farmers in the region by opening the door to a flood of U.S. agricultural products.’⁶⁵ OXFAM pointed out that the Central American countries ‘depend heavily on agriculture for the livelihood of significant portions of their populations’, and that the agreement ‘will put the needs of U.S. agribusiness and pharmaceutical companies above the basic development needs of Central America’s poor’. Touted as a free trade initiative, the agreement conveniently ignores ‘the fact that US farmers receive extensive subsidies and domestic supports, estimated to be around \$24 billion this year alone’.⁶⁶ It was a good deal for certain groups. The US government reports

that ‘the entry into force of the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement in 2006 boosted U.S. export opportunities’, and that ‘about 80 percent of U.S. goods now enter the region duty-free, with tariffs on the remaining 20 percent to be phased out by 2016’. Exports to Honduras were over \$5 billion in 2012 and were expected to double in the next 2 years. While coffee and bananas form the basis of Honduran exports, the country imports from the US soybean meal, wheat, corn, and pork and pork products.⁶⁷ In 2013, the value of US agricultural exports to Honduras was \$576 million.

This overview of the contemporary landscape cannot be isolated from Washington’s historic support for horrendous state violence, which peaked in the 1980s. Over this period, officially the first War on Terror⁶⁸, Washington supported the Guatemalan and El Salvadoran dictatorships against populations struggling for an end to oligarchic rule, and used Honduras, long dominated by Washington and US business interests, as a base to launch attacks by US-organised terrorist gangs against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.⁶⁹ Superpower support for the brutal regimes prevented any form of social revolution or genuine reform; Nicaragua was the only country to have succeeded in breaking with history, in the process making substantial gains in areas like literacy, poverty reduction and healthcare. The wars devastated the societies and killed hundreds of thousands of people. Washington’s preferred economic model was protected: the economies of the region were open to foreign investment, re-orientated for agricultural export production to serve the US market, and flooded with US subsidised goods.⁷⁰ In these largely agricultural societies, the effect was the exacerbation of poverty, particularly in rural areas, and the undermining of food security; during the 1980s in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, food crops were exported to meet foreign demand while sectors of the population were malnourished

and starving. Honduras produced beef for export, observed one analysis at the time, but not for 'the estimated 58 percent of Honduran children under five years of age who suffer from identifiable malnutrition'.⁷¹

The maintenance of a system in which a small US-aligned elite prospered amidst a sea of suffering required massive levels of repression, and the foreign currency brought in from agro-export was used to finance inflated military budgets. In a vicious cycle, the regimes pushed through economic restructuring, put themselves in debt with arms spending, were pushed to enact further restructuring to meet the repayments, and, because the policies harmed the poor majority and drew resistance, again unleashed repression. Today in Honduras, the second poorest country in Central America, government military expenditure rises while human indicators like poverty and malnutrition remain dire, particularly for the half of the country's population who live in rural areas. As of 2014, the government now spends more on its police forces, who have a record outlined above, than any other country in the region; local analysts meanwhile point out that the funds 'for weapons and infrastructure, more [police] units and logistics' are not directed at the cause of violence and crime'.⁷² Fully 17 per cent of the country's GDP is being spent on the military and police forces. This prioritisation of spending occurs in a country where two thirds of the population live in poverty, and where chronic malnutrition is considered to affect 31 per cent of the population - in the most disadvantaged rural areas, where access to health services is most difficult, the figure is 53 per cent.⁷³

The context outlined above is enough to suggest that Washington's statements of concern over trafficking and violence in Central America today cannot be taken seriously. Even if the context can be forgotten - accepting for a moment that the US can be concerned with trafficking and violence while adopting the least

efficient, if not counter-productive, methods, while pursuing policies that worsen the socio-economic conditions conducive to trafficking, violence and crime, while preventing genuine development, supporting state violence and security forces connected to drugs, while largely discarding evidence-based approaches to the issue of drug use and production, and continuously adopting policies that serve mainly to push trafficking into new areas with terrible consequences for the local population, and so on - there is little doubt that support for harsh law enforcement and militarised interdiction operations in Central America will 'fail' in the conventional sense. What have been the implications of Washington's drug-related policies in the region - namely, the use of militarised interdiction and support for harsh law enforcement policies - on the drug trade? In response to rising levels of violence, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, the three largest recipients of US counter-narcotics funding, have adopted the so-called 'Iron Fist' approach to security. Earlier this year a report by the US Congressional Research Service noted that while these policies 'initially proved to be a way for Central American leaders to show that they were cracking down on gangs, studies have cast serious doubts on their effectiveness'.⁷⁴ The Research Service reported that 'largely in response to law enforcement tactics, gangs have developed into more sophisticated criminal entities, some of which are now running extortion rackets throughout the region'. Furthermore, 'Evidence also indicates that military involvement in public security functions has not reduced crime rates significantly.' At the same time, mass arrests have swelled the prison populations in countries lacking the facilities to cope, leading to overcrowding, increased conflict in prisons, and possibly a rise in gang membership as non-affiliated individuals sent to prison have been found to join gangs once inside. But the policy does serve a purpose. It presents a facade of concern in the media - a sense that something is being done. It justifies

funding for the armed forces and the police, thus increasing the repressive capabilities of the state while allowing a freer hand to attack opposition. Aside from detailing the tactical failures of the publicly stated objectives, the congressional report does add that in response to the government's adoption of these tactics there have been 'objections from human rights groups about their potential infringements on civil liberties and human rights'.⁷⁵ It has long been understood, and demonstrated in practice, that the approaches supported under the War on Drugs lead to an increase in violence and insecurity; a conclusion that has recently permeated even the highest levels in Latin America, the traditional battleground for the war.⁷⁶ Latin American governments, often made up of groups that see their own people as a threat to their social and economic position, have historically accepted 'counter-narcotics' money from the US, which has in turn improved their repressive capabilities and allowed Washington to dictate local policy related to drugs. The significant US role in drug policy in Latin America historically has meant the emboldening of corrupt, repressive regimes and abusive militaries; the stifling of progressive political movements; and increased violence; and, as a result of policies focused on enforcement and prohibition, the expansion of means of social control and rocketing drug-related incarceration rates, mostly of the weakest links in the trafficking chain, leading to a crisis in many national prison systems.

The Honduran government has, like Washington, placed the blame for violence in the country almost entirely on drug traffickers and general criminal activity. This transparently serves a purpose. Not only is it an attempt to exonerate their own role in the violence and the trafficking, it allows for the passing of repressive measures to defeat 'criminality'. Publicly justified as initiatives to confront criminality and violence, the government has passed a

stream of measures designed to increase the repressive capabilities of the state.⁷⁷ The creation of a military police force is one such example. Emergency laws meant the military had assumed a police-style role since mid-2011, but the constitution, which banned any military involvement in policing duties, had to be amended in order to make the changes permanent.⁷⁸ The militarisation of the police, a report by the *Security Assistance Monitor* points out, 'has threatened human rights and diverted resources away from civilian police operations and reforms while crime and violence levels have remained high'.⁷⁹ Recent indications are that the force, known as 'The Tigers', is to be expanded.⁸⁰

'Confronting' the 'cartels' in this manner, as Washington claims to be doing, using law enforcement and militarised interdiction, will most likely increase violence - the Mexican government has understandably rejected any presence of FAST operatives on their territory - and will have little effect on 'cartel' activity aside from pushing routes around the region and forcing traffickers to adopt more sophisticated operating methods. One particularly visible effect is deforestation, which is happening throughout the region as airstrips and roads are built by traffickers moving into more remote areas. According to a recent study led by Dr Kendra McSweeney of Ohio State University, deforestation has surged, driven by the rise in drug trafficking but also the pressure on traffickers that forces their activities across borders.⁸¹ A BBC summary of the study points out, 'Buying and clearing the forests helps launder profits, and the traffickers usually have enough political influence to ensure their titles to the land are not contested. Through this process, the "improved" land can then be sold on to corporate concerns,' a common outcome in other Latin American who have hosted a War on Drugs.⁸² McSweeney asks environmental groups to join others in pressuring the US to change the 'appallingly inappropriate, militarised approach to the drug problem'.

From the discussion so far, it is evident which of the State Department's goals, quoted below, are real concerns with a long history, and which are necessary platitudes:

'Our policy in Honduras is focused on strengthening democratic governance, including the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, enhancing economic prosperity, and improving the long-term security situation in the country. U.S. Government programs are aimed at promoting a healthy and more open economy capable of sustainable growth, improving the climate for business and investment, protecting U.S. citizen and corporate rights, and promoting the well-being and security of the Honduran people.'⁸³

US 'counter-narcotics' funding might be a failure, or misguided, according to the ostensible aims, just as it is a disaster for those struggling for social change. But it has been an unambiguous success in ensuring the domination of allied political groups, building military partnerships, and 'improving the climate for business and investment'.

DISMISSING HISTORY

Recent events have provided another insight into the legacy of Washington's involvement in Central America. Earlier this year a spike was recorded in the number of Central American children apprehended while trying to cross the US border - 63,000 between October 2013 and August 2014, twice the figure for the same period the previous year. The majority were from Honduras and were fleeing 'poverty and violence'.⁸⁴ The other primary countries of origin were Guatemala and El Salvador. When gang violence was cited as a factor, many commentators remarked that it was the decision in the 1990s by President Clinton to deport immigrants with criminal records that had sent a stream of individuals into Central

America, and faced with few employment options, many of them had reformed the gangs they had joined while imprisoned in the United States; Mara Salvatrucha and Mara 18, the two most prominent gangs in the region, were both formed in Los Angeles. Gang violence then became a serious problem in countries barely recovering from the devastation of the 1980s.⁸⁵ While US border patrol apprehended 16,546 Honduran children crossing the border between October 2013 and June 2014, over the same period only 178 Nicaraguan children were stopped. Journalist Judy Butler suggested a reason: after the Sandinistas had removed the Somoza dictatorship there followed 'a cleaning out of the military and other structures of government that never happened in ... Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras', where US power was vital in preserving the status quo against popular opposition. Moreover, 'the Sandinista Party has relatively good forms of grass-roots organization that incorporate young people into healthy activities', notes professor at the University of California San Diego, Richard Feinberg, a former adviser to President Clinton. Even though Nicaragua is the poorest country in Central America, it does not suffer problems of violence and corruption on the same scale as other countries in the region. Nicaragua, which has the smallest proportion of the population in prison and the smallest police force relative to population, is considered relatively safe compared to its neighbours. Military spending per head is the lowest in the region. 'Something has gone really wrong here', comments José Miguel Cruz, a Florida International University professor: 'The U.S.-trained institutions are the worst able to deal with crime.'⁸⁶ Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador - the US bastions during the 1980s, the largest recipients of US funding in the region today - have the highest crime and murder rates in Central America.

Butler quotes Jeffrey Gould, a US historian of Nicaragua: 'There seems to be a lot of amnesia in terms of our policy toward Central America, the kinds of regimes we were bolstering

back in the '80s, the kind of societies that came out of that.' The contemporary socio-economic landscape in Honduras - the poverty, the inequality, the oligarchic control of the economy and political life, the polarisation of society, unemployment, gangs, the presence of traffickers - cannot be discussed in ignorance of this past; of Washington's policies and objectives in the country, of the kinds of devastated societies left smouldering in the wake. Social reforms, like those initiated by Zelaya's administration, and which local civil society groups continue to fight for, could alleviate the preconditions for violence. The link between inequality and higher levels of violence is well-established.⁸⁷ Improving general human development and supporting equitable economic development could have an impact. But the US has, successfully, sought and used military power to enforce an economic and political arrangement that preferences foreign capital, to the detriment of equitable development.

Even high-level, conservative sources make this connection. A World Bank report, for example, has argued that what is needed to overcome the elevated levels of crime and violence in the region is development.⁸⁸ They criticise the prevailing and US-backed '*mano dura*' (Iron Fist) response to crime and violence, adopted mainly in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, which has received 'poor reviews'. Instead, they 'suggest strongly that alternative courses of action should be explored, with due regard for human rights'. And, following an evidence-based approach, they recommend local governments 'devote resources to address domestic drug use through public health and harm reduction programs, including greater investment in education campaigns, treatment for users, and drug use prevention'. Needless to say, militarisation and law enforcement have been Washington's priorities. A newly unveiled funding plan for the region exhibits a strict commitment to the usual priorities, and looks set to take advantage of the child immigrant surge to push through neo-liberal economic reforms.⁸⁹

The context of US policies, and the policies they have chosen to 'confront' trafficking and violence, demonstrate clearly enough that they have little to do with serious efforts at counter-narcotics or violence-reduction. The superficiality of official statements enforces the point. In official discourse, history and context are eviscerated, the US role is forgotten. The former US ambassador to Honduras, for example, has argued that violence is solely the result of the aggressiveness of drug 'cartels' and gangs.⁹⁰ The solution? 'The evils of the drug trade must be met by an increased focus by the United States government to counter cartels'. In a typical formulation of the issue, Vice President Joe Biden has spoken of helping Honduras in a 'battle against the narco-traffickers'. The official approach is echoed in the US media. 'Much of the press in the United States has attributed this violence solely to drug trafficking and gangs', argues Dana Frank, a history professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, writing in the *New York Times*. 'But the coup was what threw open the doors to a huge increase in drug trafficking and violence, and it unleashed a continuing wave of state-sponsored repression.'⁹¹ While the murder rate in Honduras has been increasing steadily since 2005, a significant jump is noticeable after the coup; the homicide rate of 91.6 per 100,000 recorded in 2011 was the highest in the world.⁹² There is little doubt that drug trafficking contributes to escalating levels of violence.⁹³ But the presentation of drug trafficking and criminality as the sole cause of the violence is a useful foil for American and Honduran officials. In both cases, it detracts from their own role in creating and worsening the underlying conditions. Reversing the causality, the head of US Southern Command, General John F. Kelly, has argued that 'Drug cartels and associated street gang activity in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala ... have left near-broken societies in their wake'. In an article titled, 'Central American Drug War Dire Threat to US National Security',

written for the Air Force Times, he argues that ‘without appropriate application of U.S. military support it will remain fertile ground for every threat to regional security and stability’.⁹⁴ US involvement is also required to improve human rights. According to Kelly: ‘I have found over my years of working with partner nations around the globe, that nothing changes countries for the good like working alongside the U.S. military in a close and continuous relationship.’ ‘I challenge anyone to argue differently,’ he adds, ‘unless of course one does not trust U.S. intentions in the region and also does not have faith in the decency of our military men and women.’

Honduran human rights and civil society groups, who have good reason not to trust US intentions in the region, have taken up the challenge. In a statement, the Committee of Families of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras called the drug war ‘only a pretext for a greater military occupation by the United States and to block the wave of political change driven by the national resistance’. Julieta Castellanos, the rector of the largest University in Honduras and a member of the government’s Truth Commission, has recommended a simple way the US could curtail abuses by the security forces: ‘stop feeding the beast’.⁹⁵ Kelly’s comments are perhaps to be expected, but are hardly a reflection of reality.⁹⁶ There is a well-established and long-standing correlation in Latin America between abusive regimes and US funding.⁹⁷ In Colombia, to take a prominent example, US military assistance has increased along with human rights violations, including the period in the 1990s when the country had the worst record in the hemisphere. US funding has bolstered a repressive regime, the security forces connected to drug trafficking and paramilitaries, and served as an enabler of state and paramilitary violence.⁹⁸ The correlation has even been shown to extend to individual army units. A study by the Fellowship for Reconciliation (FOR) examined the link between US assistance and cases of

extrajudicial killings by the military: ‘Based on data on 5,763 reported executions in Colombia and extensive documentation of U.S. assistance to the Colombian military, we found a positive correlation between the units and officers that received U.S. assistance and training, and the commission of extrajudicial killings.’ Many of the officers who oversaw the largest number of killings, ‘received significantly more U.S. training, on average, than other officers’. According to FOR director, John Lindsay-Poland, on average ‘when there were increases in U.S. military aid, in those areas there was an increase in killings. And more importantly, when U.S. aid decreased... the killings did too’.⁹⁹ The report continues: ‘we identified Colombian Army officers with the largest number of extrajudicial executions under their brigade command, and found that four of six with the most such killings under their command were subsequently promoted to command the Army. This includes current Army commander General Jaime Lasprilla Villamizar, who oversaw at least 75 killings of civilians when he led the brigade in southern Huila Department in 2006-2007’. But ‘instead of being held accountable, officers like Lasprilla have received extensive U.S. assistance and risen in rank’. The seriousness of Kelly’s human rights commitment is exemplified in his comments made elsewhere regarding the way the Colombian military - which Amnesty USA has been arguing for more than a decade should be denied any US arms or assistance - provides a useful means to circumvent Congressional restrictions. Kelly calls this, ‘The beauty of having a Colombia’: ‘When we ask [the Colombian military] to go somewhere else and train the Mexicans, the Hondurans, the Guatemalans, the Panamanians, they will do it almost without asking ... It’s important for them to go, because I’m - at least on the military side - restricted from working with some of these countries because of limitations that are, that are really based on past sins.’¹⁰⁰

Returning to Central America, in 2013 more

than 145 organisations based in the region and the US co-signed a letter to President Obama and Central American heads of state. The letter outlined a more nuanced understanding of the causes of violence, and made the important connection between economic policy and the region's current straights:

'Human rights abuses against our families and communities are, in many cases, directly attributable to failed and counterproductive security policies that have militarized our societies in the name of the "war on drugs." The deployment of our countries' armed forces to combat organized crime and drug-trafficking, and the increasing militarization of police units, endanger already weak civilian institutions and leads to increased human rights violations. ... The violence we face today has its roots in the poverty, injustice and inequality of our societies. National and bilateral investment policies enshrined in Free Trade Agreements exacerbate these problems.'¹⁰¹

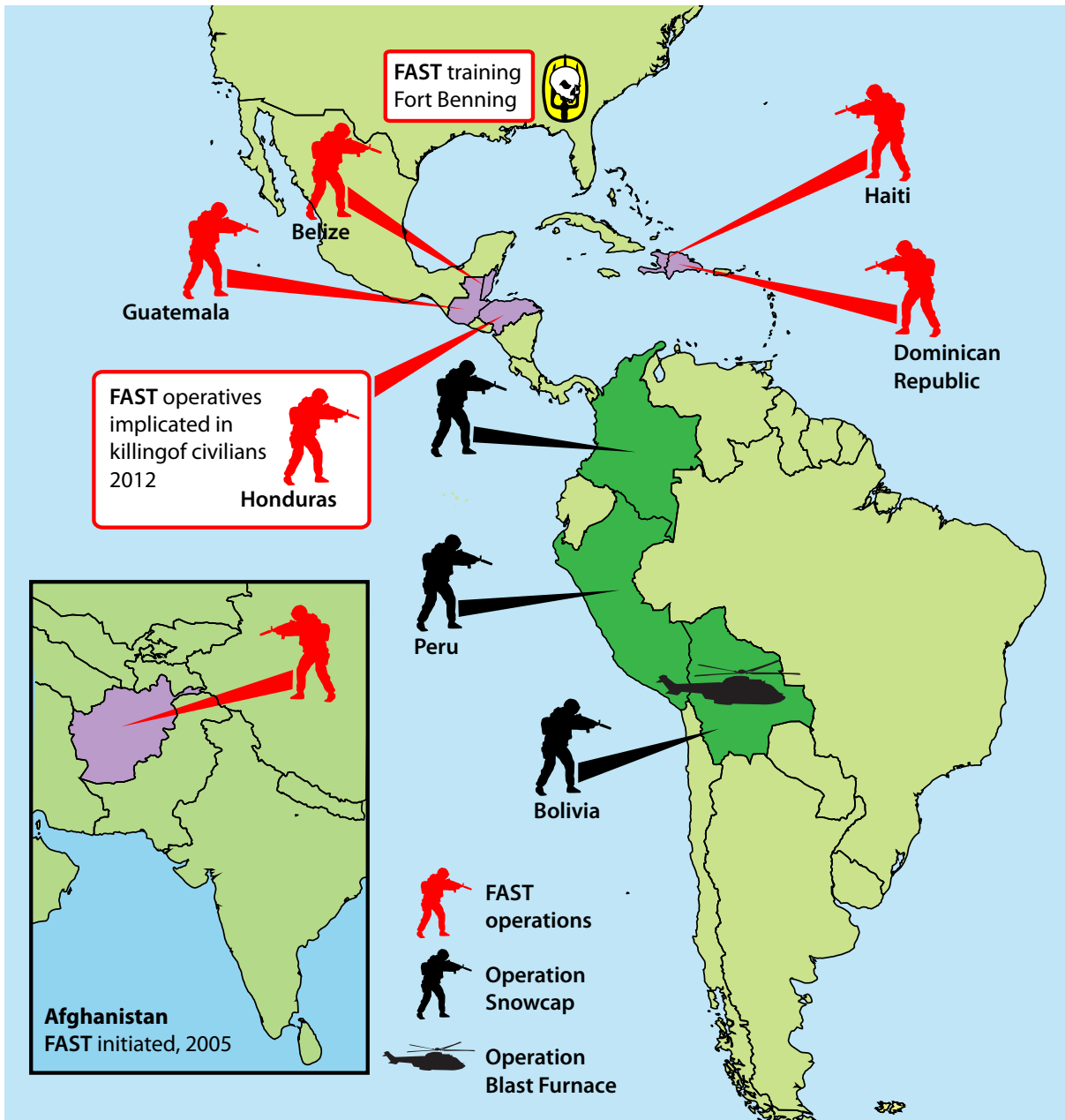
This brief discussion of Honduras has explored the context in which Washington is funnelling money to a local allied regime, justified under counter-narcotics and confronting 'cartels' and violence. It has also demonstrated that violence in contemporary Honduras is a complex phenomenon with various sources. Factors include: poverty, displacement to urban areas, lack of opportunities, an economic model that creates vast inequalities in wealth and land, state repression against political opposition, and the resurgence of elite-linked paramilitary forces. The combination has created fertile ground for traffickers pushed into the region by Washington's policies elsewhere. Crucially, Washington has played a significant, perhaps definitive role in exacerbating many of the factors underlying poverty, violence and drug trafficking. In fact, in a region in which Washington has played such a devastating role historically it is remarkable that US officials can openly pontificate in the manner they have on the local problems, let alone dictate

the 'solutions'. As is discussed later, it is wildly inaccurate, but convenient and self-serving, for US officials to claim the violence is a phenomenon borne of gang and 'cartel' activity alone.¹⁰²

OLD WINE, BIGGER BOTTLES

The use of the drug issue to facilitate the flow of military aid to allied governments and the construction of overseas military bases is not new. FAST, while recently created, is also not a novel invention. It is in fact a rehash, or better put, an upgrade, of a programme developed by the DEA during the 1980s called 'Operation Snowcap' (see infographic).¹⁰³ Initiated in 1987, Snowcap sent DEA Special Agents with military training to Latin America to work with local police forces. Like FAST, the focus was on disrupting organisations and transport routes: Snowcap operatives conducted interdiction operations, and destroyed cocaine processing facilities and landing strips. 'They aren't military', reported the *LA Times* in 1990, 'but they wear camouflage, carry guns and look for trouble'. The programme reportedly cost \$8 million a year and involved 140 agents on rotation every three or four months through a number of countries in Latin America - primarily Bolivia, Peru and Colombia. It was, at the time, the largest US counter-narcotics operation ever launched in the region.

In 1990, the US House of Representatives Committee on Government Operations convened to review the effectiveness of Snowcap. Their report defines the programme as 'a joint U.S.-host country effort to curb the flow of cocaine from the producing and processing countries of South America'. While 'primarily a joint law enforcement effort', they add that 'it is conducted by means of paramilitary tactics'. The committee found a tiny percentage of the coca produced in the region had been destroyed over the course of Snowcap operations, something they attributed



Infographic: US militarised Counter-Narcotic Operations

largely to a pause on operations in Peru and the incompetence of their local counterparts; they did record, as was well known, that the Bolivian, Peruvian and Colombian security forces were heavily involved in drug trafficking. Snowcap had been suspended shortly in Peru through 1989 and was reportedly stopped completely by the mid-1990s. A tranche of declassified documents from this period suggest the reasons for its eventual cancellation. While the lack of effectiveness is alluded to in the internal discussions, it does not seem a plausible explanation. It was known then,

just as it is known now, that militarised interdiction is one of the least effective means of confronting drug trafficking, and subsequent years have displayed no distaste among US administrations for adopting the same tactic, which is ‘the highest profile, the most dangerous, and the least effective of all the options available’, quoting a confidential strategy paper written in 1989 by a member of the State Department’s Office of Andean Affairs.¹⁰⁴ Worth noting is that this conclusion came at the dawn of Washington’s push into the Andean region under the rhetoric of a drug

war, in which interdiction and eradication were touted as the mechanisms through which the problem should be confronted. The report, written a couple of years after Snowcap began, goes on to argue, 'The US must reconsider the advisability of operations like Snowcap ... the results do not justify the expense and danger when compared with the results that might be obtained by increasing aid to local forces. US police agencies like the DEA should engage in police work and liaison abroad, not paramilitary operations.' (According to the report, the State Department's main 'challenge' is as follows: '... to place the traffickers on a collision course with local forces, and ensure the local forces have the wherewithal to prevail'. That is, to send countries to war with drug traffickers. The more modern version is more nuanced, although not so different. The U.S. National Drug Control Strategy, the official goal of which is to reduce illegal drug consumption in the US, includes among its priorities the disruption of the drug trade abroad 'by attacking the power structures and finances of international criminal organizations'.¹⁰⁵ The implications of this strategy in practice can be seen most prominently today in the devastation wrought throughout Mexico.¹⁰⁶)

In respect to cultivation, the ultimate outcome of the operations of which Blast Furnace and Snowcap were a part was to shift production to Colombia. Following years of eradication and interdiction operations there, cultivation has now begun moving back to Peru. Such an outcome was predictable. The impact of these policies on the drug trade is not disputed. And, while the facts have only reinforced this understanding since Snowcap, it was well understood at the time, as the internal documents show.

With Snowcap in full flow, the RAND Corporation, essentially the think-tank of the US Department of Defense, produced a study titled, 'Sealing the Borders; The Effects of Increased Military Participation

in Drug Interdiction'. The study concluded: 'Increased drug interdiction efforts are not likely to greatly effect the availability of cocaine in the United States.'¹⁰⁷ In 1994 RAND produced another now famous report on the cost effectiveness of supply vs demand programmes. The findings were clear: demand side programmes are vastly more effective in reducing drug use. The study estimated the cost of decreasing cocaine consumption in the US by 1 per cent using the various options available. The results were as follows: eradication (supply country control), near \$783 million; interdiction, close to \$366 million; domestic enforcement, \$246 million; and treatment, \$34 million. 'Cut back on supply control and expand treatment of heavy users', states the papers primary recommendation.¹⁰⁸ But the spending focus has remained essentially the reverse, overwhelmingly aimed at source country control, and interdiction and enforcement measures at home. In a 1992 paper, Peter Reuter, then a RAND employee, noted that 'source-country programs, whether they be crop eradication, or refinery destruction, hold negligible prospects for reducing cocaine consumption in the long run'. 'It seems unlikely', Reuter wrote, 'that eradication, crop substitution, or any related effort aimed directly at coca growing and cocaine refining in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia will make a significant difference to total Andean cocaine production, though it may affect the distribution of cocaine production among these countries.' The years since have borne out the validity of this point. Another of Reuter's comments also continues to hold true: 'despite the continued failure of [supply-side] programs and the analytic arguments against them, they continue to flourish budgetarily (sic).' 'Why do these programs continue to generate political support?' Reuter asked, especially given the fact they 'have demonstrably failed in the past.' He offers some suggestions: institutional factors that create policy inertia, for example. But

a more evident and common sense answer seems to be that ‘counter-narcotics’ policies as they have been framed achieve goals that are not publicly stated by policy makers.

The internal record suggests that the cancellation of Snowcap could not have been made with counter-narcotics goals in mind. The crucial factor appears to have had nothing to do with the efficacy of the ostensible aims of the programme. The problem was that US personnel were being placed in harms way in the course of their duties and were not sufficiently armed or trained to respond; the reason for the suspension in Peru in 1989 was the rise in confrontations between DEA operatives and the insurgent group *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path). ‘DEA managers must realise that our agents on operation snowcap have crossed the line from the commonly accepted role of domestic narcotic law enforcement, to the role of an infantry combat advisor’, reads an internal DEA report written in 1988. ‘This line, whether we want to accept it or not, was crossed when Snowcap agents started to wear camouflage jungle uniforms, and jump out of Huey helicopters, carrying M-16 rifles, which the Bolivians call the “black sticks of death.”’¹⁰⁹ The problem, the report argued, was that agents were exposing themselves to attack - from disgruntled coca farmers, drug traffickers, and guerrilla groups. The remedy: give Snowcap operatives more powerful weapons and the kind of training necessary to allow them to operate more like Special Forces. With the creation of FAST, the report’s recommendations have been belatedly realised. At the time, however, the argument of the strategy paper was preferred: ‘Our goal should be a steady withdrawal of DEA from such a role as military and economic assistance allows local [military] forces to take up these tasks.’ And this is what happened. The policies were outsourced. The Snowcap programme was cancelled. The recent adoption of militarised US law enforcement agents operating overseas and

concerned primarily with interdiction is simply a return to the Snowcap model, albeit with more heavily armed and better trained agents.

Snowcap was not an isolated policy, distinct from wider objectives. The internal record demonstrates how the operation and related ‘counter-narcotics’ funding were consciously integrated with strategic goals, reinforcing what the historical record suggests: US officials expected allied governments to use funds justified under counter-narcotics to repress political dissent. In 1989, for example, the National Security Council produced a directive titled ‘International Counternarcotics Strategy’. The funding for programmes in Colombia, Bolivia and Peru, would involve ‘expanded assistance to indigenous police, military, and intelligence officials ... for the purpose of assisting them to regain control of their countries from an insidious combination of insurgents and drug traffickers’. An annex to the directive, marked ‘secret’, adds that each country’s drug programme ‘increased military assistance to neutralize guerrilla support for trafficking’. The same year, a National Security Council Interagency Working Group Draft noted that the strategy to be implemented in the Andean region ‘has the corollary benefit of helping democratic governments fight growing insurgent movements’, although they recognise the support to the militaries ‘could have human rights implications’.¹¹⁰ One NSC document states, ‘military assistance will go toward two uses: narco-insurgents and traffickers’.¹¹¹ In Peru, a 1989 State Department cable, describing a discussion with Peruvian President Garcia on the Andean Summit, argued there was ‘significant overlap’ between counter-narcotics operations and the governments war against *Sendero Luminoso*.¹¹² Another cable from the US embassy sent in late 1989 concedes that funding for anti-drug policies was a ‘deal’ made with the local government in order to assist them with their ‘number one problem’: ‘subversion’. ‘The program is repeat is an anti-subversive program’ states

the embassy cable.¹¹³ Meanwhile, Peru's repressive and brutal security forces were engaged in a war on 'subversion' and in doing so were guilty of massacres, assassination, disappearances, kidnapping, operating death squads and torture. 'These counter-subversive programs make sense to us,' states the embassy cable. 'Counter-narcotics' funds given to Latin American governments were part of counter-insurgency operations, which were unequivocally wars on political opposition, armed or otherwise.

The same was true in Bolivia and Colombia. Prior to Snowcap, Bolivia had hosted a predecessor, known as Operation Blast Furnace. The core of the operation was the use of US military helicopters to transport DEA agents and local police during raids on cocaine labs. Facilitated by President Reagan's 1986 directive on narcotics control, (National Security Decision Directive; April 8, 1986) Blast Furnace marked a watershed in the US military's involvement in such operations. (Coming afterwards, Snowcap represented the next step in encroaching militarisation. The FAST programme is a modernised version: agents are better armed, better trained, and it circumvents the problem of direct US military involvement via the use of domestic law enforcement agents.) As is generally the case, US funding had an enormous effect. 'The impact of U.S. counternarcotics pressure on Bolivia cannot be overstated', noted a Human Rights Watch Report written in 1995. 'Bolivia has passed laws, created institutions and adopted antinarcotics strategies shaped by U.S. concerns and dependent on U.S. funding.'¹¹⁴ Thereafter the document describes abuses committed by local forces tutored and funded by Washington. 'In the Chapare, the rural area in which most of Bolivia's coca is grown and cocaine base produced, the antinarcotics police run roughshod over the population, barging into homes in the middle of the night, searching people and possessions at will, manhandling and even beating residents,

stealing their goods and money. Arbitrary arrests and detentions are routine.' 'A number of Bolivians detained on drug trafficking charges allege torture by Bolivian law enforcement personnel', the report continues. 'They also allege DEA complicity with abusive interrogations. DEA personnel acknowledge that they do not intervene to stop abuse.' There is total impunity for abuses committed by the local forces: 'Even complaints of serious human rights violations, including torture, are rarely investigated. Charges of human rights abuse by DEA agents are left unanswered. A mantle of diplomatic immunity and agency secrecy impedes public investigation and accountability ... U.S. officials dismiss or downplay abuses by the U.S.-supported Bolivian counternarcotics forces.'

The record of the Colombian armed forces and their paramilitary allies is far worse. In 1996 HRW released a report that demonstrated conclusively what had been inferred in a report published seven years before: Colombian military commanders 'have not only promoted, encouraged and protected paramilitary groups, but have used them to provide intelligence and assassinate and massacre Colombians suspected of being guerilla allies'. The evidence of collaboration was extensive. Officers who had worked with the murderous paramilitaries, 'far from being punished ... have been promoted and rewarded and now occupy the highest positions in the Colombian army'. The report found:

'Under the stated objective of fighting drugs, the U.S. has armed, trained, and advised Colombia's military despite its disastrous human rights record. Strengthened by years of U.S. support, the Colombian military and its paramilitary partners instead have waged a war against guerrillas and their suspected supporters in civil society, including members of legal political parties, trade unionists, community activists, and human rights monitors. Far from moving to address

the mounting toll of this war, the U.S. has apparently turned a blind eye to abuses and is moving to increase deliveries of military aid, including weapons, to Colombia.’

Twenty-four Colombian army units, ‘comprising a significant percentage of total troop strength’, had received money under the rhetoric of counter-narcotics, HRW reported, also observing that ‘U.S. Military assistance officials have made a virtue of their failure to distinguish between counternarcotics and counterinsurgency support by designating Colombia’s insurgents across the board as “narco-guerrillas”’.¹¹⁵ Drugs proved useful for evading congressional restrictions: ‘U.S officials pointed to the “narco-guerrilla” phenomenon as vitiating the distinction between counterinsurgency and counternarcotics objectives, in so doing neatly sidestepping the intent of Congress to insulate the United States from Colombia’s dirty war.’¹¹⁶ The paramilitaries, who the US was tacitly supporting and had actually played a substantial role in creating¹¹⁷, were more deeply involved in the drugs trade, at all levels, than the guerrilla, and were responsible for a far greater share of the violence, but they were not the target.¹¹⁸ As is standard practice, a military advisory group found US funding was in compliance with legislation and that counter-narcotics efforts were in fact effective. As a result of this decision, ‘U.S. arms sales to Colombia not only continue unimpeded, but are expected to reach a record level’, as they did in the following years in conjunction with rising state and paramilitary terror. Amid talk of a failure to reduce drug production, the funding justified under counter-narcotics was effective for something: fighting a dirty war in which Washington remains a major player. The aim of this war was explained in a *New York Times* op-ed written in 1992 by Jorge Gomez Lizarazo, a Colombian judge and human rights activist:

‘While Americans are told that all this is necessary to fight the drug war, we Colombians don’t agree. The main victims of Government

and Government-supported military actions are not traffickers but political opposition figures, community activists, trade union leaders and human rights workers.’¹¹⁹

Throughout this period, and regardless of the facts, recipient countries were presented as ‘democracies’, the problem they needed to confront was the ‘narco-guerrilla’, and the way to confront it was with the military. In the late 1980s, this strategy was applied to Central America to justify support for highly repressive, and US-allied, regimes, which were presented as being under threat and in need of help. History is essentially repeating: the contemporary analogues are clear, but unremarkable given the consistency of policy objectives.

Officials were aware such an approach this could be an effective means to garner public and congressional support. Toward the end of the 1980s, analyst and author Michael Klare observed, ‘advocates of an expanded U.S. role in low-intensity warfare ... view the drug issue as a useful vehicle for mobilising public support behind their interventionist policies’. ‘Without providing much evidence, these ideologues claim that leftist guerillas in Latin America are cooperating with narcotics dealers in order to finance arms purchases’, he wrote. Klare cited a US Colonel who argued these connections be made in public in order to create an ‘unassailable moral position’ for ‘the necessary support to counter the guerilla/narcotics terrorists in this hemisphere’, as well as to combat the ‘church and academic groups’ critical of US operations in Central America.¹²⁰

In the decades prior to Snowcap, recent history in Latin America had indicated clearly Washington’s aims in the region. In the 1980s, Washington backed local oligarchies against popular uprisings seeking democratic reform and measures to assist the poor. In the 1960s and 1970s, Washington supported the brutal neo-fascist regimes known as the ‘National Security States’, the first of which

emerged in Brazil after the overthrow of an elected government by military generals in 1964, ushering in a period of dictatorship and state terror. (In the aftermath of the military coup in Brazil, the US ambassador reported to the State Department that it had been ‘a great victory for the free world’, which would ‘create a greatly improved climate for private investment’.)¹²¹ Over the same period, social movements based in the peasantry and inspired by the Catholic Church had begun struggling for changes to the unjust social order. In response, the US stepped in to assist regimes in this war on their own people, and to re-focus the militaries towards ‘internal security’. Official documents from the post Second World War period discuss the aims openly. The threat to be contained was the rise of governments in the region who embrace ‘policies designed to bring about a broader distribution of wealth and to raise the standard of living of the masses’, and who believe ‘the first beneficiaries of the development of a country’s resources should be the people of that country’.¹²²

The most important aim has been the protection of the kinds of economic policies outlined above. And in this sense militarisation has historically been very successful. But in maintaining a close relationship with foreign militaries, Washington also achieves other aims. Policy makers have long appreciated that military training and cooperation engender influence over future leaders, ensuring US priorities are paramount inside foreign military institutions. In 1959, for example, a committee formed by President Eisenhower to assess the Military Assistance Program, which had the goal of arming and training Latin American militaries and was justified as a means of protection against the threat of the Soviet Union, applauded the programme based on the level of influence it had given Washington within these organisations. ‘There is no single aspect of the military assistance program,’ stated the committee, ‘that produced more useful returns for the dollars

expended than these training programs’.¹²³ Cooperation with military forces has also been a means of checking political developments in Latin America. Military coups throughout the region have often had at their helm graduates of the infamous training centre known as the School of the Americas, based in Fort Benning, Georgia and recently renamed. (One of the leaders of the 2009 coup in Honduras, General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, is an alumni of the School of the Americas.) In the late 1990s, when the drug threat had replaced the communist threat, Martin Jelsma, a leading policy analyst with the Transnational Institute, observed that, ‘For the military, the counter-narcotics mission has been the most important vehicle available allowing for the intensification of transborder collaboration.’ The importance of this utility cannot be underestimated. And it should be kept in mind that the contemporary militarisation is taking place amid a tide of independence and a waning in Washington’s historic domination of the region.

‘Following the break up of the Soviet Bloc’, wrote Jelsma, ‘the Pentagon had to come up with a new enemy in order to justify its defense budget and to maintain a global presence.’¹²⁴ The answer was a War on Drugs. Then-President Bush re-declared the War in 1989, just as the Cold War ended, seven years after it was declared by Reagan (1982), who made drug trafficking a ‘threat to national security’ in 1986 meaning far greater military involvement in interdiction, and more than two decades after it was first announced by Richard Nixon (1971).¹²⁵

By the end of the 1990s ‘drugs’ had become firmly entrenched as the main national threat to be confronted. Old counter-subversive wars justified as part of counter-insurgency operations against communists and their sympathisers were replaced by counter-narcotics, with little actual alteration in practice.¹²⁶ Since 2001, the War on Terror has assumed prominence. Both the War on

Terror and the War on Drugs have come under increasing scrutiny in recent years, largely as a result of their abject failures to achieve their stated aims. The latest tendency seems to be to try and combine the two justifications: The *New York Times* pointed out in 2011 that the creation and expansion of the FAST 'commando-style squads', signified one more step in 'blurring the line between law enforcement and military activities, fusing elements of the "war on drugs" with the "war on terrorism"'.¹²⁷ Back in the 1990s, the drug threat and the 'narco-guerrilla' allowed old policies to find new funding streams. The same process appears to be at work with the contemporary claims of confronting cartels and countering "narco-terrorism".

JUSTIFYING POLICY

In Afghanistan, officials speak of FAST as a counter narco-terrorism programme. In Central America however, FAST is justified in the same way as the funding: as counter-narcotics, as a means to confront 'cartels' and, to use the official phrase, 'transnational organised crime'. But there have been scattered efforts to transpose the 'narco-terrorism' justification to Central America, regardless of the facts. However, as with the War on Terror, attempts to garner support for policies, to make reality fit the rhetoric, are often crude and border on straight scaremongering. Here is Michael Braun, FAST founder, explaining to a congressional subcommittee why the DEA must conduct 'counter narco-terrorism' in 'ungoverned spaces':

'If you want to visualize ungoverned space or a permissive environment, I tell people to simply think of the bar scene in the first "Star Wars" movie. Operatives from FTOs [Foreign Terrorist Organisations] and DTOs [Drug Trafficking Organisations] are frequenting the same shady bars, the same seedy hotels and the same sweaty brothels in a growing number

of areas around the world. And what else are they doing? Based on over 37 years in the law enforcement and security sectors, you can mark my word that they are most assuredly talking business and sharing lessons learned.' As discussed earlier, the narco-guerrilla connection served the same purpose since the 1980s, although post 9/11 it is terrorism that has proven far more effective in rallying public opinion. Writing in the journal *Military Review* back in 1987, a US army colonel and counter-insurgency theorist argued for the linking of guerrillas with drug trafficking, and described the benefits of the approach:

'A melding in the American public's mind and in congress of this connection would lead to the necessary support to counter the guerilla/narcotics terrorists in this hemisphere. Generating this support would be relatively easy once the connection was proven and an all-out war was declared by the National Command Authority. Congress would find it difficult to stand in the way of supporting our allies with the training, advice and security assistance necessary to do the job.'¹²⁸

Braun's 'Star Wars' comments cited above were made at a meeting with the title, 'Iran, Hezbollah and the Threat to the Homeland', part of a sustained and futile effort by US officials to try and conjure a link between organisations designated as terrorist in the Middle East and insurgencies and drug 'cartels' in Latin America and to present this as the next great threat facing the American people. In a similar attempt to present a dehumanised, malevolent enemy, Dobrich's presentation mentioned earlier includes the following quote from Frankie Shroyer, Inter Agency Task Force Director at US Southern Command: 'When your job takes you into the swamp to hunt snakes, you'll have opportunities to kill or capture some crocs as well -cause they live and multiply in the same, nasty surroundings.' Another recent example comes from a House of Representatives Committee on Homeland

BOX 1 - Creating a Narco-Terror Connection

A recent US DEA investigation is illustrative of how the terror-drug nexus can be used and manipulated. Begun in 2012, the operation led to the arrest of five individuals from Guinea-Bissau, including the former head of the navy, and two Colombians.¹³⁰ One side of the undercover operation ended with FAST operatives arresting the Guinea-Bissau nationals off the coast of West Africa. The case against the men said they had ‘agreed to receive and store multi-ton shipments of FARC-owned cocaine in Guinea-Bissau ... pending its eventual shipment to the United States, where it would be sold for the financial benefit of the FARC’. Three of the men ‘agreed to arrange to purchase weapons for the FARC, including surface-to-air missiles, by importing them into Guinea-Bissau for the nominal use of the Guinea-Bissau military’. And the Colombian nationals had ‘agreed to facilitate the receipt of approximately 4,000 kilograms of cocaine from the FARC in Guinea Bissau, approximately 500 kilograms of which would later be sent to customers in the United States and Canada’. The comments of U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara in respect to the case are worth quoting in full:

‘The narco-terrorism conspiracy alleged in these indictments shows the danger that can grow unchecked in far away places where unfortunate circumstances can allow narcotics traffickers and terrorism supporters to transact unseen at great risk to the United States and its interests. The link between narcotics traffickers and terrorists, their financiers and supporters, needs to be broken wherever it is found. But thanks to the extraordinary efforts of our DEA partners, who have for years attacked the narco-terrorism threat, this conspiracy was thwarted and we can claim yet another victory in our unrelenting campaign against those who would harm Americans and American interests abroad.’

To these words were added the assessment of DEA Administrator Michele Leonhart: ‘These cases further illustrate frightening links between global drug trafficking and the financing of terror networks. These DEA arrests are significant victories against terrorism and international drug trafficking.’¹³¹ The remarkable thing about the case is that in this instance the ‘narco-terrorism conspiracy’ is entirely a concoction of the DEA. No members of the FARC were involved in the investigation. The DEA used ‘confidential sources ... who purported to be representatives and/or associates of South American-based narcotics traffickers’. Equally remarkable is that four of the defendants are being charged with ‘terrorism’ offences. The narco-terrorism conspiracy, then, is traffickers selling to customers put-up by the DEA. The ‘Drug/Terrorism Nexus’ list outlined by Dobrich provides an inclination of where more arrests for ‘narco-terrorism’ could occur in future.

Security, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, titled ‘Hezbollah in Latin America- Implications for US Homeland Security.’ The evidence presented of the Hezbollah presence in Latin America could generously be called ‘spurious’. According to US Representative Sue Myrick: ‘Across states in the Southwest, well trained officials are beginning to notice the tattoos of gang

members in prisons are being written in Farsi. We have typically seen tattoos in Arabic, but Farsi implies a Persian influence that can likely be traced back to Iran and its proxy army, Hezbollah. These tattoos in Farsi are almost always seen in combination with gang or drug cartel tattoos.’¹²⁹ Media reports have claimed Hezbollah is training and providing weapons to Mexican ‘cartels’, although the evidence never

goes beyond quotes from undisclosed US sources. Running alongside efforts to demonstrate a drugs-terror connection are attempts to link political opponents in Latin America and the Middle East. At the congressional hearing on Hezbollah in Latin America, demonstrations of insidious connections between Venezuela and Hezbollah include the fact that ‘the Venezuelan airline, Conviasa, conducts regular flights between Caracas and Damascus and Teheran’. All of the purported supporters of Hezbollah - ‘Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and others’ - happen to be both left-leaning and part of the trend towards independence in the region.

FAST itself is an unashamedly political programme with official US enemies as its targets. In his presentation, Dobrich lists the following groups considered to make up the ‘Drug/Terrorism Nexus’ with which FAST is concerned: ‘FARC, AUC, Hizballah, Hamas, al-Qa’ida, Al-Shabaab’. ‘FARC is *the* case study’ (emphasis in original) he adds. (It is worth noting that FAST’s commitment to counter ‘narco-terrorism’ operations in Afghanistan does not seem to be undermined by the fact that the Taliban are not designated as a terrorist organisation by the US government.) We can assume the strategy in future will be to try to find any link whatsoever, or even perhaps to invent one, in order to adopt policies justified as ‘counter narco-terrorism’ efforts against these groups. As noted in Box 1, this process is well underway.

The point here is not to argue that traffickers and insurgent groups are unconnected - they may well be linked, just as US allies are deeply involved in trafficking.¹³² The aim is to highlight the attempt by US officials to present this as an existential threat to the American people - a threat that requires a military presence overseas and continued military funding for strategic allies. It is obvious what ends such propaganda efforts serve. Officials want to militarise the drug war to fight insurgencies,

militarise allied governments and increase military cooperation, and they want to do this via policies that are entirely ineffective, if not outright counter-productive, in achieving their publicly stated goals. This has always presented a public relations problem. Hence the feverish attempts to find a new enemy and new justifications for extant policies.

If successful, and there is substantial evidence it will be successful, the blending of the Wars on Drugs and Terror will essentially allow for the transfer of methods across theatres. To mention a few concrete examples, in 2004 then head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, referring to the US-led operations in Afghanistan, stated that ‘fighting drug trafficking equals fighting terrorism’.¹³³ This ideological framework has provided the cover for the extra-judicial assassination of suspected drug traffickers who under international law are considered civilians. In 2009, an act in the US Congress on the use of aerial spraying in Afghanistan noted that it could only be undertaken if the president of Afghanistan requested such measures ‘for counternarcotics *or counterterrorism* purposes’. (Italics added)¹³⁴ In Latin America, the US House Committee on Homeland Security has proposed the classification of drug trafficking organisations as terrorist groups, with the hope being this will lead to an ‘increased ability to counter their threat to national security’, presumably through the usual methods.¹³⁵ The picture is of a government committed to certain policies and searching for ways to justify them, and it so happens that the ‘emerging threats’, arising just as the previous mechanisms for garnering public support are coming under increasing scrutiny, need to be confronted with the same policies as the old ones.

There are two further implications of the ‘narco-terrorism’ rhetoric that are important to draw out. The first is that, as it has in the past, such a designation, even where true,

serves to dismiss any discussion of context or the political claims of the groups designated terrorist; in this case the FARC actually is *the* case study. Second, while counter-narcotics operations have some obvious metrics of success, the same cannot be said for 'counter narco-terrorism', or even for confronting 'cartels' - a far cruder formulation than counter-narcotics. Efforts against 'narco-terrorism' have no need to show progress against drug use at home. Interdiction operations and arrests can be presented as victories in themselves - as is repeatedly done - but there is no indication they will have any significant impact on trafficking; the impact may in fact be to splinter the groups, drive them further underground and so on. Such captures, however, provide a valuable PR opportunity, a chance to try and convince the public that something is being done; a shamefaced captive flanked by masked and heavily armed members of the security forces is now a common image in Latin America, symbolic of official claims to be combating traffickers, claims which are often impossible to sustain as soon as context is introduced.¹³⁶

Counter narco-terrorism, like confronting 'cartels', presents the problem as an organisation, as a target that needs to be attacked. The *New York Times* has highlighted this element in an article entitled, 'Lessons of Iraq Help U.S. fight a Drug War in Honduras.' The *Times* reports that the new offensive in Central America, and particularly in Honduras, 'emerging just as the United States military winds down its conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and is moving to confront emerging threats, also showcases the nation's new way of war: small-footprint missions with limited numbers of troops, partnerships with foreign military and police forces that take the lead in security operations, and narrowly defined goals, whether aimed at insurgents, terrorists or criminal groups that threaten American interests'. Echoing these comments in the profile of FAST mentioned earlier, *New*

Yorker journalist Mattathias Schwartz writes how US operations in Honduras combine 'the legal framework of a police action with the hardware and the rhetoric of war'.¹³⁷

The *Times* article quotes a US Colonel based in Honduras, who outlines US aims in the region: 'By countering transnational organized crime' - which is to say, by funding the armed forces and police and running interdiction operations - 'we promote stability, which is necessary for external investment, economic growth and minimizing violence. We also are disrupting and deterring the potential nexus between transnational organized criminals and terrorists who would do harm to our country'. The terrorist-criminal connection is made entirely unchallenged and apropos of nothing - there is no mention in the article of terrorist or insurgent groups in Honduras (incidentally, local forces are also being inculcated with the notion they are fighting terrorists. At the closing ceremony of a US Special Forces training course for the Tigers unit, the US commander told the Honduran soldiers: "I promise you at some point in time, together, we'll be on target killing terrorists and drug traffickers together."). Later in the article, Vice Admiral Joseph D. Kernan, the second highest officer in US Southern Command, raises an 'insidious' parallel between 'criminal organizations and terror networks': 'They operate without regard to borders.' The one hint of criticism in the article is the following line: 'Some skeptics still worry that the American military might accidentally empower thuggish elements of local security forces.' US policy, which, the article points out, is a modified version of methods used in Iraq, is nevertheless easily justified: 'Narcotics cartels, transnational organized crime and gang violence are designated as threats by the United States and Central American governments.'

From the perspective of policy makers, countering 'narco-terrorism', like confronting 'cartels', is almost flawless: it can be used

to justify a military presence; has no real metrics; narrows the public focus, diverting attention from important context; it removes any political element behind the existence of insurgencies; and the US role is conveniently sidelined in the face of a malignant national security threat. Needless to say, there is a reason it has been used before, albeit in the slightly altered form ‘narco-guerilla’, then more appropriate to circumstances. The lack of context in recent reports is worrying, as is the ease with which the media have accepted the official line regarding the new threat and the means to confront it. The subtitle of an Associated Press report is a typical example: ‘As the drug war in Latin America continues to gain momentum, the United States continues to do everything possible to try and combat it.’ A US congressman is quoted as saying that US-backed operations against Mexican ‘cartels’ had made them ‘stronger and more violent’, and that ‘billions upon billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars have been spent over the years to combat the drug trade in Latin America and the Caribbean’, but, ‘in spite of our efforts, the positive results are few and far between’. This fact is not taken to undermine the claims that Washington is ‘doing everything possible’, only that counter-narcotics is difficult business. The article presents a now familiar paradox: officials, the military and the DEA, ‘applaud the U.S. strategy’, but ‘critics say militarizing the drug war in a region fraught with tender democracies and long-corrupt institutions can stir political instability while barely touching what the U.N. estimates is a \$320 billion global illicit drug market’.¹³⁸ None of this is new. If strategic goals are being met, officials will find some angle from which policies can be praised. Hence, when Mexico was experiencing horrendous levels of ‘cartel’ related violence following a crackdown in 2006, violence that may have killed as many as 100,000 people in the past 8 years, US officials were quoted in the press defending the policies on the grounds that

violence apparently meant they were working ‘because these guys are flailing. We’re taking these guys out. The worst thing you could do is stop now.’¹³⁹ It was clear at the time, and it is even clearer now, that this was not the case. As noted, it is well established that US policy led to a vast increase in violence and human rights abuses, with minimal impact on the drugs trade or use rates at home.

Returning to Central America, Hillary Clinton has described the funding sent to the region as ‘money well spent’. Luis Arreaga, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs has called the CARSI programme ‘a comprehensive and integrated approach to stem illegal trafficking’. Quoting these words, an analyst writing in the *Washington Post* comments: ‘One wonders how Clinton and Arreaga define success—and at what cost. For the populations of Mexico and Central America, the toll in treasure and blood has been enormous.’¹⁴⁰ This report has attempted to demonstrate on what grounds officials may define success, and to highlight how they may continue to justify them in the face of increasing scrutiny and criticism. Regardless of the terrible impact in Honduras and Central America, and the history and the context that have been discussed here, if the issue continues to be framed in the manner just outlined, if the public are bombarded with this picture by the government and the media, then the narco-terror threat will seamlessly fit in alongside the wars on drugs and terror as ways to justify policies that achieve long-held strategic goals. For all the criticism, officials have made it clear that the policies as they have been framed over the past decade in Central America are set to continue, perhaps to be expanded. ‘It’s not for me to say if it’s the correct strategy’, Brick Scoggins, head of counter-narcotics at the US Department of Defense, has been quoted as saying. ‘It’s the strategy we are using. I don’t know what the alternative is.’¹⁴¹

CONCLUSIONS

Washington's strategic objectives have developed an effective conduit in the form of 'counter-narcotics' operations. Central America is only the most recent example of a now familiar pattern: 'counter-narcotics' means the expansion and modernisation of a recipient country's security forces, with dire consequences for those working towards progressive social change.¹⁴² We can also observe the usual trends among commentators: official praise for chosen policies, and a diametrically opposed assessment from human rights groups, progressive drug policy analysts, and civil society. In Honduras, the case discussed in this report, the inclusion of even the most minimal context is enough to conclude that talk of concern for drug trafficking and the human security of the population of the region is difficult to take seriously. Instead, a US-friendly regime, committed to an economic model that benefits foreign investors and local elites at the expense of the poorest, has been bolstered and protected against people fighting for changes to the post-coup political arrangement.

Amid the talk of failure and even counter-productivity in terms of drug production and drug trafficking, there is substantial evidence that helps to explain why it is that certain policies can be considered successful; why it is that interdiction and eradication, as oppose to more effective options, continue to 'flourish budgetarily'. Within the framework of Washington's strategic objectives a military approach makes sense. Such an approach can be used to justify a steady stream of funding to allied armed forces; presents the impression something is being done about drugs while not impinging on strategic goals; expands the role and influence of the US military around the globe; and enhances levels of collaboration, and hence influence, with local armed forces. Moreover, it prevents a focus on the role of demand for illicit drugs at home, and, within producer countries, on the fundamental socio-economic conditions that are hospitable

to illicit drug production, namely poverty and marginalisation - both of which are exacerbated by the economic policies US military assistance serves to defend.

US funding and diplomatic support allow a free hand to crush political opposition, and the repression has defended a political order and an economic model that Washington has supported across Latin America with consistent effects: an improved climate for foreign investment and the concentration of wealth among a local elite friendly to foreign capital. The high price paid by the populations throughout Latin America has been necessary to enforce this model. There are alternatives. Washington could stop fuelling abuses by the security forces. It could reverse its policy of supporting what has been termed a 'pro-rich development model' in the region. It could, as the World Bank recommends, support genuine development along with evidence-based and human rights-sensitive approaches to drug use and production. It could invest heavily in reducing demand for illicit drugs in the United States. But these policies lie outside of its strategic goals, and would most likely undermine them. It is not recognised often enough that the struggle to create a genuine 'counter-narcotics' policy is intimately linked with limiting Washington's ability to carry out its strategic objectives as they are understood by policy makers. Recent rhetoric regarding a focus on treatment and prevention, which has increased under the Obama Administration, has not translated to a change in policy overseas.¹⁴³

In discussing Central America, US officials present violence and drug trafficking as both the consequence and the source of the region's problems. But this is not just a misinformed, facile understanding of a complex situation: it is an ideologically useful interpretation that permits the attainment of long-held goals. The deliberate conflation of the War on Drugs and the War on Terror into 'counter-narco-terrorism' takes place in the same vein. As discussed, 'counter-narco-terrorism', which

is unhindered by problematic metrics of success, looks set to emerge as a serviceable justification for preferred policies. The likelihood hinges on Washington's successful 'melding in the American public's mind' of drug trafficking organisations and designated terrorist groups. The process is well underway, and expanding.

With all of this in mind, it is perhaps understandable that Washington would once again choose to send heavily armed, military-style DEA agents into foreign countries, presenting the impression that this is what confronting drug production and/or narco-terrorism entails. FAST is the latest step in the narrative that tries to present any issue first as a serious threat and second as an organisation, one that must be confronted militarily. This spearhead of the 'counter-narco-terrorism' effort is also unashamedly political, targeted at official enemies regardless of their role in the drug trade. Meanwhile, militarised interdiction will continue to have minimal impact on the drug trade, except perhaps to

shift routes around the region and increase violence as the traffickers come under attack.

The expansion of conventional 'counter-narcotics' funding and policies, the deployment of FAST, and the emerging 'narco-terrorism' narrative are related developments. And they should not be separated from the whole range of policies - particularly economic policies - adopted towards a certain country or region. If history is a guide, the expansion of these trends will coincide with the media and analysts condemning misguided, even counter-productive policies. But, while they are undoubtedly abject failures according to one set of metrics, they are outright successes according to another.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Any errors of fact or interpretation remain with the author.

ENDNOTES

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- 40 The government's historic management by elite sectors means their interests are paramount. Neo-liberal reforms are one manifestation. Another is the process of state-sanctioned land concentration, imposed violently or otherwise, that has outstripped any mild reforms. A non-violent example is the Law of Agricultural Modernization passed in 1994, "allowing large producers to extend their territories beyond the maximum legal property limits. As a result, large landowners began to buy up the land of small farmers, effectively reversing whatever limited land reform had been achieved. The human costs were immense. According to Juan Chinchilla of the Unified Campesino Movement of Aguan (MUCA), "it forced masses of farmers to migrate to the cities and to the U.S. under terrible conditions."³⁷ At the time it was estimated that more than 40% of the rural population either did not own land or owned less than a hectare. T.M. Kerssen (2013). *Grabbing Power: The New Struggles for Land, Food and Democracy in Northern Honduras*, Food First Books, 2013.
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- security funding from the requirement. Congress has also cut off State Department-managed aid following the military coup in 2009 and in 2012, after U.S.-backed counternarcotics operations resulted in the deaths of several civilians. In 2013, funding for a failing police reform was cut while aid was greatly reduced for much of that year after reports linked the country's police chief to death squads. In March 2014, Congress suspended cooperation on aerial radar assistance after the passage of a law permitting the Honduran air force to shoot down suspected drug-trafficking aircraft. Between May and July of 2012, three out of five such joint interdiction operations carried out by DEA agents or Honduran officers trained, equipped and vetted by the United States resulted in the deaths of trafficking suspects and innocent civilians. As of November 2014, there had still been no justice for the families of victims in these cases. Security Assistance Monitor, *Country Profile: Honduras*. <http://securityassistance.org/publication/country-profile-us-security-assistance-honduras>
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- 48 A slight dip in military aid and arms sales after 2009 was accompanied by a corresponding rise in Pentagon contracts, meaning money for US military operations, which served to almost cancel-out the decrease. J.Lindsay-Poland (2012), *Metrics of U.S. Militarization in Latin America*, Fellowship of Reconciliation, 29 March. <http://forusa.org/blogs/john-lindsay-poland/metrics-us-militarization-latin-america/10416>.
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- 55 In reviving this role for the country, the US has reactivated a number of old military bases, including the installation Oliver North was using

- when he orchestrated the movement of money from weapons sales to Iran to the brutal contra forces in Nicaragua; the so-called Iran-Contra affair.
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- 57 J. Johnson, S. Lefebvre (2013), *Honduras Since the Coup: Economic and Social Outcomes*, Center for Economic and Policy Research. <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/Honduras-2013-11.pdf>; Presidential elections took place again in 2013. Given the persistence of repression of political opponents, it was unlikely that the elections would be fair. Fraud, violence and intimidation were reported. "If the election were totally free and fair," wrote Dana Frank, Zelaya's party, LIBRE, "might have a chance. But, in a spectacular run of pre-election violence, at least 16 of its candidates and activists have already been assassinated, more from all the other parties combined, including the traditional parties."
- D. Frank (2013), *Hopeless in Honduras? The Election and the Future of Tegucigalpa*, Foreign Affairs, 22 November. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/140283/dana-frank/hopeless-in-honduras>. Once the elections led to the victory of a pro-US candidate they were, predictably, praised by officials in Washington. Aside from the violence and intimidation, analysts have also noted the myriad problems with the voting process itself: "Leo Gabriel, an Austrian delegate from the EU's observer mission, told Brazilian media that he witnessed considerable irregularities in the election, noting that living voters showed up as deceased and dead people's votes were counted. Gabriel also asserted that votes were bought and sold and that one-fifth of the original tally sheets were sent to an illegal server. Moreover, the murder of three Libre Party activists during the weekend of the election underscored the environment of fear and intimidation in which the election was held." D. Frank (2013,) *A High-Stakes Election in Honduras*, The Nation, 6 November. <http://www.thenation.com/article/177028/high-stakes-election-honduras>
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- 63 US Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs (2013), *2013 Investment Climate Statement - Honduras*, February. <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2013/204655.htm>; It is worth noting that the World Bank has invested in companies suspected of links to drug trafficking - something entirely ignored in US 'counter-narcotics' operations. Reuters (2014), *World Bank again criticised for investments in Honduras*, 12 August. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/12/us-worldbank-honduras-ficohsa-idUSKBN0GC04D20140812>
- 64 Oxfam (2005), *Backroom Deals Enable DR-CAFTA to Pass*, 28 July. <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/press/backroom-deals-enable-dr-cafta-to-pass/>
- 65 Citizens Trade Campaign (2011), *Key Reasons to Oppose CAFTA*. http://www.citizenstrade.org/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/CAFTA_Talking_Points.pdf
- 66 Oxfam (2005), *DR-CAFTA: A Bad Deal for Poor Countries*, 20 April. <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/press/dr-cafta-a-bad-deal-for-poor-countries/>
- 67 US Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs (2013), *2013 Investment Climate Statement - Honduras*. <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2013/204655.htm>
- 68 A 'War on Terror' was first declared by President Reagan in 1981. The focus was on the Middle East and Central America, where the 'terror' was intended to refer to the Sandinista movement in Nicaragua. The War on Terror declared in 2001 was run by many of the same individuals; John Negroponte, for example, was ambassador to Honduras in the early 1980s, and to Iraq 2004-2005. Perhaps unsurprisingly, high-level analyses have looked back to the wars in Central America as a guideline for counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- 69 for extensive discussion of this period see: N. Chomsky (1985), *Turning the Tide*, South End Press; W. Blum (2003), *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, Zed Books, London.; M. McClintock (1985), *The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in Guatemala*, Zed Books; and, M. McClintock (1986), *The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador*, Zed Books.
- 70 For a study on the agricultural legacy see: P. Howard-Borjas (1995), *Cattle and crisis: The genesis of unsustainable development in Central America*, UN Food and Agriculture Organization. http://www.fao.org/docrep/v9828t/v9828t10.htm#P2250_308434
- 71 B. R. DeWalt, (1983), *The Cattle are Eating the Forests*, Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, January, Volume 39, No.1
- 72 Telesur (2014), *Honduran Law Enforcement Spending Rises by 357%*, 20 September. <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Honduran-Law-Enforcement-Spending-Rises-by-357-20140920-0023.html>

- 73 M.C. Brun (2011), *Documento del Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo*, <http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=38904070>
- 74 C. Ribando Seelke (2014), *Gangs in Central America*, Congressional Research Service, 20 February. <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34112.pdf>
- 75 *ibid.*
- 76 See for example, Organization of American States (2013), *The Drug Problem in the Americas*. http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Introduction_and_Analytical_Report.pdf
- 77 Dana Frank writes:
 “Cofadeh and the Center for Justice and International Law have raised alarms over recent measures “that presumably are trying to combat criminality but that are restrictive of the human rights of the population,” including a law allowing wiretapping with few restrictions and another permitting inspection of the bank records of nonprofits.” D. Frank (2012), *The Nation*. <http://www.thenation.com/article/167994/honduras-which-side-us>
- 78 An example of the behaviour of these forces: In May 2012, soldiers on police duty at a checkpoint caught a 15 year old boy who had gone through the checkpoint on his bike without stopping, and shot him to death. It was later discovered that the soldiers “turned out to be U.S.-trained and vetted, their equipment was U.S.-donated and the commanding officer who subsequently ordered a coverup had been trained in the United States.” See D. Frank (2014), *The Thugocracy Next Door*, *Politico Magazine*, 27 February. <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/02/honduras-the-thugocracy-ext-door-103883.html#ixzz3IISB3vBcA> Washington Office on Latin America report has outlined the general implications of including the military in police work: “Using the military for internal matters like crimefighting carries four main risks. First, it generates a potentially tense overlap between military and police institutional missions and responsibilities, especially for crime prevention and control. Second, it politicizes the military; as Hunter (1994) warns, it ‘invites the armed forces to remain an important political actor.... The symbolic significance of military involvement in domestic affairs should also not be underestimated, especially where a tradition of interventionism exists.’⁸⁹ Third, it places military personnel in a situation for which they are not properly trained or equipped: constant contact with the population. This entails risks of authoritarian behavior and human rights abuse. Fourth, it carries a high institutional opportunity cost. Recurring constantly to the military to solve internal security problems reduces political will to make the investments necessary to build a functioning civilian security and justice sector. This sector’s continued weakness, in turn, guarantees that the armed forces will be called on again in the future.”
- G. Withers, L. Santos, A. Isacson (2010), *Preach What You Practice: The Separation of Military and Police Roles in the Americas*, Washington Office on Latin America. <http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/downloadable/Regional%20Security/2010/preachwhatyoudo.pdf>. It was recently reported that a police chief opposed to the militarised approach was removed from his position. Telesur (2014), *Dismissed Police Chief in Honduras Refuses to Leave Office*. <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Dismissed-Police-Chief-in-Honduras-Refuses-to-Leave-Office-20141121-0053.html>
- 79 Security Assistance Monitor (2014), *Country Profile: U.S. Security Assistance to Honduras*, 1 December. <http://securityassistance.org/publication/country-profile-us-security-assistance-honduras>
- 80 For evidence of corruption inside the Tigers unit see El Heraldo (2014), *Honduras: 22 policías hurtaron \$1.3 millones del botín de los Valle Valle*. <http://www.elheraldo.hn/alfrente/774706-331/honduras-22-polic%C3%ADas-hurtaron-13-millones-del-bot%C3%ADn-de-los-valle-valle>. It is worth recalling that it was the US that founded the most notorious military battalion in Honduras, battalion 3-16. Stephen Kinzer writes:
 “American documents show that General Álvarez, who was chief of the Honduran security police and then the country’s top military commander, favored the simple expedient of murder. Among the special units he created to carry out this policy was Battalion 3-16 (or 316), which has become the most infamous military unit in Honduran history. According to a heavily edited version of a CIA report that was released in 1998, Brigade 3-16 emerged as an independent entity ‘based on recommendations from the “Strategic Military Seminar” between the Honduran and the US military.’ Some of its members were flown to the United States for training by CIA specialists.” S. Kinzer (2001), *Our Man in Honduras*, *The New York Review of Books*, 20 September. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2001/sep/20/our-man-in-honduras/?page=2>
- 81 K. McSweeney, E. Nielsen, M. Taylor, D. Wrathall, Z. Pearson, O. Wang, S. Plumb (2014), *Drug Policy as Conservation Policy: Narco-Deforestation*, *Science*, Vol. 343 no. 6170 pp. 489-490. <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/343/6170/489>
- 82 M. McGrath (2014), *Drug trafficking is speeding deforestation in Central America*, 30 January., BBC News, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-25960481>
- 83 US Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (2014), *U.S. Relations with Honduras*. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1922.htm>
- 84 H. Park (2014), *Children at the Border*, *New York Times*, 21 October. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/15/us/questions-about-the-border-kids.html>
- 85 M. Paarlberg (2014), *Gangs, guns and Judas Priest: the secret history of a US-inflicted border crisis*,

Guardian, 23 July. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jul/23/history-border-crisis-central-america-gangs>

- 86 J.Repogle, *Why Nicaraguan Kids Aren't Fleeing to U.S.*, KPBS, 29 July. <http://www.kpbs.org/news/2014/jul/29/why-nicaraguan-kids-arent-fleeing-to-the-us/>
- 87 Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence (2010), *More Violence, Less Development; Examining the relationship between armed violence and MDG achievement*, September. http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/MDG_Process/MoreViolenceLessDevelopment.pdf
- 88 R. Serrano-Berthet, H.Lopez (2011), *Crime and Violence in Central America: A Development Challenge*, World Bank. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLAC/Resources/FINAL_VOLUME_I_ENGLISH_CrimeAndViolence.pdf
- 89 The US Vice President Joe Biden recently announced a \$1 billion dollar funding plan for Central America that will aim to curb emigration from the region to the north. Information is vague at this point, but in Biden's formulation it seems the emphasis in the economic realm will be placed on the usual areas. "Central American economies," he wrote in a New York Times op-ed, "can grow only by attracting international investment." He praises the example of Colombia, which "reformed its rules of commerce to open up its economy." The plan essentially seems to be a modified version of a proposal. J.Biden (2015), *A Plan for Central America*, New York Times, 30 January. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/30/opinion/joe-biden-a-plan-for-central-america.html?_r=1; The White House (2015), *Fact Sheet: Promoting Prosperity, Security and Good Governance in Central America*, 29 January. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/29/fact-sheet-promoting-prosperity-security-and-good-governance-central-ame>
- For discussion of the proposal that seems to have formed the basis of the new plan, see D.Beeton (2014), *Central America's "Alliance for Prosperity" Plan: Shock Doctrine for the Child Refugee Crisis?*, Center for Economic and Policy Research, 26 November. <http://www.cepr.net/index.php/blogs/the-americas-blog/central-americas-alliance-for-prosperity-plan-shock-doctrine-for-the-child-refugee-crisis>; The reaction from 'critics' is the familiar one: the funding is well-intentioned but poorly conceived. "Giving \$1 billion in aid to governments with serious corruption issues just because they are pledging to clean up their act is a triumph of hope over experience", writes one commentator in the journal National Interest. "In the worst case, giving \$1 billion to governments with dubious records on transparency and human rights will empower corrupt officials to the detriment of ordinary Central Americans." J. Hidalgo (2015), *Drug Money: Obama's Reckless \$1 Billion Payout to Central America*, The National Interest, 8 February. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/drug-money-obamas-reckless-1-billion-payout-central-america-12272>
- 90 J.R. Hernandez Alcerro (2012), *U.S. Policy on Honduras: Views of Two Diplomats*, New York Times Letters Section, 5 February. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/06/opinion/us-policy-on-honduras-views-of-two-diplomats.html>
- 91 D.Frank (2012), *Op-ed: In Honduras, a Mess Made in the U.S.*, New York Times, 27 January. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/27/opinion/in-honduras-a-mess-helped-by-the-us.html?_r=2&
- 92 UNDP (2013), *Human Development Report 2013*. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013_en_complete.pdf
- 93 In 2011 the UNODC estimated over 25 percent of intentional homicides were related to organised crime and criminal gangs. In Guatemala, according to local sources, an estimated that 45% of homicides are drug-related. See Organization of American States (2013), *The Drug Problem in the Americas*, p.76. http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Introduction_and_Analytical_Report.pdf
- 94 J.F.Kelly (2014), *SOUTHCOM chief: Central America drug war a dire threat to U.S. national security*, Air Force Times, 8 July. <http://www.airforcetimes.com/article/20140708/NEWS01/307080064/SOUTHCOM-chief-Central-America-drug-war-dire-threat-U-S-national-security>
- 95 D. Frank (2012), *Honduras: Which Side Is the US On?* <http://www.thenation.com/article/167994/honduras-which-side-us>
- 96 Kelly recently presented the annual posture statement of the US Southern Command before congress. The presentation is largely a demonstration in historical revisionism and scare mongering. The threat of Lebanese and Iranian influence in Latin America is highlighted, with little substantiating evidence. Honduras is widely praised for investigations against "high-level officials involved in corruption" and for "making efforts to swiftly arrest those security forces implicated in human rights abuse." "Of note," he says, "human rights groups have acknowledged to me that Honduras is making real progress in this area." It is not clear which human rights groups are being referred to. Kelly shares "a few examples of how our counterdrug efforts, conducted in coordination with DEA, are contributing to the region's overall security." Every example is related to improving the training and interdiction capabilities of foreign militaries. Colombia, he argues, is the model, and US strategy there should be applied "to the region as a whole". One beneficial outcome he alludes to is Colombia's role as a "regional stabilizer": "Colombia is a terrific example of how sustained U.S. support can help a partner nation gain control of their security situation, strengthen government institutions, eradicate corruption, and bolster their economy. Colombia's turnaround is nothing short of

phenomenal, and it stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the United States as together we work to improve regional stability. Mr. Chairman, Members, as you know, the United States has a special relationship with only a handful of countries throughout the world. These relationships are with countries that we rely on to act as regional stabilizers, countries that we look to for international leadership, countries that we consider our strongest friends and most steadfast allies. Colombia unquestionably plays that role in Latin America.” Kelly is also clear in elucidating a prime objective in Southern Command’s activities:

“Early this year we held a forum that brought together U.S. and partner nation government officials and private sector leaders to brainstorm ways to improve security and economic investment in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The forum featured lessons learned from Colombia and Mexico on the importance of security to economic development and identifying near-term activities to improve the security situation and, by extension, the investment climate in these three countries. To quote Paul Brinkley, who wrote one of the most impressive books I have read on the subject, the greatest element of our national power is our “private-sector economic dynamism.” I am hopeful American businesses will help advance our President’s goal of a stable, prosperous, and secure Central America.”

The comments pertaining to Southern Command’s approach to human rights are worth quoting: “As I have said before, the U.S. military doesn’t just talk about human rights, we do human rights. We teach it. We enforce it. We live it. The protection of human rights is embedded in our doctrine, our training, and our education, and above all, in our moral code. It is the source of our great strength as a military power, and it is also our best defense against losing legitimacy in the hearts and minds of the people we have taken an oath to protect.” “Human rights improvements in this region,” he adds, “have largely come as a direct result of close and continuous dialogue and engagement by the United States government.” (See main report for discussion, and footnote 97 for sources). The presentation ends with a warning:

“Two decades ago, U.S. policy makers and the defense and intelligence communities failed to anticipate the collapse of the Soviet Union or the rise of international terrorism. Today, another challenge is in plain sight: transnational organized crime threatens not only our own security, but the stability and prosperity of our Latin American neighbors. As the Congress knows, the United States and our partners worked hard to ensure the Western Hemisphere is a beacon of freedom, democracy, and peace. In the face of the corrosive spread of criminal networks and other threats, we must work even harder to ensure it remains that way.”

As an interpretation of contemporary history, the testimony is clearly not to be taken seriously. But Kelly’s presentation, and his interpretation of events, is revealing in demonstrating how, after the cold war, the threat of “the technological sophistication of third world powers” - quoting George Bush Snr’s national security strategy - the drug threat, and the terrorist threat, organised criminal groups are being seamlessly adopted as the latest development that warrant the pursuit of core foreign policy objectives. J.F Kelly (2015), *Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, United States Marine Corps Commander, United States Southern Command*, Senate Armed Services Committee, March 12. http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Kelly_03-12-15.pdf

- 97 For discussion of this historic correlation see E.Herman (1982), *The Real Terror Network*, South End Press; T.Carruthers (1993), *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years*, University of California Press; and L.Schoultz (1992), *Human Rights and United States Policy Toward Latin America*, Princeton University Press.
- 98 O.Dube, S.Naidu (2010). *Bases, Bullets, and Ballots: The Effect of U.S. Military Aid on Political Conflict in Colombia*, Center for Global Development. http://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/1423498_file_Dube_Naidu_Military_Aid_FINAL.pdf ; hylton; stokes
- 99 Fellowship of Reconciliation and Colombia-Europe-U.S. Human Rights Observatory (2014), *Report: The Rise and Fall of ‘False Positive’ Killings in Colombia: The Role of U.S. Military Assistance, 2000-2010*. <http://forusa.org/content/report-rise-fall-false-positive-killings-colombia-role-us-military-assistance-2000-2010> ; K.Begg (2010), *NGO: ‘Alarming’ link between US aid and ‘false positives’*, International Peace Observatory. <http://www.peaceobservatory.org/en/1056320102/ngo-alarming-link-between-us-aid-and-false-positives>
- 100 A.Isaacson (2014), *Human rights laws in the way? Use Colombian trainers*, Security Assistance Monitor, 5 May. <http://www.securityassistance.org/latin-america-and-caribbean/blog/human-rights-laws-way-use-colombian-trainers>
- 101 SICA (2011), *Letter to Heads of States*. Available online here: <http://www.ghrc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/ENG-Letter-to-Heads-of-States-SICA-April-30-2013.pdf>
- 102 The focus here has been Honduras, but the situation is not unique. In Guatemala there is considerable evidence that the local military and the police involved in trafficking, and narco money is considered to have infiltrated the judicial system, congress, and the executive branch. Even the US State Department, in its latest summary of the situation in the country, notes that the principal human rights abuses “included widespread institutional corruption, particularly in the police and judicial sectors” and “police and military involvement in serious crimes such

as kidnapping, drug trafficking, and extortion". Poor campesinos defending their land rights are targets of government harassment and attack. Those struggling for better conditions for the poor and marginalised have been publicly accused by officials of being terrorists, drug traffickers, even communists. Guatemala is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists, and even international solidarity volunteers who accompany local human rights defenders have themselves come under attack. Last year the country experienced the largest rise in attacks on human rights defenders since the official end of the civil war in 1996. This year, Washington ended a 24-year embargo on direct military aid, opting instead for 'conditions' to be placed on the money. In a recent move, the government designated those who oppose resource extraction operations as a threat to national security. A local digital investigative journalism project, based at a university, made the following comments: "A democratic government or one that respects the rule of law would never consider a social protest to be a threat against the State; it would never classify it as destabilizing and dangerous to the security of the nation. On the contrary, an authoritarian government with a military court and a profound history, placing it at the genesis of the counter-insurgency policy applied during the civil war, will react and prioritize the same way it did before." The country also has the familiar socio-economic indicators: poverty is severe, with half of children under five suffering from chronic malnutrition, and levels of wealth inequality are among the highest in the world. (When a rise was recorded recently in the number of children crossing the border, in the case of Guatemala they were found not to come from the most violent regions, but the poorest.) As noted in the report, the US is pushing the same militarisation of the society. The New York Times reports: "The Guatemala military, once one of the most brutal and feared in Central America, is resurging to take on violent crime, forging closer ties with American troops and law enforcement even as worry over human rights abuses and corruption intensifies ... [The] government is training and deploying more of its famed and feared special forces unit, known as the Kaibiles and for carrying out some of the worst abuses in this country's civil war and ex-members' ties to brutal criminal gangs." The situation in El Salvador is also grave, although it has a less corrupt judicial system than Honduras and Guatemala, and its police and security forces have not been involved in repression on the same level. Again, the correlation holds between greater US involvement and greater repression and human rights abuses (see footnote 82). For references and more information see: UNICEF (2011), *Humanitarian Action for Children: Guatemala*. http://www.unicef.org/arabic/hac2011/files/HAC2011_4pager_Guatemala_rev1.pdf;

- M.Flash (2013), *Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala*, Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, 1 November. <http://hrbrief.org/2013/11/situation-of-human-rights-defenders-in-guatemala-2/>; Peace Brigades International (2013), *ALERT: Attacks increased against human rights defenders in Guatemala*, 27 May. http://www.peacebrigades.org/newsroom/news-item/?no_cache=1&L=0&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=3844&cHash=6f9e1905fe6502238f99c38461116ebf; O.J. Hernández (2014), *Guatemala: Opposition to Mining, the New Threat to National Security*, Upside Down World, 21 July. <http://upside-downworld.org/main/guatemala-archives-33/4952-guatemala-opposition-to-mining-the-new-threat-to-national-security>; U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2013), *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>; Author's translation from O.J.Hernandez (2014), *La oposición a la minería, la nueva amenaza a la seguridad nacional*, Plaza Public, 16 July. <http://www.plazapublica.com.gt/La%20oposici%C3%B3n%20a%20la%20miner%C3%ADa%2C%20la%20nueva%20amenaza%20a%20la%20seguridad%20nacional>;
- R.C. Archibold (2012), *Guatemala Shooting Raises Concerns About Military's Expanded Role*, New York Times, 20 October. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/21/world/americas/guatemala-shooting-raises-concerns-about-militarys-expanded-role.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all& ; And for more on Guatemala, and the kinds of security forces receiving US money, see: A.Isacson, L.Haugaard, A.Poe, S.Kinosian, and G.Withers (2013), *Time to listen*, Center for International policy, http://www.ciponline.org/images/uploads/Time_to_Listen.pdf
- 103 A former trainer on Operation Snowcap, writing in 2011 of his experiences, noted the continuity: "As I write this, the current administration is moving forward with a similar counter-narcotics surge effort in Afghanistan. The principle remains the same, only the location and the flavor of the drugs has changed." B.Hartman (2011), *Inside DEA: Operation Snowcap*, Trafford Publishing.
- 104 State Department draft report (1989), *Cocaine: A Supply Side Problem*, 25 April. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB69/col06.pdf>
- 105 United States Government Accountability Office (2008), *Cooperation with Many Major Drug Transit Countries Has Improved, but Better Performance Reporting and Sustainability Plans Are Needed*, Report to Congressional Requesters, July. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/280/278210.pdf>
- 106 For some discussion of the impact of the War on Drugs in Mexico since 2006, see N.Steinberg (2013), *End Mexico's Disastrous "War on Drugs" Once and For All*, The Financial Times, 2 December. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/02/end-mexicos-disastrous-war-drugs-once-and-all>; and Human

- Rights Watch (2011), *Neither Rights Nor Security; Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico's "War on Drugs"*. http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/mexico1111webwcover_0.pdf
- 107 P.Reuter, G.Crawford, J.Cave (1988), *Sealing the Borders; The Effects of Increased Military Participation in Drug Interdiction*, RAND Corporation. <http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2007/R3594.pdf>
- 108 C.P.Rydell, S.S.Everingham (1994), *Controlling Cocaine; Supply Versus Demand Programs*, RAND Corporation. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2006/RAND_MR331.pdf
- 109 F.E. White (1988), "Operation Snowcap," 8 March, Internal Memorandum. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB69/col02.pdf>
- 110 National Security Council (1989), Interagency Working Group Draft: "Strategy for Narcotics Control in the Andean Region," 30 June. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB69/col11.pdf>
- 111 State Department Briefing Memorandum (1989), M.Levitsky, Bureau of International Narcotics Matters (INM) to R.Kimmitt, Under Secretary for Political Affairs (P): "NSC Deputies Committee Meeting on Enhancing Anti-Narcotics Efforts in the Andean Region," 7 July. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB69/col12.pdf>
- 112 State Department cable (1989), Discussion with President Garcia on the Andean Summit, 8 December. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB69/col16.pdf>
- 113 U.S. Embassy Peru cable (1989), Washington Interagency Comments on Narcotics Implementation Plan for Peru, 21 October, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB69/col14.pdf>
- 114 Human Rights Watch (1995), *Human Rights Violations and the War on Drugs*. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/b/bolivia/bolivia957.pdf>
- 115 J.Wagley (2006), *CRS Report for Congress: Transnational Organized Crime: Principal Threats and U.S. Responses*, Congressional Research Service, 20 March. <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33335.pdf#sthash.H3YyyF6u.6ulQQSq7.dpuf>; The first reported use of 'Narco-Terrorism' was in Peru during the 1980s in reference to the insurgent group Shining Path.
- 116 Human Rights Watch (1996), *Colombia's Killer Networks*. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/killertoc.htm>
- 117 In the early 1960s, a US delegation to Colombia (the Yarborough Commission) recommended the creation of paramilitary forces. Human Rights Watch has documented "the disturbing role played by the United States in support of the Colombian military. Despite Colombia's disastrous human rights record, a U.S. Defense Department and Central Intelligence Agency team worked with Colombian military officers on the 1991 intelligence reorganization that resulted in the creation of killer networks that identified and killed civilians suspected of supporting guerrillas." Human Rights Watch (1996), *Colombia's Killer Networks*. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/killertoc.htm>
- 118 For a discussion of the way the "Narco-Guerilla" has been used in Colombia see: R.Vargas (1997), *Colombia: The Heresy of the Manicheans*, The Transnational Institute. <http://www.tni.org/article/colombia-heresy-manicheans>
- 119 J. Gomez Lizarazo (1992), *Colombian Blood, U.S. Guns*, The New York Times, 28 January. <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/01/28/opinion/colombian-blood-us-guns.html>
- 120 M.Klare, P.Kornbluh (eds) (1988). *Low Intensity Warfare; Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency and Antiterrorism in the Eighties*, Pantheon Books.
- 121 The director of USAID told congress at the time that the organisation's interest in the country was "the protection and expansion, if possible, of our economic interests, trade, and investment." P.Lernoux (1980), *Cry of the People*, Double Day, p.166
- 122 Internal state department documents, now declassified, cited in N.Chomsky (1993), *The Clinton Vision*, Z Magazine. Available online here: <http://www.chomsky.info/articles/199312--.htm>
- 123 Cited in P.Lernoux (1980) p.163. Assessing US aid to Central and South America between 2003 and 2008, the government accountability office determined the primary success to be the increased level of cooperation. Counter-narcotics policies - "Assistance programs focused on three key areas: (1) intelligence-gathering and investigations, (2) maritime and land-based operations, and (3) criminal prosecutions." - were considered unsustainable. United States Government Accountability Office (2008). <http://www.gao.gov/assets/280/278210.pdf>
- 124 M.Jelsma (1997), *Introduction: Damaging Side Effects - The War on Drugs*, The Transnational Institute, 1 April. <http://www.tni.org/article/introduction-damaging-side-effects-war-drugs>
- 125 In the Journal of American History, Maria Celia Toro has discussed the legal shift in the 1980s that facilitates modern day overseas counter-narcotics operations:
 "The most striking and consequential development from the perspective of international relations has been the extraterritorial extension of United States criminal jurisdiction, most notably the extension of its judicial capacities in the 1980s. For many countries in Latin America, this represented a drastic change in United States antidrug policy. The enforcement of United States laws beyond United States borders, considered illegitimate by practically all nations, has been unique in the case of drug trafficking, in comparison both with previous practice and with approaches to other so-called transnational crimes. Perhaps the most important legislation affecting international narcotics control was the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which outlawed the manufacture and distribution of drugs outside

- the United States if they were intended for export to American territory. This law provided the basis for United States federal grand jury indictments of foreign nationals, a practice that has increased over the last ten years. Over the last fifteen years, the DEA has maximized its capacity to gather evidence in foreign territories to be used in prosecutions in United States courts. It has also consolidated its power to obtain formal extradition of fugitives to the United States and to take drug traffickers and associated criminals to trial in the United States, luring them into United States territory or arranging an abduction.” M.Celia Toro (1999), *The Internationalization of Police: The DEA in Mexico*, *The Journal of American History*, 86 (2): 623-640. <http://jah.oxfordjournals.org/content/86/2/623.extract>
- 126 A US Special Forces trainer working in Colombia during the early 1990s has described how the handover operated in practice:
 “The American public was being told, if they were told anything at all, that this was counter-narcotics training. The training I conducted was anything but that. It was pretty much updated Vietnam-style counter-insurgency doctrine. We were advised that this is what we would do, and we were further advised to refer to it as counter-narcotics training, should anyone ask. It was extremely clear to us that the counter-narcotics thing was an official cover story.” D.Stokes (2005), *America’s Other War; Terrorising Colombia*, Zed Books.
- 127 C.Savage (2011). http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/07/world/americas/united-states-drug-enforcement-agency-squads-extend-reach-of-drug-war.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- 128 Cited in N.Chomsky (1991), *Deterring Democracy*, Verso Books, p. 121;
 In the 1970s, when the Argentine police were torturing dissidents and running their own death squads, the US was supplying them with extra training and funds from the International Narcotics Control Program of the State Department and the DEA, “which became the chief source of U.S. aid for Latin-American police agencies after congress abolished the AID training program in 1974.” Studying this period, author and journalist Penny Lernoux refers to a Government Accountability Office study that suggested “U.S. narcotics assistance could well be serving the same objectives as those of the earlier AID public safety program, which was shown to have encouraged the use of torture and assassination by Latin-American police and para-police organizations.” “According to the GAO,” Lernoux writes, “U.S. aid to Latin-American police agencies through the narcotics program increased by nearly 600 percent between 1973 and 1974, compensating almost exactly for the money cut off from the public safety program.” The local police received the same kind of equipment and training as before, and had only to add a superficial responsibility for counter-narcotics to their activities. In Argentina the police had a barbaric record, and were led by a paramilitary and drug trafficker. Lernoux quotes an Argentine official who justified the counter-narcotics funding as follows:
 “We hope to wipe out the drug traffic in Argentina. We have caught guerillas after attacks who were high on drugs. Guerillas are the main users of drugs in Argentina. Therefore, the anti-drug campaign will automatically be an anti-guerilla campaign as well.” P.Lernoux (1980), p. 339
- 129 Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence (2011), *Hezbollah in Latin America - Implications for U.S. Homeland Security*, 7 July. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg72255/pdf/CHRG-112hhrg72255.pdf>
- 130 The press release, from which the following quotes are taken, is available here: United States Attorney’s Office Southern District of New York Press Release (2013), *Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces Arrests Of Drug Kingpin Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchuto, The Former Head Of The Guinea-Bissau Navy, And Six Others For Narcotics Trafficking Offenses*, 5 April. <http://www.justice.gov/usao/nys/pressreleases/April13/GuineaBissauArrestsPR.php?print=1>
- 131 Ibid.
- 132 For a discussion of the way narco-terrorism has been applied in specific cases, see B.Gomis (2015), *Demystifying Narco-Terrorism*, GDPO, Forthcoming.
- 133 P.Tighe (2004), *UN Says Coalition Forces, NATO Must Help End Afghan Drug Trade*, Bloomberg, 10 February. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=a9oJlvelOk8g&refer=asia>
- 134 J.Nathan (2010), *Poppy Blues: The Collapse of Poppy Eradication and the Road Ahead in Afghanistan*, *Defense & Security Analysis*, 25:4, p.331-353. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14751790903416699>
- 135 United States House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management (2012), *A Line in the Sand: Countering Crime, Violence, and Terror at the Southwest Border*, US House of Representatives, November. <http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/11-15-12-Line-in-the-Sand.pdf>
- 136 In Colombia, questions have been raised over the actual identities of the captures touted as ‘high-profile’. See Noticias Uno (2012), *Agente DEA condenado por narcotráfico denuncia falsos positivos en extradición*, 11 March. <http://noticiasunolaredindependiente.com/2012/03/11/noticias/falso-positivo-dea/>
- 137 ‘What is remarkable,’ writes Schwartz in an incredulous tone now common to discussions surrounding US drug policy, ‘is how many times the U.S. has tried such militarized counter-narcotics programs and how long it has been apparent how little they amount to.’ M.Schwartz (2014). <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/01/06/a->

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ShadowSpear (2015), Special Forces Soldiers Train Honduran Counter-Narcotic, Counter Trafficking Force, ShadowSpear 24 March
<http://www.shadowsppear.com/2015/03/special-forces-soldiers-train-honduran-counter-narcotic-counter-trafficking-force/>
- 138 AP (2013). <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/02/03/us-expands-drug-war-latin-america/1887481/>
- 139 J. De Cordoba (2009), *Latin American Panel Calls U.S. Drug War a Failure*, The Wall Street Journal, 12 February. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB123439889394275215?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB123439889394275215.html>
- 140 Writes Ted Galen Carpenter, an analyst at the Cato Institute: “A study last year from the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy found that “despite increasing investments in enforcement-based supply reduction efforts aimed at disrupting global drug supply, illegal drug prices have generally decreased while drug purity has generally increased since 1990.” The study concluded that “expanding efforts at controlling the global illegal drug market through law enforcement are failing.”
T. Galen Carpenter (2014), *The child migrant crisis is just the latest disastrous consequence of America’s drug war*, The Washington Post, 21 July. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-watch/wp/2014/07/21/the-child-migrant-crisis-is-just-the-latest-disastrous-consequence-of-americas-drug-war/>
- 141 AP (2013). <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/%20world/2013/02/03/us-expands-drug-war-latinamerica/1887481/>
- 142 “Counter-narcotics” in Colombia, for example, may be a failure in terms of reducing drug production, but the funding it has facilitated has militarised the armed forces, heightened their repressive capabilities, and repressed resistance to what a group of NGOs working in the country have termed a “pro-rich development” model. It has also laid the ideological path for the installation of military bases in strategic regions of the country, where either the insurgency is considered to be operating or there is a concentration Colombia’s abundant natural resources. Fumigation has displaced poor farmers from strategically important areas. US officials are castigated by analysts for mistakenly persisting with a ‘failing’ policy, and no more.
- 143 A study on the gap between rhetoric and reality by the International Drug Policy Consortium notes: “With over two years in office, the Obama administration has had time to begin to make its mark on the government’s domestic and international drug policies. But has the welcome change in tone been matched by a change in policies? The track record to date is disappointing, with far more continuity than change.” Reforms at home have been modest, while “in the

international sphere the U.S. “war on drugs” continues apace.”C.Youngers (2011), *The Obama Administration’s drug control policy on auto-pilot*, International Drug Policy Consortium. <http://idpc.net/publications/2011/04/obama-administration-drug-policy-on-auto-pilot>

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About the Global Drug Policy Observatory

The Global Drug Policy Observatory aims to promote evidence and human rights based drug policy through the comprehensive and rigorous reporting, monitoring and analysis of policy developments at national and international levels. Acting as a platform from which to reach out to and engage with broad and diverse audiences, the initiative aims to help improve the sophistication and horizons of the current policy debate among the media and elite opinion formers as well as within law enforcement and policy making communities. The Observatory engages in a range of research activities that explore not only the dynamics and implications of existing and emerging policy issues, but also the processes behind policy shifts at various levels of governance.

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