

LATIN AMERICA & HAITI WEB SITE

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We publish articles describing life in different Latin American countries and Haiti; these include human interest pieces, political analysis, discussions of US relationships. We will emphasize pieces about indigenous peoples, labor and human rights, and descriptions of legislative initiatives that affect these countries and the US. We will publish literary pieces. Some of our articles will be reprinted from other sources. **WE WILL CONSIDER SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPTS.**

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FOREIGN
POLICY**

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"Low intensity
conflict" means
you infect the
heart of the
country.
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Latin America: U.S. Foreign Policy in Latin America

By Harold Pinter

Editors note: Nobel Laureate playwright Harold Pinter died on Christmas Eve. We celebrate his life with an excerpt of his speech given when he accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature in Sweden in 2005. Playwrights, poets and authors often serve as our conscience.

U.S. POLICY AFTER WORLD WAR II

I would like to look at the recent past, by which I mean United States foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. I believe it is obligatory upon us to subject this period to at least some kind of even limited scrutiny, which is all that time will allow here.

Everyone knows what happened in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe during the post-war period: the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought. All this has been fully documented and verified.

But my contention here is that the US crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged, let alone recognised as crimes at all. I believe this must be addressed and that the truth has considerable bearing on where the world stands now. Although constrained, to a certain extent, by the existence of the Soviet Union, the United States' actions throughout the world made it clear that it had concluded it had carte blanche to do what it liked.

Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America's favoured method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as 'low intensity conflict'. Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop. It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued—or beaten to death—the same thing—and your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the camera and say that democracy has prevailed. This was a commonplace in US foreign policy in the years to which I refer.

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**The U.S.
supported the
brutal Somoza
dictatorship in
Nicaragua for
over 40 years.**

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NICARAGUA

The tragedy of Nicaragua was a highly significant case. I choose to offer it here as a potent example of America's view of its role in the world, both then and now.

I was present at a meeting at the US embassy in London in the late 1980s.

The United States Congress was about to decide whether to give more money to the Contras in their campaign against the state of Nicaragua. I was a member of a delegation speaking on behalf of Nicaragua but the most important member of this delegation was a Father John Metcalf. The leader of the US body was Raymond Seitz (then number two to the ambassador, later ambassador himself). Father Metcalf said: 'Sir, I am in charge of a parish in the north of Nicaragua. My parishioners built a school, a health centre, a cultural centre. We have lived in peace. A few months ago a Contra force attacked the parish. They destroyed everything: the school, the health centre, the cultural centre. They raped nurses and teachers, slaughtered doctors, in the most brutal manner. They behaved like savages. Please demand that the US government withdraw its support from this shocking terrorist activity.'

Raymond Seitz had a very good reputation as a rational, responsible and highly sophisticated man. He was greatly respected in diplomatic circles. He listened, paused and then spoke with some gravity. 'Father,' he said, 'let me tell you something. In war, innocent people always suffer.' There was a frozen silence. We stared at him. He did not flinch.

Innocent people, indeed, always suffer.

Finally somebody said: 'But in this case "innocent people" were the victims of a gruesome atrocity subsidised by your government, one among many. If Congress allows the Contras more money further atrocities of this kind will take place. Is this not the case? Is your government not therefore guilty of supporting acts of murder and destruction upon the citizens of a sovereign state?'

Seitz was imperturbable. 'I don't agree that the facts as presented support your assertions,' he said.

As we were leaving the Embassy a US aide told me that he enjoyed my plays. I did not reply.

I should remind you that at the time President Reagan made the following statement: 'The Contras are the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers.'

The United States supported the brutal Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua for over 40 years. The Nicaraguan people, led by the Sandinistas, overthrew this regime in 1979, a breathtaking popular revolution.

The Sandinistas weren't perfect. They possessed their fair share of arrogance and their political philosophy contained a number of contradictory elements. But they were intelligent, rational and civilised. They set out to establish a stable, decent, pluralistic society. The death penalty was abolished. Hundreds of thousands of poverty-stricken peasants were brought back from the dead. Over 100,000 fami-

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lies were given title to land. Two thousand schools were built. A quite remarkable literacy campaign reduced illiteracy in the country to less than one seventh. Free education was established and a free health service. Infant mortality was reduced by a third. Polio was eradicated.

The United States denounced these achievements as Marxist/Leninist subversion. In the view of the US government, a dangerous example was being set. If Nicaragua was allowed to establish basic norms of social and economic justice, if it was allowed to raise the standards of health care and education and achieve social unity and national self respect, neighbouring countries would ask the same questions and do the same things. There was of course at the time fierce resistance to the status quo in El Salvador.

A TAPESTRY OF LIES

I spoke earlier about ‘a tapestry of lies’ which surrounds us. President Reagan commonly described Nicaragua as a ‘totalitarian dungeon’. This was taken generally by the media, and certainly by the British government, as accurate and fair comment. But there was in fact no record of death squads under the Sandinista government. There was no record of torture. There was no record of systematic or official military brutality. No priests were ever murdered in Nicaragua. There were

in fact three priests in the government, two Jesuits and a Maryknoll missionary. The totalitarian dungeons were actually next door, in El Salvador and Guatemala. The United States had brought down the democratically elected government of Guatemala in 1954 and it is estimated that over 200,000 people had been victims of successive military dictatorships.

Six of the most distinguished Jesuits in the world were viciously murdered at the Central American University in San Salvador in 1989 by a battalion of the Alcatl regiment trained at Fort Benning, Georgia, USA. That extremely brave man Archbishop Romero was assassinated while saying mass. It is estimated that 75,000 people died. Why were they killed? They were killed because they believed a better life was possible and should

be achieved. That belief immediately qualified them as communists. They died because they dared to question the status quo, the endless plateau of poverty, disease, degradation and oppression, which had been their birthright.

The United States finally brought down the Sandinista government. It took some years and considerable resistance but relentless economic persecution and 30,000



Harold Pinter as he delivered his Nobel prize speech in December 2005.

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dead finally undermined the spirit of the Nicaraguan people. They were exhausted and poverty stricken once again. The casinos moved back into the country. Free health and free education were over. Big business returned with a vengeance. ‘Democracy’ had prevailed.

But this ‘policy’ was by no means restricted to Central America. It was conducted throughout the world. It was never-ending. And it is as if it never happened.

The United States supported and in many cases engendered every right wing military dictatorship in the world after the end of the Second World War. I refer to Indonesia, Greece, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Haiti, Turkey, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, and, of course, Chile. The horror the United States inflicted upon Chile in 1973 can never be purged and can never be forgiven.

Hundreds of thousands of deaths took place throughout these countries. Did they take place? And are they in all cases attributable to US foreign policy? The answer is yes they did take place and they are attributable to American foreign policy. But you wouldn’t know it.

**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
OF VENEZUELA**

*Compiled by Ronald Coburn
from the Venezuela Information
Office, Washington, D.C.*

Official statistics place the indigenous population of Venezuela around 535,000 people, or about 2.1% of the national populations. By other estimates that number might be closer to one million. Though this may seem small, Indigenous groups form an immeasurably important part of the past, present, and future of Venezuela.

Twenty six different ethnic groups exist in Venezuela today, and are known in their own languages as the Wauu, Warao, Pemon, Anu,



Yanomami, Jiv, Piaroa, karifia, Pume, Yecuana, Yukpa, Enepa, Kurripakao, Bari, Piapoko, Bare, Baniva, Puinave, Yeral, Jodi, Karina, Warekena, Yarabana, Sape, Wanai and Uruak. Indigenous communities are hardly the primitive cultures that Venezuelanas and outsiders alike have imagined and depicted for so many years

Juan Gabriel Tokatlian is a professor of international relations at Universidad de San Andres, Buenos Aires.

Latin America: A New Doctrine of Insecurity? U.S. Military Deployment

By Juan Gabriel Tokatlian

Editor's note: More creeping Empire building is going on in South America. This piece was originally published by the North American Congress in Latin America Essays, September 2008 and is republished here with permission.

The announced redeployment this summer of the U.S. Navy's Fourth Fleet, a World War II-era flotilla, to patrol the Caribbean and Latin American coastline represents a major new projection of North American military power in the region. This development, on the cusp of a new U.S. administration, prompts us to ask: Will Washington continue its imperial temptation in Latin America? Will Latin America be a focus of renewed attention after the November presidential election? Will there be changes in U.S. international military deployment in the region? Over the decades, Washington has noticeably varied its international strategy, its broader global doctrine, and the diplomatic instruments that sustain it. During the Cold War, U.S. grand strategy had different components: The strategy of containment predominated; underpinned by a network of strong and decisive alliances, it attempted to limit the expansion of the Soviet Union and, to the extent possible, roll back the consolidation of its sphere of influence.

Containment was backed up by the doctrine of deterrence; Washington made it known that the effects of retaliation would be devastating if the Soviet Union launched a nuclear attack. In the Americas, U.S. grand strategy was complemented by a subordinate logic: Washington did not give the armed forces of the region a fundamental role in combating the Soviet Union. Instead, it put forth the so-called National Security Doctrine to combat the "internal enemy": local communism.

After September 11, 2001, and especially after the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States transformed its foreign and defense policy, pursuing a new strategy oriented toward maintaining U.S. primacy. Washington would not tolerate any international competitor, be it a current friend (the European Union) or incipient opponent (China). According to the new doctrine of preventive war, Washington reserved

for itself the right to use its military might against any country, whether or not that country intended to attack immediately and whether or not the United States

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could verify that the attack was indeed planned: Imminence and evidence did not seem to matter. The solid alliances of the past were reformulated and replaced by ad hoc coalitions (e.g., the Coalition of the Willing); Washington alone would determine the mission, and only later would the appropriate coalition be formed to carry it out.

Even though the subordinate hemispheric logic that accompanies this redefinition of grand strategy—what we could call a “doctrine of national insecurity”—is still not wholly consented to or implemented, there are evident signs that Washington may nonetheless establish such a logic in the region. Worryingly, many facts point in this direction.

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In Latin America, though with different levels of acceptance in each country, Washington has successfully implanted the omnipresent idea of “new threats” and the proliferation of all kinds of dangers, including global terrorism, transnational organized crime, and international drug trafficking, all of which operate in “empty spaces” where the state has vanished or is markedly disappearing.

The Pentagon has insisted, and continues to insist, that these threats demand that the division between internal security and external defense be done away with, and thus the work of police, security forces, and the armed forces must overlap. They must exchange information, erasing the borders between police and military activities. This year’s “Merida Initiative”, which reproduces the same punitive drug-war logic of Plan Colombia, and the new “participation” of the Brazilian military in combating the drug trade in the favelas suggest that the strict separation of defense and security is progressively diminishing.

U.S. Grand Strategy during the Cold War and after 9/11		
	<u>Cold War</u>	<u>Post 9/11</u>
Strategy	Containment	Primacy
Doctrine	Deterrence	Preventive war
Instruments	Alliances (NATO, Rio Pact, ANZUS among others)	Flexible or ad hoc coalitions (Coalition of the Willing)
Hemispheric Logic	National Security Doctrine	National Insecurity Doctrine

Latin America has in turn accepted, though not unanimously, the thesis of the new coalitions of the willing. The Pentagon garnered direct military support from

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El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic, as well as explicit initial political support from Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica, in the coalition that attacked Iraq in 2003. It also successfully recruited 12 countries in the region to commit to the military-police mission in Haiti beginning in 2004. There is no doubt a big difference between the war waged by Washington and its allies in Iraq and the deployment of forces in Haiti, endorsed by the United Nations. However, quite apart from the humanitarian sentiment behind Latin American involvement in the Haitian contingent, many countries in the region assign a growing value to their armed forces in processes of pacification, stabilization, and reconstruction beyond their borders. The kinds of intra-military linkages that are being made in the hemisphere, the internal training that foreign military missions require, and the impact in the medium term on civic-military relations and domestic democratic evolution are questions worth some careful examination.

In this context, the Colombian military's March 1 attack on the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Ecuadoran territory is of great significance. First, it presents the risk of the "war on terror" being Latin Americanized—even though the only place where this modality of terrorism has not yet manifested itself is Latin America. Second, the Colombian operation justifies the violation of international law to combat alleged terrorists, and the deployment of preventive force could be established as a standard practice. This, in turn, may give rise to the distortion of legitimate defense and to the further militarization of responses to the region's long list of socio-political problems. For this reason, the Organization of American States' March 17 resolution on the Colombian operation is of great importance. It reaffirms, among other things, the validity of the principle of territorial sovereignty; rejects the Colombian incursion into Ecuadoran territory



The USS George Washington and other ships in South American waters.

without Quito's "knowledge or consent"; registers the apologies offered by Colombia and its decision not to repeat such an action "under any circumstance"; reiterates the region's commitment to confronting the threats from "irregular groups and criminal organizations"; and provides for mediation to reestablish "good relations between the two countries." The ratification of principles of coexistence and respect among nations, like Colombia's willingness to abide by the regional consensus, is an encouraging sign that an inappropriate mode of action can be prevented from becoming a valid, standard, and permanent strategy. The U.S.

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**Latin American
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interpretation of the Colombian attack as legitimate “self-defense,” on the other hand, seems to justify any and all methods in the fight against U.S.-defined terrorists.

Yet the OAS resolution leaves the doctrine of confronting “new threats” at an impasse. Indeed, there are two interpretations of the resolution. In the optimistic version, Latin America has successfully confronted the United States and rejected interventionism; in the pessimistic version, Washington was nonetheless able to break inter-American unanimity. An alternative view, which attempts to discern the nuances of the resolution, leads one to conclude that the “war on terror” in the region is beginning to acquire some uncertain contours that are as dangerous as any to be found within the international system. The U.S. military’s view of Latin America therefore merits a detailed evaluation.

TYPES OF U.S. ENGAGEMENT

We can divide U.S. engagement with the region into three areas: First, there are trade relations that operate within commercial treaties, both multilateral and bilateral (NAFTA, CAFTA-DR, Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Panama). Second, there is a military dimension that emanates, basically, from the Pentagon, is articulated by the U.S. Southern Command (Southcom), and occupies an ever more central place in Washington’s regional strategy. Third, there are political exchanges that have been weakened and are lacking a positive agenda, now concentrating only on “problem cases” like Venezuela and Colombia. Southcom’s “Command Strategy 2016: Partnership for the Americas” (available at www.southcom.mil), released in 2007; this is the most ambitious strategic plan by a U.S. agency regarding the region that has been conceived in years. Conspicuous in their absence from the report are policy instruments like the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance and the Inter-American Defense Board, as well as multilateral institutions like the OAS and the UN. The hemispheric relations maintained by other parts of the U.S. government bureaucracy, like the Departments of State, Justice, and the Treasury, have also disappeared in the document: They seem irrelevant or unnecessary. Southcom thus announces its role in protecting the region for the next 10 years as if it were a continental proconsul.

The text begins by reviewing the principal challenges facing the United States in Latin America and the Caribbean. It turns that none of the major threats to the United States (totalitarian states armed with weapons of mass destruction or forms of trans-national terrorism with a global reach) appear in the region. The document only indicates that ungoverned spaces in the region could “potentially” be used to harm vital U.S. interests; nowhere in the text is the existence in the region of radical Islamic groups bent on attacking U.S. targets confirmed. Meanwhile, poverty, inequality, corruption, and criminality are all identified as significant menaces.

But the mission of the Southern Command is excessive. In the document,

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**Between 2001
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Southcom establishes itself as the leading organization among existing agencies to guarantee “security, stability, and prosperity in the Americas.” To the usual military activities are added the establishment and support of regional and global coalitions—that is, the above-mentioned coalitions of the willing. These coalitions are meant to be available for peace operations both in the region and elsewhere. They are also meant to help in the identification of “third trainee party nation alternatives to accept migrants,” and to establish programs to deal with the problem of large-scale migration.

With the goal of increasing stability, Southcom intends to actively link with various state agencies, NGOs, and public and private institutions; propose negotiating “security agreements throughout the hemisphere”; designate new countries as new “major non-NATO allies” (only Argentina has this status now); and stimulate joint efforts among government and non-state actors in humanitarian tasks. In order to “enable prosperity,” the document emphasizes the importance of developing programs of training in the area of “internal security” in Latin American nations; of increasing the number of so-called cooperative security locations (in reality, small military bases like the ones at Manta in Ecuador, Reina Beatrix in Aruba, Hato Rey in Curacao, and Comalpa in El Salvador); supporting the proposal for a joint Central American battalion; and improving the definition of the Defense Department’s role in the region’s “socio-economic and political development processes.”

The Southern Command’s new strategy comes in the context of a growing role for the Defense Department in Latin America. Between 1997 and 2007, total U.S. military and police assistance to the region was about \$7.3 billion. In 2005-07, four countries in the region were among the top 15 recipients of U.S. military assistance: Colombia, fifth; Bolivia, eighth; Peru, 10th; and Mexico, 12th. In the last five years, annual arms sales to the region have been an average \$1.1 billion. Between 2001 and 2005, 85,820 Latin American soldiers were trained in the United States. (Compare this with the 61,000 soldiers and police trained by the infamous School of the Americas from 1946 to 2000.)

Southcom’s near decade-long strategy (ending in 2016) will continue to demand more material resources and greater autonomy for the U.S. military. This is an extensive and comprehensive undertaking, whose execution, it appears, is independent of the political-military future of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the next U.S. presidential election. The underlying assumption is that no government led by a dovish Democrat or a hawkish Republican will change the course of military diplomacy toward the region in the next decade.

WASHINGTON’S PROJECTION OF POWER

It is against this backdrop of Washington’s projection of power into Latin America that the U.S. electoral process is taking place. In this sense, there will

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**Democrats and
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politics**

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probably be more continuity than change. Since September 11, civil society has been so sensitized that any president will have to be “tough” on terror. Politicians have been restricted by that trauma, the military has become addicted to the new “war on terror,” and both are hypnotized by the notion of global U.S. primacy. In sum, the country is locked inside the logic of 9/11—both captive and captivated. With fear in the air, an economic recession, and the threat of a larger financial crisis, it is difficult to suppose there will be a substantive and definite change of course for the United States in terms of foreign relations. No candidate or political force appears disposed to propose a new role for the military in U.S. foreign strategy. The hyper-militarization of foreign policy is more and more telling. All the quantitative and qualitative indicators—budget, doctrine, deployment, reach, corporate weight, institutional pressures, civic-military balance—point in this direction. Democrats and Republicans, neoconservatives and liberals, all have an excessive faith in the use of force in world politics and appear not to respect international law and global regimes. The dilemma is not whether the United States is on its way to becoming a new or stronger empire; it is whether the “Prussian” route to primacy has really been embraced by its leadership.

The economic deterioration and its spread beyond the United States will no doubt occupy the next president’s agenda. The executive will have to put the country’s house in order before trying to deal with the “houses” of others. The principal source of the United States’s eventual imperial decline is to be found in its domestic scene, and is much more socioeconomic than political-military. That is why there is a tactical consensus on certain strategic issues: curb China, co-opt India, deter Russia, control Europe, quarantine Pakistan, contain Iran, sustain Saudi Arabia, defend Israel, isolate Venezuela, assist Colombia, among others. On these questions we see, in general terms, a relative convergence between the two main candidates: They speak little about those matters, and when they make their differences known. Those differences are more about style and form rather than substance or content.

Finally, significant changes in defense and foreign policy do not depend on individuals. Predicting a major transformation based on a candidate’s profile is imprudent, even more so when Washington shows no signs of abandoning its bid to secure and maintain military, economic, and political predominance. Democrats and Republicans show at most carefully differentiated modes of a calibrated primacy. Obama and McCain do have distinct personalities and respond to different party imperatives. This, however, does not imply that there will be a turning point in U.S. global grand strategy. A number of forces, factors, and phenomena, both internal and external, seem to impose fundamental continuity with minor tactical changes.

Faced with this panorama, Latin America shows its fragmentation. In the most noted case in South America, Andean conflicts have flared up, attracting more and

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**Washington's
obsession with
the Middle
East and
Central Asia
has allowed for
a proliferation
of Latin American
initiatives
conceived
without U.S.
participation.**

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more attention from Washington. Paradoxically; this is occurring at a rare conjuncture: There have been few other times that presented such concurrent conditions to reduce Latin America's subordination to the United States and widen its autonomy in world affairs. The opportunity is ripe; whether it is taken advantage of or not depends essentially on the countries of South America.

The inattention paid by the United States to the region after 9/11 and its loss of credibility after the Iraq invasion, combined with its bad economic management in the last few years, offer the region rare leeway. The so-called left turn in South America is the natural consequence of a democratizing movement that, with the crisis of dictatorships during the 1980s, counted on active support from the United States. The current reassessment of the state in South America is a consequence of the costs produced by policies established under the so-called Washington Consensus through the 1990s. Its exhaustion is visible throughout the region. This fact, together with the executive's inability to put its own country's economy in order has meant that neither the White House nor Wall Street have been able to seriously question or deter the testing of heterodox economic measures in the hemisphere. Washington's obsession with the Middle East and Central Asia and its loss of international and hemispheric prestige has allowed for a proliferation of initiatives conceived without U.S. participation.

In this context, three issues that revolve around Brazil will be the key to whether South America wastes this opportunity, attempts a simple dependent re-accommodation, or devises a more emancipatory response. First, the important discovery of oil along the Brazilian coast will change the regional energy equation and oblige Brazil to design a more consistent grand strategy of its own if it wants to become an important emerging power. Second, the February agreements between Brazil and Argentina on nuclear power and defense are of great importance. Uranium enrichment for peaceful purposes, designing a nuclear power reactor, and commitments for the joint production of arms constitute the core of the agreement. Finally, Brazil's call for the founding of a South American Defense Board shows, on the one hand, the obsolescence of Washington's InterAmerican Defense Board and, on the other hand, the South American desire to prevent and reduce conflicts in the region by its own design.

Taken together, these regional trends indicate a growing realism toward the United States: It is neither an inexorable enemy nor an indispensable ally. But its geopolitical projection and military deployment in South America constitute a growing problem.

**COLUMBIA:
US COLD
WAR
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Lynn Biddle has traveled extensively in Latin America and written frequently on the conditions and politics in these countries. She is a former Pledge member who now lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

Columbia: US Cold War Foreign Policy Hasn't Worked in Colombia. Can It Work Anywhere Else?

By Lynn Biddle

Since 2000, the U.S. has spent \$6.03 billion in Colombia. It's goals? - to help the government of Columbia to sharply reduce the amount of cocaine imported into the U.S., to win the war against the leftist guerillas, primarily FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia), and "to promote respect for human rights". The chosen method has been supplying the Columbian government with military hardware and advisors, and by supporting the far-right President Uribe. In addition to the U.S., he relies on the Colombian military and the middle and upper classes for support.

The result? There has been no decrease in the supply of drugs, no end to the war, and, definitely, no improvement in human rights. In fact, life has become more difficult and dangerous there today. Rural people, especially the indigenous and Afro-Colombians, are targeted by paramilitary troops, forcing them off their land when natural resources or more grazing land for cattle are coveted by the wealthy, including foreign corporations.

Colombia is second only to Darfur in the number of violently internally displaced, living in shanty towns and still subject to violent raids on their homes. Free trade has undermined small farmers' ability to support themselves and their families. Labor leaders and organizers have the highest rate of assassination in the world.

For years, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other groups have documented cooperation between the army and right-wing paramilitary groups. Together, "paras" and the army are responsible for more massacres, terrorism, and human rights abuses than all the leftist guerilla groups combined. Only in the last year or two has the judicial system dared to prosecute these criminals.

Only recently, also, has the justice system begun prosecuting people in Uribe's government, including his cousin, for drug trafficking.

What has the U.S. bought with its \$6.03 billion aid to Colombia? We are responsible for aerial fumigation of crops, not always exclusively coca, without much of the promised help introducing alternative crops, thus making life even more difficult for rural people. We have funded the militarization of the country as a whole. We have done nothing to improve the system of justice, nothing to protect



US President George W. Bush (L) awards the Colombian president Alvaro Uribe the Presidential Medal of Freedom during a ceremony at the White House in Washington, DC, USA on 13 January 2009.

the Colombian people, nothing to improve human rights, nothing to better the lives of the poor.

I've called it "Cold War" foreign policy because its primary purpose has been to wipe out Colombian leftists who supported themselves through the drug trade. With the rising populism in South America, with leaders such as Chavez, Correa, and Morales, the U.S. has clung ever more closely to President Uribe, our "closest ally" on that continent.

Why is the U.S. government so afraid of the Castros, and the South American populist presidents? The Cubans offered to send doctors to New Orleans to help out when FEMA was floundering; Chavez sends discounted oil to the poor here in the U.S., whose own government can't or won't help them heat their homes.

Our own government has long had a bias against the poor and powerless - in Colombia, in all of South America, and here in the U.S. as well. Now is the time for us to demand new foreign and domestic policies. Now we must recognize the right to basic human needs and respect for every person, including respect for their choices of their own leaders. We also need a sane and fair trade policy.

OUR FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS LATIN AMERICA



Columbia: Continued Conflict

Indigenous Peoples Land and Communities Versus Land Earmarked for Large-Scale Economic Projects Such as Mineral and Oil Exploitation, Agro-Industry Developments or Hydro-Electric Schemes

Editor's note: This article was republished from the Urgent Action Newsletter of Amnesty International USA, Dec. 12, 2008. This is regrettably such a common theme for human rights violations in Latin America.

COLUMBIA: CONTINUED CONFLICT

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Indigenous land is rich in natural resources, including minerals and oil, and is in demand large-scale economic projects by private and public companies.

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Indigenous Peoples, campesino communities (rural small-scale farming communities) and Afro-descendant communities are among the groups of civilians most affected by the long-running internal conflict in Colombia. These communities, often located in areas of intense military conflict are often attacked by all sides in the Colombian conflict displacing them from lands which are subsequently opened up for large-scale economic development. Communities that campaign against such economic development are also often attacked by the security forces and paramilitaries, who repeatedly label these communities as “subversive.” Guerrilla groups also threaten and kill members of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities they accuse of siding with “the enemy.”

Amnesty International reports a very recent typical event. A group of Indigenous leaders, all members of the Embera Indigenous community in the municipality of Riosucio, Department of Choco received a death threat. The threat listed the names of Julio Mecheche Manyoma, Aquileito Mecheche Barahona, Milciades Chamorro Marmolejo, Herminio Lana Guaseruca, Diomedes Rubiano, Eleciana Chajito, Iris Nayibi Cabrera and Morelia Marmolejo, and said that all of them would be “eliminated”. The Embera Indigenous men and women who were threatened are or have been leaders of the Bajo Atrato Camizba Indigenous reservation in Riosucio. The leaders’ work has included the defense and promotion of the Indigenous community’s land rights, as the area is rich in natural resources, including minerals and oil, and is therefore in demand for the implementation of large-scale economic projects by private and public companies.

This is not the only threat that members of the community have received recently. On 18 November, four armed men with hoods forced their way into a house in Riosucio. At the time, three of Julio Macheche Manyoma and Aquileito Mecheche Barahona’s young female relatives were in the house. The intruders asked where they could find the two men. When the girls did not reply, the intruders threatened to kidnap one of them if they did not divulge the whereabouts of the two men. The intruders left without kidnapping or harming the girls, but community members report that since then, the homes of Julio Macheche Manyoma and Aquileito Mecheche Barahona have been under surveillance.

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MENCHU**

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**Menchú's
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Guatamala: Remembering Rigoberta Menchu

Editors note: This article is modified from the Encyclopedia of World Biography. We plan to frequently publish pieces on human rights activist heroes from the past to inspire us.

Rigoberta Menchú was a Guatemalan human rights activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992. Despite her youth she became an eloquent spokesperson for the rights of the indigenous peoples of the entire Western Hemisphere. She was born on January 9, 1959, in Chimel, a village in the Quiché province in the north-west highlands of Guatemala. Her mother was a midwife and traditional healer, and her father a day laborer, catechist, and community leader. Both her parents belonged to one of the many Indigenous groups of Guatemala, the Quiché Maya, and spoke little Spanish. Young Menchú herself spoke only Quiché until she was 19. Her difficult childhood is an example of how hundreds of thousands of Indian children grow up in Guatemala. Every year she followed her parents to the southern coastal plantations, *fincas*, where they spent months picking cotton and coffee. During the rest of the year the family, back in the highlands, collected wicker in the mountains and grew maize, beans, and potatoes to supplement their diet. Menchú started working when she was only eight; two of her brothers died on the plantations, one was poisoned by insecticides and the other—only two years old—from malnutrition. At age 13 she had her first prolonged direct experience with people of Spanish culture (and with discrimination), when she worked as a maid for a wealthy family in Guatemala City. Soon thereafter, her father was imprisoned for his efforts to save land from seizure by large landowners.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNREST

Menchú's political awakening was shaped by Guatemala's turbulent history. After a coup d'état backed by the United States Central Intelligence Agency toppled a left-wing president in 1954, a series of military governments ruled the country with an iron hand. A guerrilla movement that began in 1962 triggered a violent government response directed not only at the guerrillas, but also at their supporters, real and alleged, often located in the countryside. Political violence was re-

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newed in the 1970s, when government repression was applied in such an indiscriminate fashion that U.S. President Jimmy Carter, after repeated warnings against human rights violations, suspended economic aid in 1977. Guatemala's Indians, composing 60 percent of the population, suffered the indignities of forced relocation and military service. In this environment of political turmoil, indigenous vindication movements were considered by the government to be part of a communist conspiracy.

AN ACTIVIST IS BORN

Menchú became politically active, inspired by her family's involvement and by her religious beliefs. Like many others in Central America, she was influenced by Liberation Theology, a movement that believes that the Bible should be read through the eyes of the poor and that Jesus Christ had a special message of liberation for poor people. In an interview she described how peasants "felt everything the Bible said was coming to pass, with Christ crucified, Christ attacked with stones, Christ dragged along the ground. One felt the pain of that Christ, and identified with it."



Rigoberta Menchú, 2008

Another important influence was her father, Vicente, who was active in the Peasant Unity Committee, a group that fought for peasant land rights. She joined the committee in 1979, and was asked to organize the country's 22 Indian groups, each with its own culture and language, against exploitation. A few months later her 16-year-old brother, Petrocinio, was tortured and then killed by the army. The following year she lost her father in an event that received widespread coverage in the international press. Vicente Menchú, along with other representatives of indigenous groups, occupied the Spanish embassy in Guatemala City to press their demands. The army attacked the embassy and burned it, killing 39 people, including Menchú's father, who burned to death.

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN BEGINS IN EXILE

The next year her mother was kidnapped, tortured, and killed by the army, and two of her sisters joined the guerrillas. Life in Guatemala was too dangerous for her, and Menchú fled to Mexico in 1981. In exile, she began an international crusade to explain the plight of the Guatemalan Indians, and joined the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

In 1983, during a trip to Paris to promote her cause, she dictated her autobiography to a Venezuelan anthropologist, Eliza-

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beth Burgos. The result of their collaboration was the widely read book, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, which was translated into more than a dozen languages. It brought her to the attention of the rest of the world and helped her to become the foremost spokesperson for indigenous peoples.

EFFORTS BRING ACCLAIM

Although her first attempt to return to Guatemala in 1988 ended badly (she was threatened and put in jail), she later visited her country for short periods of time. It was during one such visit in October of 1992 that she learned the Nobel Peace Prize would be given to her “in recognition of her work for social justice and ethno-cultural reconciliation based on respect for the rights of indigenous peoples.” She was only 33.

With the \$1.2 million from the prize she set up a foundation named after her father. She was active in the continent’s Five Hundred Years of Resistance Campaign and in the United Nations International Indian Treaty Council. In June of 1993, during a political crisis in Guatemala, Menchú played an instrumental role in the events that brought to power a new president, Ramiro de León Carpio, a human rights advocate. Growing international pressure also helped force the government to ease up on military repression, and in 1995 many refugees who fled to Mexico to escape torture began to return.

Menchú remained an advocate for indigenous peoples, and in June, 1996 was named a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for a Culture of Peace by the Director-General of UNESCO. Later the same year she went to Norway to watch Guatemalan government and rebel leaders sign a cease-fire agreement for the 42-year conflict—Latin America’s longest civil war—that she and her family fought so hard to end.
