

NYT COVERS THE WAR ON ~~TERROR~~ DRUGS WITH NO MENTION OF LARGER CONTEXT

This NYT article, which describes how the US has adopted the Special Forces approaches used in Iraq and Afghanistan to fight the drug trade in Central America, rather bizarrely makes no mention of the larger context—growing opposition in Latin America to the War on Drugs as such. On the contrary, the NYT suggests there is consensus about drugs unlike the Cold War disagreements that existed when Oliver North built similar bases in Honduras to fight the Contras.

Narcotics cartels, transnational organized crime and gang violence are designated as threats by the United States and Central American governments, with a broader consensus than when that base was built – in an era when the region was viewed through a narrow prism of communism and anticommunism.

“The drug demand in the United States certainly exacerbates challenges placed upon our neighboring countries fighting against these organizations – and why it is so important that we partner with them in their countering efforts,” said Vice Adm. Joseph D. Kernan, the No. 2 officer at Southern Command, which is responsible for military activities in Central and South America.

Compare that formula—US demand creates the need for us to set up Forward Operating Bases out of which our Special Forces can operate—with that offered by Guatemala’s right wing President, Otto Pérez Molina, in his calls to legalize drugs. [This is my very rough translation.]

In part, we have seen an unequal struggle [against drugs] because America is not cooperating with Central America as it should on this problem.

[The fight against drugs] is a shared responsibility that has different levels and degrees that each country must take.

The US is the largest consumer and the final destination of all the drugs passing through Central America and therefore it has the greatest responsibility.

In the last proposal made in July 2011, at a meeting in Guatemala, U.S. representatives said they would put in one dollar for every three dollars that Central Americans put in—that is 25% to 75%. That is not accepting the shared responsibility they have, but instead leaves the burden to us. Central America, rather than investing those three dollars to eliminate poverty, meet basic services, and develop our countries, spends them to combat drug trafficking, the greatest consumption of which takes place in America.

That is, Pérez argues that the US places demands on Central American nations far beyond what they should have to bear, and as a result, those countries spend all their money fighting the trafficking that feeds US demand, rather than investing in their own development. Central American leaders want the US to pay its fair share; the US wants to set up the same kind of FOBs it does in countries it is occupying.

In his push for legalization, Pérez tried to hold a Central American summit to begin discussing the idea in March. At least according to Pérez, Honduras' President Porfirio Lobo said he would attend, though reportedly in response to US pressure, Lobo (along with two other Central American Presidents) backed out at the

last minute and sent his Vice President Samuel Reyes instead. Nevertheless, Pérez' failed efforts in March to build consensus support for legalization still led one of America's closest allies, Colombian President and host of the Cartagena summit, Juan Manuel Santos, to call for discussion of alternatives to the current approach on the war on drugs at the Summit of the Americas.

So it's not just that the US is building the same kind of militarized response in Central America to fight its own drug suppliers as it uses in the Middle East and Africa to fight terrorism (and also drugs). But it is doing so even as more and more Latin American leaders call for new, more rational approaches to the problem.