

Reinventing Guatemalan History. Wall Street Journal Upholds Rios Montt, Denies Crimes against Humanity

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History reinventors support despots. Social democrats are vilified. Crimes of war, against humanity and genocide are sanitized. They're whitewashed. They disappear in plain sight.

Washington tolerates no independent governments. Left of center democratic ones are most vulnerable.

In 1953, the CIA's first coup deposed Iran's Mohammad Mosaddegh. At the time, The New York Times called him "the most popular politician in the country." Reza Shah Pahlavi replaced him. A generation-long reign of terror followed.

In 1954, Washington ousted Guatemala's Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. In 1952, Truman authorized CIA action. Eisenhower followed through.

Paramilitary subversion and psychological warfare forced him out. Carlos Castillo Armas replaced him. Death squad justice followed. So did decades of genocide. More on that below.

On May 10, a three-judge Guatemalan panel found former dictator/General Efraim Rios Montt guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity.

From March 23, 1982 - August 8, 1983, he was Guatemala's president. He seized power the old-fashioned way. Coup d'etat force installed him.

Less than 17 months later, Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores replaced him. He did it the same way. In 2003 presidential elections, Montt ran unsuccessfully. In 2007, he returned to public office in Congress.

Until January 14, 2012, he remained immune from prosecution. Eight days later, he was indicted for genocide and crimes against humanity. His record is well documented. It's indisputable. More on that below.

He's now aged 86. Judge Yasmin Barrios said "(w)e are completely convinced of the intent to destroy the Ixil ethnic groups."

He was sentenced to 80 years imprisonment. His co-defendant, Jose Mauricio Rodriguez Sanchez, served as intelligence chief during his tenure. He was acquitted on the same charges.

The trial lasted five weeks. Over 100 witnesses testified. They included psychologists, military experts, and Maya Ixil Indian survivors. They explained Montt's scorched earth policy. He slaughtered tens of thousands. He destroyed hundreds of villages. More on that below.

Mary O'Grady is Wall Street Journal Americas columnist. Her commentaries reinvent history. Fiction substitutes for indisputable facts.

On May 20, she [headlined](#) "The Left's Cold War Revenge in Guatemala: The history behind an absurd court ruling that Gen. Rios Montt is guilty of genocide."

Convicting him for genocide "is not supported by the facts," she claimed. Doing so "is more a score-settling exercise by the international left than a search for truth and justice."

She called indigenous areas "havens from which terrorists planned, prepared and executed attacks on the rest of the country."

She admitted that some army units committed massacres. "But it was 'in no way' " state policy. A convoluted version of history followed.

She claimed testimonies of survivors and prosecution experts didn't prove genocide. "The absurdity of this has not been lost on many Guatemalans," she said.

"Ixil people and others from the region view Montt as a hero," she claimed.

Some hero! Over 70,000 corpses on his watch prove otherwise. So do around 200,000 throughout decades of conflict.

In 1996, Guatemala's 34-year genocidal war ended. In February 1999, a detailed report followed. The Historical Clarification Commission (aka truth and justice reconciliation commission) [headlined](#) "[Guatemala, Memory of Silence](#)."

It documented decades of genocide, torture and other atrocities. Most victims were indigenous Mayans. Guatemalan and US officials bore full responsibility.

Around 9,200 witnesses on all sides of the conflict provided evidence. The commission concluded that Guatemala's military, security forces, and paramilitary units were responsible for 93% of human rights abuses and deaths.

Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union guerrillas were involved in only 3%. In another 4% of cases, responsibility couldn't be determined.

According to the report:

"The massacres that eliminated entire Mayan villages are neither perfidious allegations nor figments of the imagination, but an authentic chapter in Guatemala's history."

"The majority of human rights violations occurred with the knowledge or by order of the highest authorities of the state."

"The responsibility for a large part of these violations, with respect to the chain

of military command as well as the political and administrative responsibility, reaches the highest levels of the army and successive governments.”

Massacres were politically motivated. “Believing that the ends justified everything, the military and state security forces blindly pursued the anti-Communist struggle, without respect for any legal principles or the most elemental ethical and religious values, and in this way completely lost any semblance of human morals.”

The worst atrocities occurred on Montt’s watch. In 1982, he launched Operation Sofia. Military and security forces committed hundreds of massacres.

Around 600 Mayan villages were destroyed. Systematic genocide was policy. During his short tenure, around 70,000 civilians were murdered or disappeared. Hundreds of thousands were internally displaced.

Over half of those slaughtered were in El Quiche. Ixil Mayans lost from 70 - 90% of their villages. Washington provided generous support. Reagan was president. General Alexander Haig was Secretary of State.

From 1981 - 1983, International/European Law Professor Emeritus Christian Tomuschat called Guatemalan policy “acts of genocide against groups of the Mayan people.”

For over two decades, Washington supported it. “Up until the mid-1980s, there was strong pressure from the US government and US companies to maintain the country’s archaic and unjust economic structure,” he said.

US administrations knew about genocide, torture and other atrocities. They encouraged them.

During the 1960s, Washington equipped and trained Guatemalan security forces. Declassified US intelligence documents revealed CIA and Pentagon involvement. Montt was trained at the School of the Americas (SOA).

Instruction then and now includes ways to kill, maim, torture, oppress, exterminate poor and indigenous people, overthrow democratically elected governments, assassinate targeted leaders, suppress popular resistance, and solidify hard-right rule cooperatively with Washington.

Throughout the 1980s, close US-Guatemalan ties remained. Scorched earth dirty war targeted indigenous Mayan, resistance guerrillas, and suspected allies.

The region was embroiled in conflict. Death squad justice was policy. Washington-backed Contras battled Nicaragua’s Sandinista government. El Salvadoran fascists were supported.

Throughout the decade, weapons, munitions, training, and destabilizing covert operations supported despots over freedom. Resistance fighters and indigenous populations were targeted.

Guatemala’s conflict lasted longest. Washington fueled and supported it. All US administrations have blood on their hands. It reflects imperialism’s dark side.

State-sponsored terror is policy. It’s war without mercy. It’s longstanding. It rages globally. It

targets humanity. It takes no prisoners.

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