



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on May 25, 2012

Outrage Grows After U.S. Drug War Kills More Honduran Women, Children

The U.S. government's so-called "War on Drugs" in Central America is under heavy fire again after a barrage of negative publicity surrounding a controversial and deadly operation in Honduras earlier this month: an attack that terrorized villagers and reportedly killed two pregnant women and two children traveling on a riverboat. Fierce criticism also erupted when it emerged later that state-sponsored gunmen speaking English — presumably Americans, according to witnesses — pointed a gun at a teenager's head and threatened to shoot if he refused to talk.



While the Obama administration has acknowledged that there were Drug Enforcement Administration agents on board the helicopters that gunned down civilians during the operation, most American authorities have denied direct U.S. government participation in the actual killings and terror. The DEA insisted that, despite the U.S. State Department providing at least two of the helicopters and some of the mercenaries involved in the slaughter, its own functionaries were acting only in an "advisory" capacity.

Numerous victims, however, described some of their attackers as "gringos," a somewhat derogatory term for Americans. "If you don't talk we'll kill you.... Where is El Renco? Where is the merchandise?" the English-speaking drug warriors said to 17-year-old Celin Eriksson, according to his statements to the Associated Press after the operation. His 14-year-old cousin, Haskel Tom Brooks Wood, was killed on the riverboat as the drug warriors riddled it with bullet holes before and after shining a spotlight on it.

After shooting up the boat in the middle of the night, wounding several people and killing at least four more — [including two pregnant women, the young boy, another child, and possibly two other victims](#), all of whom were reportedly out looking for food — the helicopters landed in the village. The heavily armed squads stormed out. According to multiple news reports based on accounts from witnesses and local officials, the agents and mercenaries began breaking down doors of wooden shacks near the town of Ahuas, brutalizing villagers while searching for an alleged criminal suspected of involvement in drug transportation.

Several hours before dawn, one of the helicopters landed in front of Hilaria Zavala's hut. Half-a-dozen armed personnel emerged and kicked their way into her home, she said, before a man she described as a "gringo" threw her husband on the floor and put a gun to his head. "They kept him that way for two hours," Zavala recalled when interviewed by an AP reporter. "They asked if he was El Renco, if he worked for El Renco, if the stuff belonged to El Renco. My husband said he had nothing to do with it." Multiple villagers described similar scenes of horror as the rampaging bureaucrats and "contractors"



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swarmed the area screaming about a character known to them as “El Renco.” One witness cited in reports from the town said the government gunmen commandeered a local boat and even kidnapped a teenage boy who knew the area, supposedly to serve as their guide during the frantic search for a canoe thought to have drugs on board.

The U.S. State Department claimed Central Americans and U.S.-funded mercenaries were in charge of the operation, and that American agents were just “advising” them. Local news outlets reported that all of the gunmen were wearing military fatigues, though the U.S. embassy flatly denied that any American troops had been involved in that particular operation. U.S. soldiers, however, have participated in numerous drug operations in the region.

“So as you know, we support counter-narcotics interdiction not only in Honduras but throughout the Central American area. We do this through our program SICA, the Central American Integration System,” U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland [said](#) as she ruffled through papers containing her carefully outlined talking points, noting that she did not know whether the DEA advised U.S.-funded, -armed, and -trained Honduran drug warriors to open fire on civilians, but that the program adheres to U.S. law. “In this particular operation on May 11, the U.S. DEA was involved only in a supporting role.”

The Honduran military investigation concluded that the civilians — all of whom were innocent, described by local officials as “humble” and “honest” — were killed by “accident.” Apparently the soldiers were looking for the drug canoe and shot the wrong boat. It remains unclear whether the victims’ families will receive compensation, or whether any cash payment to the relatives would be paid by U.S. or Honduran taxpayers — not that money could ever compensate for the loss of innocent life. No criminals were arrested. But authorities from both countries claimed the purpose of the operation was to find some cocaine allegedly hidden on a canoe in the jungle.

Criticism of U.S. government funding for Honduran authorities has been growing, with at least 87 members of Congress asking the State Department to review the human-rights situation there. According to the department’s latest report on the issue, that Central American government’s police and agents are routinely involved in unlawful killings. Yet despite laws forbidding aid to such regimes — not to mention [the lack of constitutional authority](#) for foreign aid or a drug war — the U.S. government continues to borrow and print currency to finance its Honduran counterpart, as well as dozens of other unsavory regimes around the world.

In Yemen, U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks [revealed](#), senior American officials had conspired with the nation’s U.S.-backed and -financed dictator to lie about who was dropping bombs on supposed “militants.” The former dictator promised to take credit for the mass aerial killings if the U.S. government would slaughter the “terrorists” — mostly his political opponents — though the truth in that case eventually emerged. With the outrage over the killings in Honduras this month growing quickly, activists, locals, and reporters continue to [demand answers](#), hoping that the whole story will come out someday.

But even as it stands, the situation is already grim, analysts say. “Whether American agents or contractors pulled the trigger that killed two pregnant Honduran women who were headed to a mother’s day celebration, whether they put the gun to the head of a Honduran teenager and then left him bound in the jungle, are disputable facts,” [noted](#) Mike Riggs in a piece for the liberty-minded *Reason* magazine. “Why the Honduran government is waging a war against its people is not: The American government has instructed it to, and is training and equipping its military and law



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enforcement agencies.”

At least one U.S. congressman feigned outrage over the Obama administration-backed operation, too, blaming local authorities for the killings instead of disastrous American policies. “I have consistently expressed deep concerns regarding the danger of pouring U.S. security assistance into a situation where Honduran security forces are involved in serious human rights violations,” said Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), suggesting a U.S. “review” of its so-called “security” foreign aid to the Honduran government. “The problems are getting worse, not better, making such a review all the more urgent.”

Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) chief Ethan Nadelmann blasted the attack as well, even if U.S. bureaucrats did not physically pull the triggers or kill the women and children. “DEA agents are never permitted to be involved in the killing of innocent people, whether or not they are in pursuit of criminal suspects,” he told the AP. “What happened in Honduras appears to have crossed the line — an action that was not approved by the U.S. Congress — and is, ultimately, unethical.”

Meanwhile, even as U.S. taxpayers continue [showering compliant foreign governments](#) with billions of dollars for the drug war, Congress is investigating the Obama administration for [supplying high-powered weapons to Mexican drug cartels](#) under operation “Fast and Furious.” The DEA’s money-laundering operations are also under congressional scrutiny after the *New York Times* reported that the agency was [laundering massive amounts of drug profits](#) for assorted criminal enterprises. The administration is stonewalling on both probes, according to congressional investigators.

The former head of the DEA, meanwhile, has [accused](#) the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency of trafficking cocaine into America, and numerous [reports](#) and inside sources in recent decades have [made similar allegations](#). And the border is still wide open — [on purpose, according to experts](#). On the other hand, last year, it emerged conclusively that the CIA had indeed been involved in [shooting down a plane carrying American missionaries over Peru](#) — supposedly because they thought the plane might have drugs on it. Veronica Bowers and her baby were both killed.

But as the U.S.-backed and [United Nations-inspired prohibition](#) continues to ravish the region as tens of thousands of innocent lives are lost, Latin American governments have increasingly started to [debate alternatives](#). The [tough-on-crime President](#) of neighboring Guatemala, for example, is actually lobbying for complete legalization to save his nation from the savagery and crime associated with the war.

President Obama, however, [dispatched high-level functionaries](#) to ensure continued drug-war compliance by governments in the region, promising more U.S. tax money to national rulers who cooperate fully. And more recently, the administration [asked Congress for even broader permission](#) to use American military forces at home and around the world in both the terror and drug wars — all without mentioning the [Constitution](#) a single time. But at the same time, opposition is growing stronger after each atrocity that comes to light.

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