

# US triples special operations deployment to Latin America

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From 2007 to 2014, the United States tripled the deployment of special operations forces to Latin America, according to documents obtained via FOIA request by the non-profit Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA).

The deployment of Green Berets, Navy Seals and other elite units to Latin America is bound up with American imperialism's preparations to suppress the outbreak of social struggle in Central and South America and is also aimed at countering the growing influence of China in the region.

The August 30 WOLA report notes that US special operations training is aimed at improving "technical skills like pistol and rifle marksmanship, urban combat, intelligence gathering, or riot control" among the Latin America security forces. Government documents show that the training programs are aimed at "building partner capacity, countering transnational threats, and ensuring domain awareness," which allows the US to gain "regional access with a minimal footprint." The number of training events increased 29 percent from 2013 to 2014.

Joint training exercises also support the military's "National Security Strategy" at a "relatively low-risk, low-cost, and low-signature." In other words, the presence of American troops in nearly two dozen countries allows US imperialism to exercise an enormous amount of coercion on the political life of these countries without the cost and political fallout of open military occupation. In this vein, government documents also highlight how training "activities often enhance US influence in host countries."

The report notes that the increased presence of special forces in Latin America lays the basis for an expanded US presence in the region. Special Operations Liaison Officers are currently positioned in 14 US embassies,

including four in Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador and Peru). By 2019, the report notes, US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) will have funding to place liaison officers in 40 countries, presumably including a number of new ones in Latin America.

The United States government treats the entire Latin American region as its imperial staging ground, asserting its ability to station troops and operate bases. The WOLA report notes that the US conducted 21 training exercises in Honduras from 2007 to 2014, 19 in Colombia and El Salvador, 18 in the Dominican Republic, 16 in Belize, 15 in Panama, 13 in Brazil and 11 in Guyana, Peru and Jamaica. US elite units also trained soldiers in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guatemala, Paraguay, Suriname, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mexico, Argentina, the Bahamas and Uruguay.

The elite units of many of these governments effectively serve as extra-judicial death squads, giving the lie to claims that the US military is engaged in "humanitarian" or "democratic" intervention abroad. The presence of the US military in countries like El Salvador, Colombia, Honduras, Jamaica, Guatemala and Mexico has coincided with drastic increases in state repression and violence, in some cases creating civil war-like death rates for the civilian population.

For example, a US State Department report from 2015 notes that in Honduras, "three soldiers were arrested and their unit commander temporarily suspended in connection with an investigation of alleged torture of artisanal miners working in a mine that had been closed for safety reasons." Though the soldiers were captured on video torturing the workers, "an appeals court provisionally dismissed charges against the three soldiers."

In El Salvador, the country's human rights investigator "stated that between June 2014 and May 2015" there were "2,202 complaints of human rights violations, 92 percent of which alleged human rights violations committed by the National Civilian Police and the military." These violations included "arbitrary deaths, situations that verge on torture, and possible executions between police and supposed criminals."

These are mere snapshots of the crimes committed by the armed forces trained by US military advisers, many of whom learned the trade in the criminal wars waged by the US in Iraq and Afghanistan, where torture, execution and mass murder were the standard operating procedure of the occupying armies.

The true purpose of the increasing US role in Latin America is to assert hegemony over the region's resources and cheap labor on behalf of American banks and corporations. The presence of US military forces is required to keep the region under US control and to ensure that the US is well-positioned militarily in case of war with China.

A 2015 US Army War College article by Professor R. Evan Ellis, titled "The Strategic relevance of Latin America for the United States" puts the matter clearly:

"To view the matter through a military analogy, Latin America is the unoccupied high-ground overseeing the US position. A responsible commander would recognize that the occupation of that high ground by an adversary poses an unacceptable threat to his force, and thus would dedicate resources to block the adversary from doing so. By this analogy, it would be a grave error for the United States to conclude that, in the absence of serious threats to the United States from Latin America, it is okay to merely watch as potential future adversaries such as Russia and China expand their positions in the region. While such neglect, in the short term, may 'free up resources' to continue other engagements abroad, over the long term, willing cessation of its own neighborhood by the U.S. is the single factor most likely to force the United States into a chaotic retreat from its external engagements."

There is another important reason for the increased US troop presence in the region. The US fears the outbreak of social opposition in Latin America and is prepared to crush it through invasion and the establishment of right-wing military and paramilitary units trained to kill workers, students and peasants who

oppose the demands of Wall Street and US imperialism. Aware that Latin America is the most socially polarized region of the world, the architects of US imperialist geostrategy fear the outbreak of mass social upheavals in Latin America. The groundwork for cracking down on such a revolutionary upsurge of the impoverished Latin American masses is being prepared by the US military through the expansion of military training programs.



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