

**Marching Towards The Past In Guatemala:
A New Government Head By A 'Genocidal' General;
An Army Trained By Former Kaibil Elite Forces, Some Of Whom Are
Implicated In The Zetas Drug Cartel In Mexico**

By Annie Bird

In Guatemala, former military officers and their supporters have filed legal charges against human rights activists, journalists, and surviving victims of State repression, even as a former general, Otto Perez Molina - himself implicated in Guatemala's genocide - prepares to assume the Guatemalan presidency on January 14, 2012!

Moreover, Perez Molina has named high ranking trainers of the brutal Kaibil forces to the top three military command positions. Kaibil's were directly implicated in the very worst of the State repression and genocide of the 1970s, 80s and early 90s, and some today have direct links to the Mexico-based "Zeta" narco-trafficking cartel.

VIEW: Al Jazeera news report "Zetas recruit Guatemalan Kaibils":
<http://english.aljazeera.net/video/americas/2011/08/201181554013410344.html>

Furthermore, Perez Molina is getting set to engage the Army in policing matters in partnership with the US government that is launching phase II of the brutal and deadly Mexican "war on drugs" in Central America.

2012: MARCHING TOWARDS THE PAST

As Otto Perez Molina prepares to assume the presidency on January 14, 2012, he has named commanders of Guatemala's "special forces", the feared Kaibils, to the highest positions in the military. Two officers have been appointed to cabinet level positions, even while the respected and courageous Attorney General, Claudia Paz, along with human rights activists and journalists, have come under legal and public attack by war veterans. Earlier this year, CICIG (the United

Nations backed Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala) came under attack from a Washington lobbyist hired by Guatemalan businessmen.

On December 14, 2011, a dual US/ Guatemalan citizen, also a coffee plantation owner, filed legal charges against 52 people, including a US citizen who worked for Amnesty International in Guatemala during the genocide carried out by the military, and including Jennifer Harbury, an attorney who became an internationally recognized campaigner against torture following the extended torture and presumed extrajudicial execution of her husband, Efraim Bamaca, a guerrilla commander she met during peace negotiations in Mexico City.

This is the third legal complaint of its kind lodged over the past month and a half, in what CICIG characterized as an attack on the Attorney General, seemingly an orchestrated campaign pressuring her to resign.

Over the past 2 years, human rights organizations and lawyers – and some politicians – have worked very hard to retake control of the legal system and the administration of justice from organized crime networks which have corrupted elements of the police, prosecuting attorneys and judges.

The clandestine criminal networks in Guatemala today grew out of the military/ business alliances which in the 1960s to early 1990s controlled the nation through US-backed military juntas, carrying out crimes with total impunity ranging from genocide and large scale massacres to drug trafficking. The current Attorney General, Claudia Paz, has been extremely effective in arresting and prosecuting top organized crime figures and high ranking military officers implicated in crimes against humanity.

GENOCIDE AND WAR CRIMES LINKED SPECIAL FORCES COMMANDERS NAMED TO TOP GOVERNMENT POSITIONS

The return of current and former military officers to high ranking positions in government is deeply concerning to human rights

activists. The Guatemalan special-forces unit known as the Kaibils is especially renowned for brutality, and has been extensively implicated in heinous massacres that occurred in the worst years of the “cold war” repression.

President elect Perez Molina is making no concessions to concerns. Kaibils were named to the three top military positions: Col. Ulises Anzueto as Defense Minister, Col. René Casados Ramírez as Commander of the Joint Chiefs of Defense, and Col Manuel López Ambrosio as Sub-commander of the Joint Chiefs of Defense. Anzueto’s appointment bucks hierarchy, by military tradition his appointment will force 16 Generals to resign. Another Colonel was named Interior Minister, Mauricio Lopez Bonilla, who managed Perez Molina’s presidential campaign.

In 1995, based on witness testimony and written documentation, Anzueto was named by Harbury as one of three officers responsible for the kidnapping, disappearance and torture of Efrain Bamaca. Ever since, the case has languished in Guatemalan courts, defying rulings of the Inter American Court of Human Rights.

Otto Perez Molina himself, and two other generals, were named in a second case, focusing on the commanding officers whose direct responsibility became apparent through declassified documents and evidence obtained during the first case, charges filed in March 2011.

ZETA-LINKS AS WELL

The placement of four Kaibils in top government positions, including the presidency, is even more shocking given the extensively reported ties between Kaibils and the gruesomely violent Zeta drug trafficking cartel.

The Zetas were originally an elite unit of the Mexican Army Airborne Special Forces (GAFE) and are reported to have been trained in Fort Bragg, a US military base, to combat drug trafficking. In the late 1990’s they were then trained by the Guatemalan Kaibil “special forces.”

It is widely reported that, in 2000, the unit known as the Zetas left GAFE, en masse, to begin work as Gulf Cartel's enforcers. The Gulf Cartel has, for decades, had a solid presence in Central America. It grew out of a network of local traffickers with strong ties to various militaries and death squads.

Ever since, but particularly since 2005, reports of Zeta recruitment of former Kaibils and former Kaibil training of Zetas, have been frequent. As recently as April 6, 2011, the Mexican Vice Minister of Security reported that current and former Kaibils were training Zetas in northern Guatemala and participated in drug smuggling, at the same time denouncing a pattern of large scale robbery by Zetas of weapons from military bases in Mexico and Guatemala.

The newly appointed Guatemalan Minister of Defense was the director of the Kaibil training academy until 2009, and the Commander of the Joint Chiefs of Defense was a Kaibil instructor.

The Kaibils have been credited as responsible for introducing some of the most gruesome techniques to the Zetas, including severing heads and dismembering bodies. This is no surprise given the Kaibils' savage history in the Guatemalan civil war. Most recently, on May 17, 2011 former Kaibils, now members of the Zetas, were arrested for the massacre and decapitation of 27 farmworkers on the Los Cocos farm in Sayaxche, Peten.

GENOCIDE PRESIDENT

The savagery of the Kaibils is well known, even within one of the most brutal militaries imaginable, as well documented in two "Truth Commissions," the 1999 United Nations sponsored report "Memory of Silence" and the 1998 Catholic Church's report "Guatemala Never Again."

The United Nations backed Truth Commission found that during conflict over 200,000 people were killed and 45,000 disappeared. It found that 93% of the acts of violence were perpetrated by the military or paramilitary forces, 3% by armed revolutionaries and 3%

unidentifiable authors. It documented 626 massacres by State security forces, the vast majority carried out against Mayan communities, and noted:

“The CEH has noted particularly serious cruelty in many acts committed by agents of the State, especially members of the Army, in their operations against Mayan communities... Acts such as the killing of defenseless children, often by beating them against walls or throwing them alive into pits where the corpses of adults were later thrown; the amputation of limbs; the impaling of victims; the killing of persons by covering them in petrol and burning them alive; the extraction, in the presence of others, of the viscera of victims who were still alive; the confinement of people who had been mortally tortured, in agony for days; the opening of the wombs of pregnant women, and other similarly atrocious acts, were not only actions of extreme cruelty against the victims, but also morally degraded the perpetrators and those who inspired, ordered or tolerated these actions.”

In August 2011, four former Kaibils and their commanding officer were sentenced to 6,060 years in prison for their participation in the gruesome massacre of 264 men, women and children in 1982 in the village of Dos Erres, Peten. This was the first time that soldiers have been arrested, tried and sentenced for any of the hundreds of massacres committed by State security forces during the “la violencia” (the violence), the military campaigns from 1981 to 1983.

The UN Truth Commission found that State forces committed acts of genocide against four Mayan peoples, the Achi, Q'anjobal, Kiche and Ixil. President elect Perez Molina commanded the Municipality of Nebaj military base from 1982 until the mid-1980's, Nebaj being the center of the Ixil genocide. Survivors describe being tortured by him. At least one survivor has done so in court, and survivors and leaked military documents demonstrate involvement in massacres.

Legal cases against the intellectual and material authors of the Ixil genocide have also moved forward under the tenure of AG Claudia

Paz y Paz. Former General Hector Mario Lopez Fuentes was arrested June 20, 2011, on charges of genocide against the Ixil people between 1982 and 1983. On October 12, 2011 Jose Mauricio Rodriguez Sanchez, head of military intelligence from 1983 to 1985, was arrested and indicted for genocide against the Ixil people. The advancement of these cases is now seriously at risk

PRO-MILITARY RALLIES - "WHEN 'MI GENERAL' WINS, WE WILL FINISH WHAT WE STARTED"

2011 is the first year military officers (being the "intellectual authors") have been taken to court for the political crimes of the 1980s, but the impending presidency of one of their own seems to have rallied their spirits.

On November 13, 2011 shortly after Perez Molina's electoral victory, the military and their supporters rallied in a march in the center of Guatemala City, decrying the prosecution of military officers for war crimes. This is the first time since the end of the war that the military has carried out a demonstration of this kind.

In the year leading up to the 2011 presidential elections, reports from the countryside indicated that networks of former Civil Defense Patrollers, veterans and other military allies – all implicated in the genocide and other extreme human rights abuses - mobilized to rally support for Perez Molina. Over the past year, frequent reports of vague threats made by these networks have been heard from surviving victims from the 1980's, along the lines of: "When 'Mi General' wins, we will finish what we started."

POLITICALLY MOTIVATED LEGAL CHARGES

Since June 2011, the association of military veterans and their allies have been taking aim at the current Attorney General, Claudia Paz y Paz. In newspaper advertisements veterans denounced prosecutors and human rights defenders, claiming the veterans would respond to attacks. Given the long history of endemic repression in Guatemala, these advertisements are perceived by many as threats.

The ads asserted that military officers were being unfairly persecuted, and that instead of pursuing justice in civilian courts, the Attorney General must respect the military tribunal trials that some of those accused of war crimes had been submitted to, military trials presented clearly as a tactic to avoid being held legally responsible in civilian courts for atrocities.

This year, legislators also attempted to quietly push through a new amnesty law. Both mechanisms – the mis-use of military tribunals and the passing of amnesty laws - violate international law norms.

On November 2, 2011 retired Col. Ricardo Méndez Ruiz filed legal charges, naming 26 people as responsible for his kidnapping in 1982.

On November 29, 2011 the Military Widows Association filed charges against 32 people for 45 acts of violence they claim were carried out by armed revolutionary movements.

On December 14, 2011 dual US/ Guatemalan citizen and coffee planter Theodore Plocharski, who apparently moved to Guatemala in 1980, filed charges against 52 people attributing to them responsibility for 11 acts of violence against diplomats and foreign military officers.

Many of the individuals named as defendants are repeated in the three complaints. At least one person named in the charges had not even been born at the time of the alleged acts, others were infants, some were not in the country.

No one doubts that these charges are direct attacks against the Attorney General, human rights activists, academics, politicians and journalists. Claudia Paz's deceased father and cousin were named in all three cases. Others named include: Miguel Angel Albizures, a founder of FAMDEGUA, the victims association that promoted the Dos Erres prosecution; Jennifer Harbury and Jean Marie Simon, international human rights activists; outgoing first lady Sandra Torres; as well as well-known journalists, politicians, feminists, clergy, academics, and others. Some were members of the revolutionary movements.

CICIG (the United Nations backed Commission Against Impunity) has characterized the series of legal complaints as an orchestrated attack against the Attorney General, noting that Ricardo Méndez Ruiz clearly stated in an interview that he was going after the Attorney General. The aim of the campaign appears to be to demonstrate that Paz does not lead impartial investigations, a possible pretext to force her out of office.

Even so, the Attorney General has assigned investigation of the charges to a special unit created to investigate war crimes. If the charges follow the example of those levied against military officers, it may take 15 or more years to go to court, if any evidence is uncovered. However given the chronic problems of lack of independence of the judiciary, there is definitely a risk that those charged could face biased trials.

President-elect Otto Perez Molina has picked up on the discourse of these seemingly frivolous legal charges. During a November 9, 2011 interview, Perez asserted that justice must be impartial, not “persecution of just one side.” Four distinct revolutionary movements participated in the 36 year armed conflict that ended in 1996. The first revolutionary movement was founded by military officers loyal to the democratically elected government overthrown in a CIA orchestrated coup in 1954.

LEGAL CASES AGAINST DRUG KING-PINS

In addition to helping advance criminal trials against Guatemalan war criminals, Paz has also been highly successful in arresting and extraditing top level drug kingpins, most of whom have been operating with total impunity for decades. The US ambassador to Guatemala, Arnold Chacon, expressed support for her in November, and on November 30, 2011 Assistant Secretary of State for Global Affairs, Maria Otero, during a visit to Guatemala met with Perez Molina. Many believe pressure from State Department led to a December 8 joint press conference presented by Perez Molina and Claudia Paz in which they assured that Paz's job was safe.

PEREZ MOLINA TIES TO WASHINGTON

For decades the State Department has maintained a very close relationship to Perez Molina. In 1995 he was reported to have been on the CIA payroll while head of military intelligence in 1993, when he oversaw a secret torture center and prison reported to hold over 300 prisoners. His name was very frequently mentioned in Wikileaks cables. He is a graduate of the School of the Americas.

Despite extensive evidence of his participation in extreme violations, including a video and photographs of him standing over the bodies of three murdered and tortured indigenous men in 1982, the State Department appears to have done nothing to distance itself from him. The embassy recognized his victory the night of the election before the official tally was in. Obama even called to congratulate him on November 21, and to express the US interest in cooperation in security initiatives in Central America.

During a December trip to Mexico, Perez Molina visited Mexican President Felipe Calderon to discuss security cooperation. Human rights activists claim that Calderon's "war on drugs" has cost 45,000 lives in Mexico and been unsuccessful in stemming trafficking. Calderon's War is financed by the United States through the Merida Initiative which, when proposed in 2006, was intended to finance security operations in Central America as well as Mexico. However, only this year has Washington's focus turned back to Central America, and the region is already showing signs of militarization.

Perez Molina and Calderon share some of the same friends in Washington. The Spanish public relations firm Ostos & Sola worked on both Perez Molina's and Calderon's campaigns, as well as the campaigns of Haitian President Michel Martelly and Chilean President Sebastian Pinera, all considered right wing. The firm's Executive Director in Washington DC is Damien Merlo, who was previously Vice President of Otto Reich Associates, at a time when the DC lobby firm, run by Bush administration State Department appointee Otto Reich,

advocated for the recognition of Honduran coup government of Roberto Micheletti.

MILITARIZATION versus JUSTICE

Earlier this year, in March 2011, Washington's own breed of political hit men, lobbyists or strategic advisors, were hired to take on, or out, the highly successful United Nations backed Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, CICIG. Former Ambassador Robert Geldbard of Washington Global Partners, a former special envoy to the Balkans during the Clinton Presidency and later Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, was hired by Guatemalan businessmen, including WalMart Central America Vice President Salvador Paiz, reportedly to undermine CICIG's image with its funders in Washington and New York, the Congress and the United Nations.

According to an October 15, 2011 article in the Economist, Guatemalan businessmen were reportedly angered by the arrest warrants issued against the former Minister of Governance Carlos Vielmann, accused by CICIG of running an organized crime related death squad within the police.

Cleaning up corruption at the highest levels of government is apparently not popular amongst the powerful economic and military sectors, but it is obviously key to ending the devastating violence, repression and impunity in Central America, and is completely dependent on the political will of the powerful sectors in Guatemala and the so-called international community.

As efforts were underway to undermine CICIG's support in New York and Washington, both the UN and the State Department were pushing full steam ahead on the Central America Security Strategy, particularly focused on a push to 'reform' the police forces in Central America, which in El Salvador and Guatemala were created from forces 'recycled' from the militaries.

In the 'Northern Triangle' of Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador), the police forces (historically linked to and dependent on the militaries) are infamously corrupt. The US, United Nations and international community are seemingly turning to infamously corrupt, violent and criminal military partners to 'clean up' security.

In furtherance to this focus on strengthening police forces in the Northern Triangle countries, in November, Panamanian President Martinelli announced that the US and Colombia are establishing in Panama a joint training center for police forces from throughout the region, bringing back nightmarish memories of the School of the Americas, which originally trained military forces from throughout Latin America in Panama.

PRIVATIZATION

There also appears to be a push to involve private security contractors in the police reforms and 'anti-narcotics war' in Central America. Former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe has coordinated a series of conferences for mayors and presidents of Central America, sponsored by private security corporation Continental Security and Integrated Systems (CIS). 55% of Plan Colombia funds were spent on US based private security contractors. It appears Central America will follow suit.

Military and former military officers dominate the private security industry throughout the region, and in recent years the presence of private security forces in the countryside, especially in Guatemala and Honduras, has grown extensively, largely present where mines, hydroelectric dams and biofuel projects are being developed by transnational corporations and the local elite.

In the Bajo Aguan region of Honduras, it is reported that 1980s death squad member Billy Joya advised the local police before a rash of death squad style killings of land rights activists in conflict with biofuel producers broke out; at least 50 campesinos activists have been killed in under two years.

In addition to Washington's willingness to work with incoming president Perez Molina and his Kaibil cabal, in El Salvador former General Munguia was named Security Minister in November, an extremely controversial move toward 'militarization' of civilian security. Analysts claim that the appointment came in response to pressure from the US Embassy.

Perez Molina has pledged to deploy Kaibils to combat drug trafficking, despite accusations against current and former Kaibils of participating in drug trafficking. He has also pledged to mobilize the Airforce Special Forces in the drug war, and to expand the military by 2,500 new elements.

In Honduras, the reform program has been vigorously denounced as a charade run by the same corrupt power players that created the criminal networks within the police and that supported the 2009 military coup against the democratically elected government of President Zelaya. Alfredo Landaverde, a former Anti Narcotics Chief and one of the most outspoken critics of the "reform," was gunned down by motorcycle assassins on December 7.

GRIM PROSPECTS FOR REAL SECURITY AND JUSTICE

While undoubtedly clean police forces are critical to building safe communities, pouring money, arms and training into corrupted security forces, as shown by the Zetas, will only fuel the violence, corruption and impunity.

There must be real political interest in addressing impunity and corruption and in prosecuting organized crimes' political power players. Apparently prosecution of corruption is not good for transnational business interests, but the security industry is big business.

(Since 1995, Annie Bird is co-director of Rights Action, www.rightsaction.org)

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