



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on September 7, 2012

## Critics Slam Obama Deployment of U.S. Troops to Guatemala for Drug War

Critics from across the political spectrum are outraged after the Obama administration [announced](#) that it was [unconstitutionally](#) sending 200 U.S. Marines to Guatemala under the guise of fighting the drug war. According to officials, the American troops were deployed as part of “Operation Martillo,” a multi-national squad of soldiers and law-enforcement personnel supposedly aimed at countering narcotics trafficking throughout Central America.



The new President of Guatemala, Otto Pérez Molina — a widely respected tough-on-crime former military general who opposed communism — had said earlier this year that [legalizing drugs would be a better approach](#). However, the Obama administration [swiftly deployed high-level functionaries to coerce the leader into backing down](#). Apparently the mission was a success.

In mid-July, the Guatemalan government signed what news reports and officials described as a “treaty” with the Obama administration — the U.S. Senate, however, never ratified any such agreement as required under the Constitution. Within a month of the controversial deal, U.S. Marines, equipment, and military helicopters began arriving in Guatemala.

“This is the first Marine deployment that directly supports countering transnational crime in this area, and it’s certainly the largest footprint we’ve had in that area in quite some time,” Marine Staff Sgt. Earnest Barnes from the U.S. Southern Command [told](#) the Associated Press. However, the scheme, which began in January, is much broader than just the 200 U.S. Marines. The Coast Guard and assorted alphabet soup U.S. federal bureaucracies are involved as well.

The operation also includes forces from Belize, Britain, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, France, Guatemala, Honduras, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Panama, and Spain, according to [news reports](#). On top of that, the U.S. government has offered over \$100 million to governments in the region under the guise of the “Central American Regional Security Initiative” for 2012.

U.S. officials claimed that the American troops would be helping to find drug-laden planes and boats along Guatemalan coastlines. However, domestic forces will supposedly be doing the fighting, according to Obama administration spokesmen, who alleged that U.S. forces would only be allowed to defend themselves if fired upon.

“Marines in Guatemala are in a supporting role and we are providing aerial, communications and logistical support to a regional partner who is currently facing strong challenges with illicit trafficking along its coasts,” claimed Department of Defense spokesman Army Lt. Col. Todd Bresseale, adding that the deployment was “temporary in nature” and focused on supporting “regional authorities” in their own war. “This is not a new role nor the first time the U.S. military supports a partner in this capacity.”

Despite the lack of constitutional authority to send troops abroad to fight various undeclared “wars,”



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military officials had a variety of excuses purporting to justify the latest deployment. U.S. Rear Adm. Charles Michel, for example, [explained](#) that the “adversary” was highly mobile and well-funded — though he did not mention that drug cartels are only so wealthy and powerful because of massive profits associated with the “war” itself. He also claimed that the “adversary” supposedly “threatens democratic governments, terrorizes populations, impedes economic development and creates regional instability.”

For critics, however, that is hardly an excuse to send American forces into foreign nations without a declaration of war. Not only is the U.S. government borrowing more than a trillion dollars per year just to stay afloat, intervention abroad almost always causes what foreign-policy experts refer to “blowback” — consequences that will eventually come back to haunt the American people.

“I’m sure there are more drugs floating around the U.S. than in Guatemala, so would it be permissible and acceptable for another country to send its heavily armed troops here to fight their own war on drugs?” wondered popular libertarian analyst and commentator Gary D. Barnett. “The more likely scenario is that the U.S. is making sure that most of these drugs get delivered safely to the U.S.” Another scenario cited by analysts was knocking out certain less-favored cartels to eliminate competition.

According to Barnett, it is ironic that the U.S. government — which he called “one of the [largest drug traffickers on the planet](#)” — would wage a war all over the world to supposedly stop drugs. “The government depends heavily on its phony ‘war on drugs’ in order to fill the prisons of its corporate sponsors; thereby supplying money and taxpayer subsidized jobs to all the prison support companies,” he concluded. “And how else would the CIA fund its murderous covert operations without the sale and delivery of drugs?”

Human-rights activists expressed separate concerns, worrying that U.S. involvement in Guatemala would lead to continuing abuses that have become commonplace throughout much of Latin America — atrocities largely fueled by the drug war today. Executive Director Helen Mack of the Myrna Mack Foundation, for instance, recalled the historic trauma already inflicted upon the people of Central America by the U.S. government.

“Rural communities in Guatemala are fearful of the military being used to combat drug traffickers because the same techniques are applied that were used in contra warfare,” she was [quoted](#) as saying in news reports expressing alarm about the latest developments. “The historical memory is there and Guatemalans are fearful of that.” Other human rights activists echoed those concerns, and Congress instituted a partial ban on funding the Guatemalan government that is still in effect due to long-running state-sanctioned abuses.

Despite nearly a trillion spent on the “war on drugs,” there is little to show for it aside from death, destruction, increasing drug abuse, and wanton human rights violations at home and abroad. Well over 50,000 Mexicans have been slaughtered since the government there — prodded and financed by U.S. government — declared all-out war. And those facts have hardly escaped the notice of activists seeking a more sensible policy.

“The United States has poured millions of dollars into foreign militaries to stem the flow of drugs, but the criminal groups continue to wield enormous power to corrupt and intimidate — and to kill; while those foreign militaries are often responsible for serious human rights violations,” [observed](#) Acting U.S. Program Director Maria McFarland of Human Rights Watch in a recent piece calling for a discussion on



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reforms. “Sometimes they work together.”

Meanwhile, the latest announcement of U.S. troops heading to Guatemala comes amid a series of drug war-related scandals swirling around the Obama administration and growing more problematic every day. The Justice Department, for example, is obstructing a [congressional investigation into DEA drug-money laundering](#).

Separately, the Obama administration is trying its best to conceal the facts about its ATF scheme known as “[Fast and Furious](#),” which put thousands of high-powered U.S. weapons into the hands of Mexican cartels later [shown to be on the FBI payroll](#). Disgraced Attorney General Eric Holder has already been held in contempt of Congress for his role in the ongoing cover-up.

The CIA, meanwhile, is back in the spotlight following [new allegations of agency involvement in drug trafficking](#) — charges that have been made by top officials, [drug traffickers](#), and former CIA officers for decades. The so-called “intelligence” agency has built a [reputation](#) as one of the largest facilitators of the drug trade in the world.

At the same time, U.S. drug agents and mercenaries are still under fire worldwide following a [killing spree that left pregnant women and children dead in Honduras](#). The DEA was apparently searching for a canoe allegedly containing drugs, officials claimed.

But the never-ending controversies surrounding the drug war and the unconstitutional use of American forces are hardly unique to Obama. “Of course nobody is going to talk about this during an election year, because the only criticism that Mitt Romney would make of this foreign policy is that we didn’t send 500 Marines,” said Steve Newton with [The Delaware Libertarian](#), adding that many of the same drug cartel operatives supposedly being pursued were once trained by the U.S. military.

While the Obama administration makes [subtle campaign appeals to drug users](#), it is [simultaneously demanding or granting itself vast new powers to use the U.S. military at home and abroad as part of the “war on drugs”](#) — moving beyond just the “terror war” that originally provided the excuse for such [unconstitutional](#) activities. [Latin American leaders](#) and [political heavyweights](#) on [both sides of the aisle](#) in the United States, however, are becoming increasingly fed up with the war.

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