

Unending War, Undying Resistance:

U.S. Militarization of Guatemala from the Internal Armed Conflict to the Present

The militarized repression that has taken place the last few years in places like El Estor, Guatemala, or Minneapolis, U.S., teaches us at least two lessons: 1) When people defend land, life, and dignity, armies and militarized police will come for them, and 2) What has been done there can be done elsewhere. While Guatemalan and U.S. governments tell us that militarization is in our best interest, such as to preserve domestic peace or ensure national security, history tells us the truth: militarization is a tool to control and repress people. This means that defending life and seeking justice must always include a strong opposition to militarization, and that people in both countries have shared stakes in eradicating it. This demands nothing less than our undying resistance, as we create the world we long for, where all of us are free.

U.S. Militarization of Guatemala: A Very Brief History

1954

The CIA supports a coup against democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz, whose government had implemented important agrarian reforms that helped poor peasants and workers, but negatively impacted U.S. corporations such as the United Fruit Company.

1960s

The CIA helps install a U.S.-backed military dictatorship that begins decades of brutal violence against the Guatemalan people. The U.S. trains Guatemalan police and military in the U.S. Army School of the Americas and in Guatemala, teaching torture techniques, counterinsurgency tactics, and the "internal enemy" doctrine.

1966

Guatemala's deputy defense minister requests U.S. assistance to train special kidnapping squads to eliminate the growing number of organized resistance groups. This is also the first year with established records of the military disappearing people in the conflict.

1970s

The Carter administration attempts to cut direct military aid in an effort to stabilize the region, which is reeling from wars. However, most assistance continues flowing to the Guatemalan military in the form of equipment, technology, and training.

1980s

Ronald Reagan renews and intensifies support for the Guatemalan military, including CIA assistance. He publicly promotes the Guatemalan government and lies about the human rights violations. Henry Kissinger meets with the Guatemalan president and dismisses the violations as Guatemala's "internal matters."

In 1996, peace was signed and the armed conflict supposedly ended. Since then, however, U.S. military support for Guatemala has continued. This includes trainings by the U.S National Guard, equipment donations such as 95 military vehicles last November, intelligence briefings between the U.S. embassy and high ranking Guatemalan military officials, and more.



Monroe Doctrine: Foundational Ideology of U.S. Militarism

The primary ideology guiding U.S. militarization of the continent is the "Monroe Doctrine." Exactly 200 years ago, U.S. President James Monroe stated that any act of intervention by foreign powers in Latin America or the Caribbean was an act against the United States. This is how the U.S. first claimed the continent as its own "back yard," a phrase repeated by President Trump and then updated by President Biden (who called it "America's front yard"). This ideology/doctrine is the foundation of U.S. foreign policy in the region, including its unending support for the Guatemalan military.

Security for Who? Present Day Militarization & the War on Migrants and Activists

Justified in the name of national or regional "security" and the "war on drugs," the U.S. continues its military support to Guatemala. An outgrowth from the war on terror, this security ideology has (d)evolved instead into a war on migrants and activists. U.S. officials (on both sides of the aisle) will never admit to these wars. Rather, they call military assistance, "security assistance." But who is this security really for?

Is it for the handcuffed mother, stripped from her baby, as she is placed into Guatemalan border patrol's new U.S.-donated Humvee? Is it security for the community that is fighting against the imposition of a mine on their home by a transnational corporation (and its Guatemalan subsidiaries), and that is violently repressed with tactics that the Guatemalan police learned from the U.S. National Guard? Or is it security for the bipartisan political interests of U.S. politicians in curbing forced migration from Central America at any cost; or security for investor confidence in a company's ability to generate wealth, also at any cost? The answer should be obvious.



"From the beginning, Indigenous peoples had their lands to feed themselves. But one way that militarization affected us is that during the Internal Armed Conflict, the military not only killed the people, but also took away our territories. One cause of poverty is because people have nowhere to farm. And right now in our community, work is being done to defend life and justice, but also our right to territory. As Indigenous peoples that have been dispossessed as a result of militarization, it is very important to find a way to get the land back."

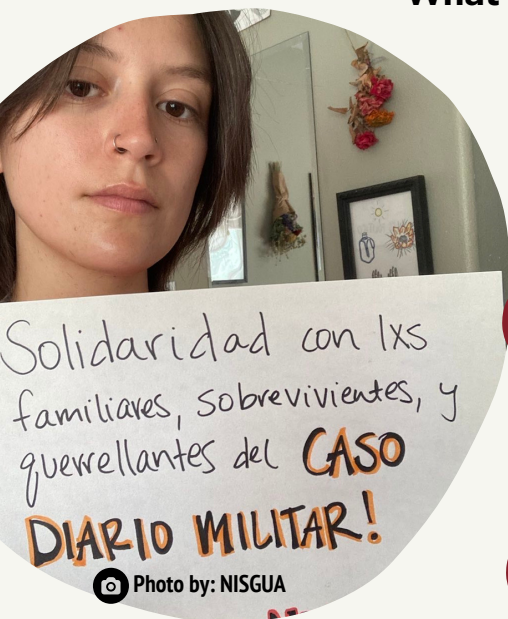
Member of the Association for Justice and Reconciliation (AJR), Kaqchikel region

"We don't want Guatemala to have an army because they exist for the defense of neoliberal capital. The military is a war machine destined to protect the CACIF (conglomerate of financial elites), the extractive companies, the corrupt, the interests of mining companies. They criminalize the majority of the people. They coordinate with corrupt judicial powers to fabricate crimes or charges against territorial defenders. The presence of the army is of no benefit to our struggle. It is the most powerful enemy for our struggle. Even just to see the military is very sad and scary. The military means terror for our people, whether it is the Guatemalan or a foreign military, because their presence is to execute actions against the people."

Member of the People's Assembly of the Department of Huehuetenango (ADH), Huehuetenango



What Can I Do About This Militarization Crisis if I'm in the U.S.?



1

Political Education: Study ideas or policies that stand out to you from this report, do research about anti-imperialist and anti-militarist movements in your country and abroad, create study groups with friends, feel your imagination expand as you do this!

2

End the Monroe Doctrine: NISGUA is an endorser of the conference - "In Search of a New U.S. Policy for a New Latin America: Burying 200 Years of the Monroe Doctrine" - taking place this April in Washington D.C. The conference will challenge this imperialist ideology and craft progressive foreign policy proposals from below. Keep an eye on NISGUA's online platforms for details (or contact us directly!).

3

Join or support grassroots organizations: Whether you join anti-imperialist organizations in the U.S. which challenge U.S. militarism, or you support people suffering the immediate impacts by funding organizations like NISGUA, we need you to invite more people into the movement. Share this report with friends, family, and comrades! ¡Hasta la victoria siempre!