

THE DIRTY WAR AGAINST YOUTH

FROM FERGUSON TO AYOTZINAPA

BY CRYSTAL VANCE GUERRA, TRUTHOUT | NEWS ANALYSIS 9.05.2015

Almost one year ago, 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Normal School in Mexico went missing, kidnapped by state authorities after they traveled to the city of Iguala to protest education reforms. And just over a year ago, protests erupted in Ferguson, Missouri, after the police killing of Michael Brown. From both sides of the border, a parallel demand for justice and freedom is being lifted by the youth in response to these acts of state violence.

In response to the disappearance of the 43 students in Mexico, we are saying “Los queremos vivos” (We want them alive). In response to Mexico’s never-ending femicide, we are saying “Nos queremos vivas” (We want each other [women] alive). And the insistence that Black lives matter has not stopped reverberating from the mouths and marching feet of millions.

From Ferguson to Ayotzinapa, we have reached a tipping point in an accumulated history of indignation: “¡Ya Basta! We Can’t Breathe!”

Recent killings of a young male photojournalist and three women in Mexico, and the death of Sandra Bland in Texas

police custody also highlight the continued relevancy of these movements. The systematic state-sanctioned violence against particular communities has become evident in the turn of this century.

The Recent History of Contemporary State Violence

To better understand today’s state violence, it becomes necessary to analyze both the economic and military policies of the United States since the 1980s. While Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and the Chicago Boys’ economic theories celebrated the global reach of neoliberalism, the US was funding and training counterinsurgent armies in Central America, which killed a quarter-million indigenous and mestizo people. In the US, the war on drugs, crack cocaine sales and the mass incarceration of Black and Brown people peaked. Nicaragua’s revolution in 1979 toppled one of the bloodiest US-backed dictatorships in the history of Latin America.

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Soon after, both El Salvador and Guatemala were also on the brink of shouting victory. All the while, Honduras, nestled between the three, was becoming increasingly militarized by the US and served as a training base for the Contras, short for counterinsurgents.

THE MASS DISAPPEARANCE OF BLACK PEOPLE, BOTH THROUGH INCARCERATION AND POLICE BRUTALITY, IS NOTHING SHORT OF GENOCIDE

Infamous for their execution-style murders and torture tactics, the Contras became known as the “Death Squads” within Central America. These forces were at first openly supported by Reagan and US foreign policy, and were described by him as “freedom fighters.” But in 1983, Congress signed the Boland Amendment prohibiting this support due to concerns over their violation of human rights.

Dismissing Congress and popular anti-Contra movements in the United States, a secret group within the CIA called the Operations Sub-Group—composed primarily of then-Gen. Oliver North, Vice President George H.W. Bush, then-CIA director William Casey and President Reagan—decided to take matters into their own hands.

Through the use of private companies and personal bank accounts, these men expanded US influence in Honduras, training, equipping and housing the death squads (counterinsurgent armies) that destabilized and extinguished the liberation movements of its neighbors almost

simultaneously. In these 10 years of dirty war in Central America, more than a quarter-million people lost their lives and a million more were displaced. And the 1980s, which began in Central America with the promise of liberation, became known as the “lost decade.”

In the United States, meanwhile, the 1980s were welcomed with weariness. The liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s were disarticulated. The strongest of these that couldn’t be stifled with reform had been destabilized through CIA and Pentagon programs such as Cointelpro, a successful counterinsurgency program launched against the Black Panthers.

Launched in the 1980s, crack and the war on drugs became all too real metaphors for the destruction of Black and Brown neighborhoods across the country.

Mass Incarceration and Mass Disappearances

The prison industrial complex (the business of incarceration) came into being along with the militarization of police and an increase in white supremacist legislation, all supporting the expansion of this market.

Under Reagan’s war on drugs, crack became criminalized at a 100-1 ratio to cocaine, and Black, Brown and poor people all became increasingly criminalized. And the prison population linked to drug offenses (largely due to crack) rose from 40,000 to 1 million in this decade. The majority of those incarcerated were (and still are) Black.

The mass disappearance of Black people, both through incarceration and police brutality, is nothing short of genocide, as demonstrated by the Chicago organization We Charge Genocide at the 2014 Geneva Convention last fall.

WHAT BETTER WAY TO ENSURE THAT A SYSTEMATICALLY OPPRESSED PEOPLE NEVER RISE UP THAN TO TARGET ITS YOUTH?

Without minimizing the particularities of each side, the mass disappearances linked to crack cocaine in the United States and Central America had similar consequences. Generalized violence - though rooted in the

state - increased state security and the destabilization of families and community: all the right elements to limit any voice of liberation from rising up again.

One of the first premises of counterinsurgent warfare is to use “the natives” (as the first US Marine manual on the subject notes) against

each other in order to mask the US government’s role and win “the hearts and minds” of those targeted for submission. In Central America, this meant the formation of the death squads and mass disappearances by Central American forces trained and funded by the United States.

In South Central Los Angeles and other “inner cities” across the United States, the cocaine-dependent Contra War of



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the Operations Sub-Group in Central America provoked the militarization of police, the increased use of firearms and drug trafficking within gangs and the mass incarceration of the young and poor, sparking another dirty war within Brown and Black US neighborhoods.

Whether this kill-two-birds-with-one-stone outcome was intentional or just became highly useful as time passed cannot be confirmed, but with all the current

knowledge about US direct complicity in the drug trade, the question becomes all the more salient.

Defense, Drugs and Banks

Since this century has begun, we have witnessed a series of financial crises, the most shattering beginning in 2008. Throughout this period of negative to zero growth across the majority of sectors, defense and those corporations related to defense were the only ones who managed to secure significant profits. At the same time, it is in this period that the drug trade became second only to the arms trade in terms of profits.

The last thread to begin to understand what is happening today can be found in the banks. "In many instances, the money from drugs was the only liquid investment capital. In the second half of 2008, liquidity was the banking system's main problem and hence liquid capital became an important factor," said Antonio Maria Costa, head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, in 2009.

"Inter-bank loans were funded by money that originated from the drugs trade and other illegal activities," Costa added. "There were signs that some banks were rescued that way."

Within these three sectors, defense, drugs and banks, the United States maintains a tight monopoly and a highly circular trade.

OUR NEIGHBORHOODS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER ARE WITNESSING THE EXTREME CRIMINALIZATION OF YOUTH.

In 2013, a trial held in Chicago revealed that Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, one of the richest men in the world and former head of the Sinaloa cartel - the strongest (read monopoly) cartel in Mexico - has close ties with the CIA. The two men testifying were high-ranking members of the cartel, including a lawyer. Their testimony affirms that the CIA, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) did not simply ignore the trafficking, but rather

participated actively in its operation, eliminating competition and securing the entry and distribution of the product.

These documents highlight how the Sinaloa cartel gave US officials information about rival cartels in exchange for privileged trading agreements. Some former cartel members say these exchanges show just how the CIA has been played by El Chapo. Instead of revealing the whereabouts of their leader, double agents

within the cartel fed the CIA information about



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its competition, revealing their true role as triple agents. Either way, with the CIA coordinating raids against El Chapo's competition, it is no surprise that this cartel grew to dominate, albeit monopolize, the drug trade in Mexico and the United States.

Whether US intelligence can be so clueless, or whether this cooperation was intentional, the same two-birds-with-one-stone question is still relevant, but it needs to be placed into context. In the 1980s, it was clear what the enemy target was: everything and anything communist. Today, the enemy target of US counterinsurgency is much more obscure.

The Targeting of Youth

What does it mean that it's the youth on both sides of the border that are being targeted? And not just any youth, but the Black, Brown, indigenous and poor.

As seen in repression of Black Lives Matter organizers and protesters in the United States and of the Los Queremos Vivos movement in Mexico, youth of color are always already criminalized as potential threats - thugs, maras (Central American gangs), anarchists. This current and historical reality of preemptive criminalization relates to another premise of counterinsurgency expressed in a recent Joint Chiefs of Staff publication: control through manipulation and disciplinarian of the target population. According to the publication, "Success in COIN depends on a counter-insurgent's ability to motivate various people ... toward behavior that supports an outcome of the operation consistent with the [US government's] desired political end state" (JP 3-24, I-4).

The combination of "lethal and non-lethal" actions that achieve this complacency leads to the preemptive suppression of rebellion.

Laws like stop-and-frisk and SB1070 are based off another premise of counterinsurgency: any and every "native" is a possible insurgent. What better way to ensure that a systematically oppressed people never rise up than to target its youth?

Cocaine and Counterinsurgency Today

As already noted, the “dark alliance” between the US government, drug trafficking and private companies - first revealed by journalist Gary Webb 30 years ago - remains in place. The elimination of the Sinaloa cartel’s competition by the CIA, and the continuous training and arming of Mexican and Central American military, police and paramilitary forces by the US are practices that appear to go hand-in-hand to support a common cause: business interests.

Money laundering, arms and drugs sales and the ever-expanding private prison and security industries on both sides of the Rio Grande are now even more lucrative than in the 1980s. Control over these three top markets in the world is important for the United States, especially in these times of economic crises. The war on drugs, the longest US counterinsurgent war ever launched,

thus appears to be more a war for monopoly-control of the drug market than one against the drug trade itself.

The financial, legal and criminal cooperation between the Sinaloa cartel and the US government revealed in 2014, however, has failed to generate the indignation than the same scandal revealed in the 1980s.

The use of development dollars, such as USAID, in security and defense—that once caused uproar—is now celebrated as global policy by the World Bank, which also happens to finance well-known and longtime drug traffickers in Central America.

Although there are no longer nationwide, armed liberation movements in Central America, mass murders are still the outcome of the continued war on drugs.

Since 2000, a quarter-million people have lost their lives in drug-related deaths in Central America while another million were displaced. In this same time period, far beyond the 43 of Ayotzinapa, close to a million people in Mexico have either been killed, disappeared or displaced in relation to this same war.

In the United States, the profits gained from the recent mass detentions of undocumented youth in private prisons and the criminalization of Blackness, Brownness and poverty, along with illegal home foreclosures, school closures and police killings have furthered the destabilization of communities of color initiated in the 1980s.

Although crack addiction, violent crime and incarceration

rates in the United States are at an all-time low since the 1980s, the prison and military industrial complexes have never been stronger, receiving massive investments from banks such as Wells Fargo and Bank of America (which also are cashing in on the mass foreclosures). These investments keep growing, despite the publicly denounced high levels of racially targeted police violence across the United States.

Since 2013, 2,011 people have been killed by the police, according to one crowdsourced data set. Another ambitious project of developing a national data set has a total of 2,104 people listed, and its creators have not even finished documenting all of 2014. And according to federal data, Black men are four times more likely to experience an “arrest related

death.” Sandra Bland’s death on July 13, 2015, is but one sobering reminder of this fact.

Destabilization,



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disciplination and dependency are the primary goals of US counterinsurgency, both abroad and at home.

Our

neighborhoods on both sides of the border are witnessing the extreme criminalization of youth, and it is an example of counterinsurgency at its finest: preemptive disciplinization. Youth of color are seen as “thugs” in the United States and mara in Central America, and across the world it is the youth that the state fears will become “anarchists” or “terrorists” and challenge US hegemony.

Meanwhile, the shouts of “Black Lives Matter,” “Los Queremos Vivos” and “Nos Queremos Vivas” are the shouts of generations of youth unwilling to submit to the dirty war launched against us.

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