

Rights Action

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Bitter white-washing of U.S. role in Guatemala

by author of *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*

In a recent article in *The Nation* (<https://www.thenation.com/article/world/americas-skewed-path-in-guatemala/>), Stephen Schlesinger - co-author with Stephen Kinzer of "*Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*" - wrote that by recognizing the 2023 elections that brought the new Guatemalan government to power, the U.S. government "has commendably made up for its cruel intervention of 1954, helping Guatemala enter a new democratic age."

This is a mind-boggling statement, particularly for someone who co-authored such an important book. Somehow, simply by respecting the democratic will of the Guatemalan people, the U.S. has "made up" for the U.S.-orchestrated coup in 1954 ... and all the followed.

The U.S. has never come close to 'making up' for the 1954 coup that ousted Guatemala's last (until now) democratically elected government and returned to power the traditional economic, political and military elites. The U.S. has not 'made up' for the U.S.-backed repression that increased exponentially through the 1950s, 60s, 70s against a growing social movement and small armed insurgency.

Genocides against Mayan peoples: The U.S. has not 'made up' for its complicity with scorched earth massacres, forced disappearances of over 45,000 people, forced displacement of over 1,000,000, and the planning and carrying out of the crime of genocide in four Mayan regions (<https://hnh.org/library/research/genocide-in-guatemala-guide/>) from 1978-1985. Estimates of how many civilians were killed and



massacred, the majority being Indigenous people, run well over 250,000.

Then, after the signing of the so-called "Peace Accords" in 1996 right through to the 2023 elections, the U.S. maintained full military, economic, political relations with 27 years of - in varying degrees - repressive, corrupt, anti-democratic governments known in Guatemala as the 'Pacto de Corruptos' (pact of the corrupt). The U.S. (and Canada) called them "democratic allies" the entire time.

From the 1954 coup through to today, the U.S. has been (with some short-lived exceptions) consistent in its policies and actions that undermine democracy and the rule of law →

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while maintaining full relations with its natural allies, i.e. the repressive, corrupt, anti-democratic traditional economic, military and political elites.

Schlesinger's white-washing of the policies and actions of the U.S. continued, as he refers to President Biden as "a vocal pro-democracy advocate." When and where in Latin America has the U.S. ever really supported democracy?

Schlesinger would know that when Biden was Vice-President, the Obama administration 'legitimized' the 2009 military coup in Honduras that ousted the democratic government of President Mel Zelaya. The Canadian government of Prime Minister Harper took the same position.

Then everything in Honduras got worse.

From 2009-2022, Honduras was ruled by a series of military-backed, corrupt, anti-democratic regimes that the U.S. and Canada called "democratic allies" the entire time. Quality of life for a majority of Hondurans was thrown off a cliff, as happened in Guatemala after the 1954 coup. The country experienced its worst indices of poverty and destitution, violence and repression, corruption and impunity. More Hondurans were forced to flee the country during this period than at any time in its history.

Schlesinger's article completely misrepresents how deadly and destructive the role of the U.S. has been in Guatemala from 1954 through to today. It misrepresents, I suspect, the actual interests of the U.S. in Guatemala in the future.

Portrayal of U.S. & Canadian-supported devastation

On March 8, Juan Orlando Hernandez (former President of Honduras) was found guilty, in a New York court, of operating a drug-trafficking cartel. It is hard to overstate how complicit the U.S. and Canada were in 'legitimizing' and supporting 12 years and 7 months of the repressive, "open for global business", narco regime headed by Juan Orlando Hernandez, calling it a "democratic allie" the entire time.

Rights Action recommends listening to Episode 7, parts I and II, of the Under the Shadow podcast series that recap the U.S. and Canadian-backed military coup d'état of June 27, 2009, and then almost 13 years of unconditional U.S. and Canadian support for the narco regime.

- Episode 7, Part I – 2009 Honduras: La Resistencia (<https://nacla.org/under-shadow-ep-7-part-1>)
- Episode 7, Part II – Honduras 2009: Legacy of a Coup (<https://nacla.org/under-shadow-ep-7-part-ii>)

In Update 3 of the podcast, Karen Spring (former Rights Action colleague, long-time co-coordinator of the Honduras Solidarity Network) takes the listener inside the trial that found Juan Orlando Hernández guilty of drug trafficking.

- Update 3 – Narcodictator, Convicted (<https://nacla.org/under-shadow-update-3>)

Karen provides a devastating summary of just how much violence and damage the narco regime did to Honduras, its people and society, government and State institutions,

Denouncing U.S., Canadian, Australian and E.U. support for Israel's campaign of ethnic cleansing in Palestine

Consistent with Rights Action's work to expose and try to hold the U.S. and Canada accountable for their 'legitimization' of and support for corrupt, repressive, anti-democratic (and drug-trafficking!) regimes in Honduras and Guatemala, Rights Action denounces the policies and actions of the governments of the U.S., Canada, Australia and E.U. that are providing military, economic, political and ideological/media support for Israel's military campaign of ethnic cleansing slaughter, forced starvation, destruction and forced removal of Palestinians in Gaza.

The ethnic cleansing slaughter and starvation of Palestinians is reminiscent of the worst years of genocides and massacres of mainly Mayan people in Guatemala in the early 1980s. During the worst years of these genocides, Israel provided training and weaponry to the Guatemalan regimes, some of which is summarized in Rights Action commentaries (<https://rightsaction.org/emails>).

Rights Action supports calls for:

- Immediate and permanent ceasefire.
- Immediate delivery of massive amounts of comprehensive humanitarian relief.

- Release of all hostages, political prisoners and illegally detained people.
- Support, for as long as it takes, for a comprehensive negotiation process that deals with the extreme death, suffering and destruction happening right now (beginning on October 7), and that addresses the historic root causes, going back to 1948, including the establishment of the Israeli Apartheid system and the violent, illegal occupation and on-going illegal settler expansionism.

"Many of us like to ask ourselves, 'What would I do if I was alive during slavery? Or the Jim Crow south? Or apartheid? What would I do if my country was committing genocide?'

The answer is, you're doing it. Right now."

"The Zone of Interest is about the danger of ignoring atrocities – including in Gaza"

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/14/the-zone-of-interest-auschwitz-gaza-genocide>

of Honduras, it's government, state institutions, people and society

all enabled by the U.S. and Canada. The trial exposed:

- the fraud that is the U.S.-led "war on drugs" in the Americas, such that the U.S. and Canada supported and 'legitimized' a regime that was knowingly shipping drugs north to U.S. and Canadian markets.
- how the narco regime corrupted every institution and State and government, including the judiciary, legislative branch, police and army.
- how the narco regime empowered, enriched and operated in partnership with "the gangs" that, in mainstream media and policy newspeak, are the source of all problems that plague Honduras, forcing people to flee.
- how mainstream media operates, more often than not, as an information outlet for the foreign policy establishments of the U.S. and Canada. With few exceptions, the media ignored the "Honduras story" or parroted analysis emanating from Washington and Ottawa, from the day of the June 27, 2009 coup through to when Hernandez was forced from office on January 27, 2022.
- how the newly elected democratic government of Honduras now faces the 'herculean task' of trying to

begin to repair the devastation and destruction done to the people, State and society, even as the same media and policy establishments in the U.S. and Canada begin to blame the new government for all the ills of Honduras.

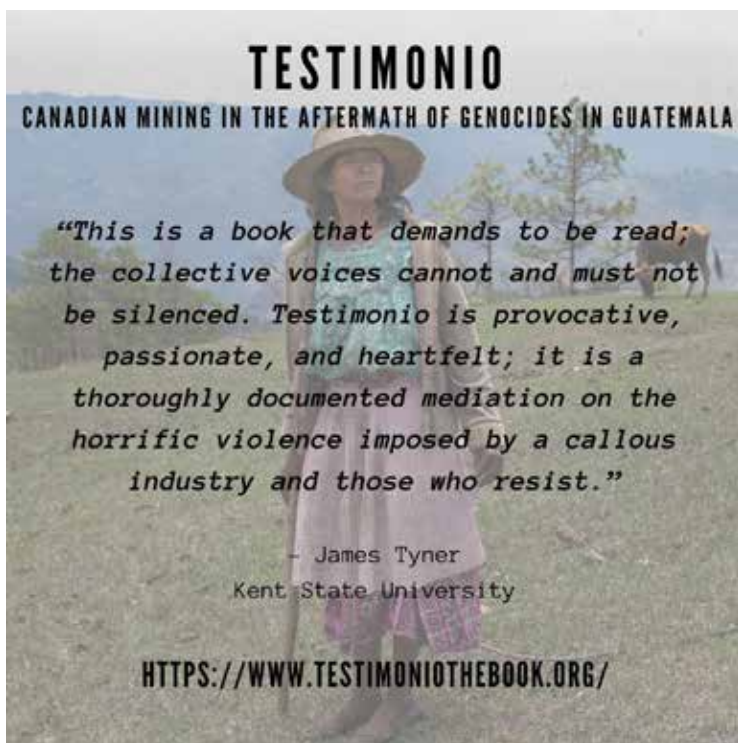
And the trial exposed, yet again, the utter lack of political oversight and legal accountability in the U.S. and Canada for the policies and actions of our governments internationally. There are simply no consequences whatsoever when our governments support and enable repressive, corrupt regimes, and lie about it.

Yet there are consequences! It is the majority Honduran population, plus the institutions of government and the State, that suffered the consequences of this U.S. and Canadian-backed nightmare, as all aspects of their quality of life were flushed down the toilet.

(Follow the work of Karen Spring and Honduras Solidarity Network leading a campaign to hold the U.S. and Canada responsible for supporting the Honduran narco-state <https://www.hondurasnow.org/category/narco-trial-campaign/>)

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PODCAST SERIES

Under the Shadow of the U.S.

"No country in Latin America has remained free from the shadow hanging over them.

The shadow of the United States. The shadow of the Monroe Doctrine."

Rights Action recommends the entire podcast series by Michael Fox, in co-production with NACLA (<https://nacla.org/>) and The Real News Network (<https://therealnews.com/>). Americans and Canadian alike will learn from this moving and informative series. Listen: <https://nacla.org/under-shadow>.



*"No country in Latin America has remained free from the shadow hanging over them.
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