

# Freedom and Democracy or Hunger and Terror: Neoliberalism and Militarization in Latin America

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## Introduction

IN LATIN AMERICA, THE PROCESS OF CONCENTRATING WEALTH WITH WEALTH AND poverty with poverty began 500 years ago, but it has dramatically accelerated in the last 25 years under neoliberal policies. Latin American countries that followed the free-market prescription and inserted themselves fully into the global economy in the expectation that freedom and democracy would ensue found such promises to be chimera fabricated by the preachers of market liberalization. Real freedom under neoliberalism is enjoyed only by capital. Large sectors of society are denied basic human rights and dignity, while local elites allied with transnational companies have grown stronger, as has the determination to eliminate all remaining barriers to capital's search for resources, cheap labor, and markets. As millions are born, live, and die in the wreckage left by neoliberalism's plunder, the elite version of democracy counsels the hungry to patiently wait for wealth to trickle-down to them. Such democracy offers citizens the freedom to choose whether to spend their income on clean water, medicine, or food, to sell their dignity, or to become an "internal enemy." The promise of democracy by those seeking to maintain their unchallenged privileges translates into increased repression and violence against those who stand up for social justice and the protection of life.

The neoliberal model is based on the assertion that poverty is best alleviated by opening societies to market-based competition, since an unregulated free market promotes economic growth and a democratic and just development process. Most Latin American countries have adopted this model and have experienced it for over two decades. Much evidence now suggests that this economic system

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produces poverty, aggravates existing poverty and inequality, impedes social development by turning human rights into commodities, and destroys sustainable livelihoods by granting corporations unprecedented rights and freedoms (Hristov, 2004). Fantu Cheru, an independent expert on the effects of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) on human rights, concluded that SAPs—a primary component of the neoliberal agenda—represent a political project of social transformation at the global level that aims to make the world safe for multinational corporations (MNCs). These policies reduce the role of the state in national development, erode the social welfare of the poor, and deny their economic, social, and cultural rights (Singh, 1999). Since it is unresponsive to the needs of the majority, the continued existence of neoliberalism requires a political counterpart capable of suppressing opposition to it. “The modern army of financial capital and corrupt governments advances in the only way it is capable of: destroying” (EZLN, 1998a: 12). This explains the emergence of war not between countries, but *within* them, waged by states against the poor (the majority of their populations). The weapons in such wars go beyond hunger to include military dimensions.

This article illustrates the coexistence of neoliberalism, militarization, violence, and repression in Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico since 1990. To a large extent, these three countries represent the relationship between economic, political, and military trends in the rest of Latin America. Their common characteristics are governments that are “economic vassals of the U.S.” (Petras et al., 2004), “empire-centered” (neoliberal) policies that have greatly impoverished the working majority in each country, and a rich natural resource base (particularly oil). They also have social movements that have demonstrated long-term viability, increasing repression and violence directed by those with economic and political power and sanctioned by the state, and an increasing U.S. military presence. The following analysis is not a series of case studies, but illustrates local expressions of global processes that conceal class struggle and the pursuit of imperial interests.

Below I briefly describe the origin and characteristics of the neoliberal economic model, and provide an overview of the neoliberal policies and their socioeconomic impact in Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico. I discuss the major social movements in each country as an inevitable response to structural inequalities that have been aggravated by the current economic model. This includes coverage of each movement’s base, strategies, visions, and accomplishments. I next challenge the view that democracy is becoming a dominant feature of Latin America’s political landscape by exposing the false notion of political representation and choice, the lack of state autonomy, the presence of authoritarian features in state structures and the repression and violence stemming from them, as well as the role of militarization in ensuring the stability of the neoliberal model. Then I examine the role of the U.S. military presence in securing control over natural resources, reinforcing the neoliberal agenda, and crushing social movements in Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico. Finally, I present evidence from these three countries that reveals the

human costs—various forms of human rights violations and politically motivated murders—that are an expression of the trends described earlier.

### **Neoliberalism: Origin and Definition**

Neoliberalism is a system of policies that promotes the market and cuts back on state activities that do not immediately favor business (Holloway and Pelaez, 1998). Its essential components are trade liberalization, privatization, and deregulation. Trade liberalization refers to free trade or the removal of trade barriers, such as tariffs and quotas. Privatization requires the sale of public enterprises and assets to private owners. Deregulation constitutes the removal of government restrictions and interventions on capital to allow market forces to act as a self-regulating mechanism. This process can take the form of labor or financial deregulation (Weaver, 2000).

Halebsky and Harris (1995) argue that the shift to neoliberal policies was due to the pressure on Latin American governments in the late 1970s to service their external debts. To receive loans from the World Bank (WB) or the International Monetary Fund (IMF), governments had to agree to a program of structural adjustment that included drastically reducing public spending in the areas of health, education, and welfare (austerity); cutting wages or severely constraining their rise; liberalizing trade and promoting export-oriented growth; removing restrictions on foreign investment; devaluating the local currency; privatizing state enterprises; and embarking on radical deregulation (Bello et al., 1994).

The core of the neoliberal program implemented by Latin American governments—austerity, trade liberalization, and deregulation—was advocated by the Institute for International Economics (IIE) in the U.S. in its publication *Toward Renewed Economic Growth in Latin America* (1986). In 1989, the Institute convened a conference to explore the extent to which these reforms were pursued in the region. The participants, including representatives from international financial institutions (IFIs), economic agencies of the U.S. government, and the U.S. Federal Reserve Board, concluded the conference with ideas for reforms that were still needed in Latin America. John Williamson, a senior official at the IIE, listed 10 such reforms. Known as the Washington Consensus, the list included fiscal restraint, public expenditures in fields with high economic returns, tax reform, financial liberalization, competitive exchange rates, trade liberalization, removal of barriers to foreign investment, privatization of state-owned enterprises, deregulation, and security for property rights (Williamson and Kuczynski, 2003). The Washington Consensus now symbolizes the neoliberal agenda, which continues to be implemented in many Third World countries.

### **Economic Liberalization and Human Enslavement**

Neoliberalism intensified the process through which economic and decision-making power become concentrated in a few hands, as well as the transfer of resources

from the public to the private sphere. Thus, the expanding freedom of the market guarantees access to profits and highly profitable income-earning opportunities to already economically powerful groups, such as MNCs, local elites, and financial operators, while excluding the participation of the working classes and low-income population (Lefebvre, 2003). The neoliberalization of nation-states is evident in their lack of interference in profit-making processes to redistribute surpluses and in the failure to regulate transnational capital in their territories. Consequently, nation-states have become less responsible or responsive to the interests of broad majorities and less accountable to society (Robinson, 1996).

Economic liberalization influences Latin American nations through external forces (advanced countries and international institutions) in the form of foreign investment, imports, international trade laws, and debt-servicing pressures and through internal ones (which are conditioned by foreign influences despite Latin American origins) in the form of macroeconomic policies. This section focuses on external pressures—trade laws and the external debt—that affect the position of Latin American countries in the global economy, and on the effects of foreign investments and imports on the poorer classes within nations. I then cover how macroeconomic policies contribute to the marginalization of the low-income population and specifically look at Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, since they represent the detrimental impact neoliberal restructuring (through various internal and external forces) has had on the economic and social development of the region.

International trade laws and the external debt reinforce the subordinate position of most Latin American countries within the global hierarchy of power. Major trade agreements benefit developed countries to a much greater extent than they do the less developed ones, since they impose large costs, particularly on food-dependent developing nations, while there is a minimal benefit from expanded market access in the North. Further, the external debt greatly impedes development since debt repayment conditions imposed by IFIs on Latin American countries demand the implementation of drastic and detrimental neoliberal measures. The debt burden reduces the leverage of these countries when it comes to negotiations on the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). As Lefebvre (2003; 1974) notes, international debt obligations have turned many poor countries into capital exporters; 25 to 40% of export earnings are committed to debt service and amortization.

In terms of inequality-generating forces operating nationally, many rural regions in Latin America seem to be entrenched in a cycle that prevents them from embarking on a path of sustainable and equitable development. Trade liberalization and privatization cause small-scale peasants to lose their livelihoods; with increasing numbers of people sinking into poverty, the demand for domestically produced goods decreases as purchasing power drops. Falling demand for domestically produced goods in turn bankrupts small rural enterprises and farmers, diminishing the demand for labor. This translates into more unemployment, poverty, and so on.

Foreign investment helps to maintain this cycle. Rural workers are often dis-

placed by capital-intensive farm technology introduced by foreign investors. In the Andean region, rural-sector employment has become precarious, with temporary and seasonal labor increasing due to labor-saving technology. Though foreign investment creates some job opportunities, the rate of growth from such jobs has not matched the rate of displacement. Consequently, many peasants resort to the urban informal sector.

Imports also undermine equitable and viable rural development. Cheap foreign goods, such as subsidized staples, displace domestic industry and farming that use labor-intensive methods of production (Lefebvre, 2003; Grinspun, 2003). With the decreased availability of credit (due to privatization of banks), local producers are driven out of business, generating more rural unemployment (Grinspun, 2003). Dependency on food imports has endangered the food security of low-income groups.

Also impeding development in the region over the last 20 years are the key macroeconomic policies adopted by Latin American states. Many policies concerning the rural sector of the economy illustrate the tendency of governments to defend the interests of agribusiness while failing to protect the livelihoods of small-scale farmers. For instance, instead of land reform, governments promote "land markets." In an unequal socioeconomic structure, small-scale peasants are unable to compete with other actors to purchase land. Hence, land markets contribute to the concentration rather than redistribution of land (Martinez, 2003). The shift toward large-scale commercial agriculture also requires resources far beyond the reach of small farmers and community-based enterprises. Large-scale commercial farms frequently benefit from various forms of government subsidies and manage to obtain capital to import mechanized labor-displacing machinery. Due to the privatization of banks, marginal, small, and medium-scale farms are left without access to credit and other critical resources, which is detrimental to their survival (Lefebvre, 2003).

Broader impacts of SAPs— austerity, privatization, and deregulation—lead to massive losses in public sector employment, de-unionization, downward pressure on wages, an assault on labor rights, deterioration in the conditions of labor, reduced access to or elimination of essential public services, increases in the cost of living due to the elimination of subsidies, and decreased food security. Below I provide an overview of the socioeconomic impact of neoliberal policies in Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico.

### *Colombia*

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Colombian elite willingly promoted the neoliberal model. Current President Alvaro Uribe Velez has carried it out to the extreme, with his government systematically removing indigenous communities and peasant families from existing and potential oil fields to secure further oil extraction by U.S. multinational corporations. Peasants, indigenous people, and

Afro-Colombians, whose presence prevents the successful exploitation of natural resources in certain areas, continue to be evicted through campaigns of terror and massacres. Every day, 1,029 people on average are internally displaced in areas of untapped oil and gas reserves (Larsen, 2002). Second, the survival of small-scale farmers has been made impossible due to the lack of policies or subsidies that would grant price guarantees and affordable credit; moreover, Uribe plans to eliminate the few remaining national agrarian institutions (Mondragon, 2002). Third, as part of the president's labor reform, overnight and overtime wages, and public sector salaries were reduced by 30% in a single decree. Uribe also closed down some of the country's largest public hospitals, eliminating 4,000 medical jobs so far, and privatized major state enterprises in the telecommunications and mining sectors (*Colombia Week*, 2003a). Greatly aggravated poverty has issued from all of the above. Seven million Colombians are unable to afford one meal a day and two million peasants have no land to work on (Ferrer, 2002). Half the country's children suffer from hunger and 40% of the population live in absolute poverty, unable to satisfy basic subsistence needs (Giraldo, 1996).

### *Ecuador*

The shift to neoliberal policies in Ecuador began in 1981 under President Osvaldo Hurtado, who closely followed IMF directives. He enacted the first large-scale stabilization program, which included new taxes on consumption, elimination of wheat and gas subsidies, an increase in transportation fares, a doubling of the price of gas, and limits on public salary adjustments, all of which greatly impoverished the average citizen. Meanwhile, Ecuador's law on foreign investment in the petroleum industry was reformed to sweeten the terms of investment and profit extraction. Ecuador's next president, Febres Cordero (1984 to 1988), put in place a full-fledged adjustment program that reduced the size of the state sector, rejected import substitution in favor of export promotion through trade liberalization, created new incentives for foreign investors, cut social spending, and eliminated most price controls. Wages as a whole continued to decrease throughout the 1980s, and in 1990 President Rodrigo Borja established the "*maquila* laws," whereby qualified industrialists pay workers less than the national minimum wage. Further, the Agrarian Reform Law (1994) made it more difficult for peasants to obtain legal title to privately owned land they had invaded and occupied. Despite promising to free the country from neoliberalism and its crippling foreign debt, once current President Lucio Gutiérrez came into power, he continued his predecessors' policies. Gutiérrez also opened up the Sarayaku region for active oil exploration, ignoring the protests and demonstrations of the local indigenous community.

Twenty years of rigorous free-market restructuring has significantly impeded the social development of Ecuador. Since 1988, inequality between skilled, formal trade-goods sector workers and unskilled workers has increased significantly, as has unemployment. Greatly aggravating the latter has been the decrease in industry's

share of the national economy, which declined to half the level of the mid-1980s (Vos and Leon, 2001). The jobless rate in urban areas today is twice the rate at the start of 1990s, and the real minimum wage has been decreasing since 1996. Forty-five percent of children under five years of age are malnourished. In rural areas, underdevelopment is acute: 91% of the population live in poverty, with 60% in extreme poverty. The illiteracy rate is 66%; around 90% of births are not attended by health care workers (InterConnection, 2004).

### *Mexico*

From the early 1980s on, Mexico followed IMF and WB demands for neoliberal restructuring so closely that in 1994 these two institutions praised Mexico for being an example that other Latin American countries should follow. Upon implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution eliminated the *ejido* system of communal landholdings, allowing the selling, purchasing, or renting of *ejido* land. Thus, large agribusinesses, cattle ranchers, oil companies, paper producers, and corporations eager to exploit the biodiversity of the Lacandón jungle could increase land acquisition, while leaving behind poor landless communities without any social provision. During the last 18 years of SAPs, the trend has been toward underemployment and informal employment, and wages have remained below the minimum level necessary for subsistence (CASA, 2001). Trade liberalization largely accounts for this, as national industries, especially micro, small, and medium scale, were gradually eliminated due to their inability to compete with MNCs (*Ibid.*). Between 1994 and 1998, over 20,000 small businesses were forced into bankruptcy (Vos and Leon, 2001). Since Vicente Fox became president (2000), more than one million manufacturing jobs have been lost (Thomson, 2002). As in Colombia and Ecuador, Mexico has privatized public enterprises and deregulated the labor force, especially in the electricity and telecommunications sectors.

The growth Mexico has experienced has only benefited the upper 10% of the population, which owns 40% of the country's wealth (Stiglitz, 2002). Most of the super-rich became billionaires with the privatization of public enterprises during the 1980s and 1990s (Veltmeyer, 1997). NAFTA has generated over one-quarter trillion dollars in cross-border trade with the U.S., but it has done little to alleviate the suffering of the 45 million Mexicans living in poverty. The middle class has also been harshly affected. Teachers, engineers, nurses, and small businessmen are swinging above and below the poverty line (Thomson, 2002).

The State of Chiapas typifies the lack of social development associated with an export-oriented economy (a main component of neoliberalism). Chiapas exports a tremendous variety and quantity of raw materials, such as petroleum, cattle, coffee, bananas, honey, corn, cacao, tobacco, sugar, soy, melons, sorghum, mamey, mango, tamarind, and avocado, to the U.S., Canada, Holland, Germany, Italy, and Japan. Despite the rich base of natural resources, 80% of the population suffer

from malnutrition. Half the residents lack potable water and two-thirds have no sewage service or electricity. One and one-half million people do not have medical services at their disposal. There are two clinics per 10,000 inhabitants and one operating room per 100,000. Half the schools offer education up to the third grade only and 72% of children do not even finish first grade. Mountain trails are the only means of transportation and communication for 12,000 communities. "At the peak of neoliberalism...the Southeast continues to export raw materials just as it did 500 years ago. It continues to import capitalism's principal products: death and misery" (Marcos, 2001: 25).

All three countries have implemented drastic neoliberal policies, yet most of their populations have been left behind. Increasing poverty and inequality also characterize the rest of Latin America. Between 1990 and 1995, the number of poor people increased by 47 million; since 1985, the number of children leaving school early to support their families grew by 50% (Robinson, 1996; Green, 1995). Deepening social inequalities have generated widespread opposition throughout the region, sometimes translating into powerful and sustained social movements.

### **The Struggle for Dignity, Justice, and Democracy from Below**

Rural and urban labor, peasants, indigenous groups, and all those marginalized by the current economic model are not passive victims. They have the power to build progress from below and in many cases have attempted to be, in Freire's (1970) words, the architects of their own liberation (Hristov, 2004). A variety of social movements has emerged in the three countries under discussion. Space limits allow coverage here only of movements whose organization, strategies, objectives, and visions show an engagement in struggles for systemic social change. They are sociopolitical forces that embrace egalitarian or socialist values, denounce economic liberalization, and advocate an improvement in the living conditions of the poor through land acquisition and greater access to productive resources (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2003).

#### *Colombia*

The wide range of social movements in Colombia encompasses indigenous groups, guerrillas, small-scale farmers, peasants, rural workers, and militant trade unions. Here the focus will be on an indigenous movement and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); both have demonstrated long-term viability and have articulated the need for alternative forms of development grounded in an anti-imperialist struggle to achieve social justice and democracy. The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), which unites the struggles of various indigenous groups, was formed in 1982. Among its key objectives are the recognition and legalization of aboriginal territory and systems of justice, as well as the right to teach native languages in local schools and provide traditional health



care. The strong organizing capacity and elaborate development proposals based on autonomous community plans have enabled indigenous people to recover some of their ancestral territories.

One of ONIC's constituents, the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (CRIC), formally came into existence in 1971 and is the oldest indigenous movement in Colombia. For decades, the communities of Cauca have struggled against economic exploitation, political and cultural oppression, and military violence. CRIC has denounced the forced separation of indigenous people from the land, as well as cultural oppression and the lack of education, health, roads, and other services. They believe that the capitalist form of agriculture breeds productivity at a severe human cost and generates economic growth by destroying life. CRIC proposes to gradually develop the productive capacity that parallels increased technological and administrative knowledge, as well as political, cultural, and social consciousness (Berglund, 1982). Through peaceful, persistent collective action, they have recovered much of their ancestral territories, elevated the level of literacy and conscientization, and revived many aspects of indigenous culture. Moreover, the organization of productive capacities within communities has been consistent with a humane and inclusive vision of progress as a process that sustains equality and nurtures life. Their territorial and cultural rights have been formally recognized in the Colombian Constitution, but wholesale disrespect for indigenous people's rights and lives has accompanied the neoliberal model, whose imposition "from above" is made possible by an intensification of militarization and repression.

Colombia's largest guerrilla movement, the FARC, evolved from an armed formation dedicated to defending the peasantry from the armed forces and landlords into a national political-military force with a sophisticated organization comprising about 20,000 armed fighters. The FARC's main constituency includes subsistence farmers, displaced peasants, landless rural workers, and urban workers and employees. Central to their vision of political transformation is modernization of the economy and society through a mixed economy, plus a strong state welfare system and regulatory regime. Their political program is based on reforming state institutions, expanding the welfare state, increasing national control over domestic markets, energy, and communications, and creating a more dynamic domestic market via redistributive politics (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2003). However, despite FARC's strong support from peasant and rural workers' communities, it has been associated with kidnappings, selective assassinations, forced recruitment, and attacks against the nation's infrastructure, such as oil pipelines, energy towers, and gas lines (ICHRDD, 2001).

### *Ecuador*

The most dynamic force for systemic social change in Ecuador is the strong peasant indigenous movement—the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities

(CONAIE). Formed in 1986, this organization has unified the voice of all indigenous nationalities at the national level and has attempted to make its platform inclusive of the needs of all Ecuadorians, not just the indigenous (Bannowsky, 2001). The profound social transformation CONAIE seeks would entail radical changes in the structure of the Ecuadorian state and existing forms of class domination. The movement addresses issues of national economic development by pursuing a model that is inclusive, equitable, just, and empowering; constructed from below by the people, it is rooted in the indigenous peasant economy and the equitable participation of the indigenous population in the country's resources. Its organizational role is thus to change the relationship of indigenous peasants to the Ecuadorian state and economy by converting indigenous peoples from being passive subjects of change into active social and political subjects (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2003). CONAIE has successfully resolved many land issues and has created a bilingual Spanish-Quechua Program in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture. The movement has also assumed a leading role in the struggle against neoliberal policies (CONAIE, 1992). In 1999, it led a nationwide uprising that overthrew the corrupt president, Jamil Mahuad. It has also become increasingly critical of the current government headed by Gutiérrez (Fertl, 2004).

### *Mexico*

The Zapatista movement of Chiapas, Mexico, comprised mostly of indigenous peasants, dates back to the early 1980s. In 1994, an armed uprising began, which received substantial attention nationally and internationally. The Zapatistas rebelled against their exclusion and marginalization in the economic, social, and political spheres, e.g., their evident landlessness, lack of control over productive forces, hunger, disease, illiteracy, and political disenfranchisement. They seek to improve the human condition of indigenous peasants and all who have been made to "participate in the financial markets only as a devalued currency, always worth less and less, the currency of their blood turning a profit" (EZLN, 1998a: 37). Zapatista economic and social programs include land redistribution, sharing the export-derived income from Chiapan resources, the right for peasants to market their products without middlemen, increased rural and urban salaries, accessible health care provision, education, and adequate infrastructure (water, electricity, roads, sewer systems, and communications). The Zapatistas envision a new space that would give expression to emergent political forces being constructed from below.

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and the Zapatista Front (FZLN, the civil component of the movement that commands the EZLN and engages in analysis, the formulation of demands, and decision-making) have created autonomous municipalities in which communities have worked collectively to advance health, education, and control over resources and productive forces. Since 1994, their communication campaign has called for resistance to the neoliberal model: "To all

human beings without a home, without land, without work, without food, without health, without education, without freedom, without justice, without independence, without democracy, without peace, without tomorrow" (*Ibid.*: 15).

### **The Myth of Democracy in Current Latin American Politics**

In Mexico, neoliberal policies were first implemented during the Dirty War (the 1970s to 1980), when hundreds of Leftists, students, and other antigovernment activists disappeared under the authoritarian rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In Colombia and Ecuador, the task of rigorous economic liberalization was undertaken and eventually consolidated by civilian democratic regimes. Since the year 2000, Mexico's Fox government has re-enforced policies that subordinate the national economy to the dictates of foreign capital.

How can a model that indirectly kills millions of people continue to receive support from governments that supposedly represent the interests of the majority? The answer is that these "democratic" regimes have been neither truly democratic nor sovereign. Social inequalities that have long oppressed vast sectors of society and generated conflict remain. Concentrated political power results from the tremendous concentration of economic power. As Robinson (1996: 20) states, "any discussion of democracy under such conditions becomes meaningless." Given the position of Latin American countries *vis-à-vis* the U.S. and foreign capital, none of these nations (except for Cuba and Venezuela) have been able to embark on a path of autonomous development grounded in principles of social justice and sustainability. According to Petras et al. (2004), most of these civilian regimes are, like their military counterparts before them, clients backed by the U.S. empire; they play a key role in opening the region to long-term, large-scale pillage.

Democracy here simply signifies the presence of political parties that compete electorally, a "governable democracy" (Stolowicz, 2004), historically the most conservative version of liberal democracy. Political parties select elites and prevent the realization of state policies that may oppose capitalist objectives. Polyarchy is a system in which a small group rules on behalf of capital and participation in decision-making by the majority is confined to choosing among competing elites. According to Robinson (1996), polyarchic regimes are effective instruments for pursuing the interests of transnational capitalists and are therefore functional to neoliberalism. Left parties are formally present in the political structure, but their ability to bring about social transformation is severely limited because they must operate within the structural constraints set by the Right (Stolowicz, 2004). The U.S. has come to regard a significant section of the Left with access to political power as "responsible," since their concessions favor MNCs, distancing them from popular constituencies (Petras et al., 2004). Realization by the public of this tendency is evidenced in steadily declining levels of participation in electoral processes.

### Low-Intensity Democracy or Low-Intensity War

Popular movements have often arisen in response to neoliberal policies that exacerbate inequalities. Under polyarchic regimes, the notion of political stability implies that obedience replaces true democracy (Stolowicz, 2004). Instead of recognizing the alternative visions of democracy embraced by various social movements, the latter are portrayed as forces that must be monitored, silenced, and eventually dismantled. This confrontational and interventionist attitude on behalf of those in power *vis-à-vis* social movements is an essential aspect of polyarchy, in which demands that impede capital's goals and therefore the stability of neoliberalism are portrayed as a threat to democracy.

The current economic model that promotes corporate over human rights and enriches the few at the expense of the many cannot be maintained simply by co-opting leftist political parties and employing propaganda that confuses, silences, and persuades the populace that no alternative exists (though the system does rely upon such tools). During Latin America's "transition to democracy," poverty and inequality increased, the region was pillaged, and its subordination to global capital was aggravated. Violence increased, as did the role of the military, the police, and various paramilitary forces. The crisis of hegemony, which signifies that pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation no longer serve to perpetuate the status quo in power relations, was not resolved through pacification and transitions to polyarchy (Robinson 2003; Burke, 1999). Beyond the ideological apparatus, the essential function of the neoliberal nation-state of providing social order and stability is thus increasingly performed through direct coercion and the expansion of law-and-order policies that seek to manage the neoliberal crisis through increased militarization and criminalization of the population (Robinson, 1996; 2003; Aiyer, 2001).

The notion that the state's role has decreased during the era of neoliberal restructuring is false. States have assumed a more direct role in the management of their citizens (Peck, 2001). Social control and ideological production are no longer limited to a fixed number of sites since power is more dispersed as the state expands progressively into the private sphere of civil society (Robinson, 2003). For example, essential features of national security legislation include the subordination of civil law enforcement to military security doctrines, increasing numbers of military personnel in civilian areas, and the autonomy of security forces (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999). As Peck (2001) argues, the decentralization/devolution of state responsibilities serves to enhance the state's power to locate, monitor, and control people (mostly the poor), while undermining potential sources of political opposition. In sum, state terror and coercion allowed the neoliberal model to be imposed from above against the will of the majority of the population and they continue to protect it from social forces that may constrain its freedom of accumulation.

### **The War on Drugs, War on Terrorism, or War on the Poor**

The long history of U.S. economic presence and military intervention in Latin America is an expression of U.S. empire-building. Petras et al. (2004) describe it as a process of violent conflicts, military coups, massacres, forced exile, and the establishment of a state apparatus loyal to the empire and a political class that is as an accomplice in imperial rule. Kirk and Okazawa-Rey (2000) and Wallerstein (1990) also point to the historical and contemporary interconnections among capitalist expansion, economic domination, colonization, imperialism, and militarism. Militarization has accompanied neoliberal economic restructuring as inequality has widened within countries and between the South and North, making armed force a central feature in the maintenance of the status quo. Corporations require political stability and protection of their investments. In his October 1998 address to chief executive officers of major U.S. enterprises, William Cohen, a former Secretary of Defense, expressed the mutually supportive nature of their relationship with the military: "Business follows the flag.... We provide the kind of security and stability. You provide the kind of profits.... We need to continue to have this relationship where we provide the security and you provide the investment" (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, 2000).

The U.S. emerged from World War II with the most extensive network of military bases in the world. Since September 11, 2001, the number and geographic spread of bases has increased (Magdoff et al., 2002). U.S. bases are now located in over 120 places throughout the world, with over two dozen in Latin America. In fact, the soldiers and contract personnel deployed to bases in the region far outnumber those employed in U.S. civilian agencies (Poland, 2001a). The Southern Command—one of five of the Pentagon's unified commands—includes 19 Latin American and Caribbean states (Fazio, 2004).

#### *Colombia*

Like Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, Colombia is an Andean country in which U.S. Special Forces currently operate. Since the 1980s, the area has been the main focus of the U.S. War on Drugs. The First Andean Initiative in 1989 marked the beginning of significant U.S. funding, since the armed forces of these countries were deemed essential to the War on Drugs. Between 1990 and 1994, \$2.2 billion in military and economic assistance were allocated to the region. In Colombia, funds were channeled to the National Police for elite squadrons and massive herbicide-spraying campaigns. By the end of the 1990s, President Bill Clinton introduced an ambitious aid program—an emergency package for Plan Colombia that totaled \$1.3 billion for 2000 and 2001. This assistance was massively skewed toward militarized counternarcotics operations. It served to equip and train three Colombian army battalions to provide ground support for aerial herbicide campaigns in the southern part of the country. After September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush allocated

\$93 million in military aid to Colombia, which was no longer officially limited to the War on Drugs, but was designated for counterinsurgency operations. The U.S. military presence in the Andean region continued to increase, with expanded training missions and a growing number of bases (Tate, 2001). Although the human rights record of the Colombian armed forces was one of the world's worst and the government has failed to implement any of the 27 U.N. recommendations, in early 2004 Secretary of State Colin Powell certified Colombia's compliance with human rights conditions and released another \$34 million in aid to the Colombian armed forces (Justice for Colombia, 2004).

U.S. and Colombian intelligence and security personnel involved in counter-narcotics and counterinsurgency operations are stationed in radar-equipped military installations in San José del Guaviare, Marandua, Leticia, Riohacha, San Andrés Island, Miraflores, Ariquita, Santa Marta, and Puerto Asís. (The last five belong to the Colombian military, but are used by U.S. personnel.) Currently, 1,000 to 2,000 U.S. military staff are involved in Colombia. Some 100 U.S. troops attached to an unidentified military-intelligence battalion are based at the Joint Intelligence Center at Tres Esquinas in the southern Department of Putumayo. Four Special Forces teams from the Seventh Special Forces Group are training Colombian army counterinsurgency battalions in the Departments of Putumayo and Caqueta. About 14 retired U.S. military and intelligence officers employed by the U.S. State Department are based in Bogotá to advise the Colombian military High Command. Three teams, including U.S. military instructor pilots, instructor flight engineers, and instructor gunners from the Sixth Special Operations Squadron, are training Colombian army and air force pilots to use Huey helicopters, as well as in tactical operations and close-air support. Many other Special Operations security personnel are deployed wherever U.S. troops are based. U.S. counterinsurgency operations in Colombia are also launched from bases outside the country: Manta (Ecuador), Curacao (Netherlands Antilles), Aruba (Netherlands Antilles), Comalpa (El Salvador), Soto Cano (Honduras), and Santa Lucia (Peru) (Castro, 2002). Plan Patriota, announced in May 2004, is a U.S.-Colombian joint initiative that will consist of a massive military offensive, including the deployment of 15,000 troops into the FARC stronghold.

### *Ecuador*

Ecuador's military cooperation with the United States includes accelerated installation of bases, special training centers for elite counterinsurgency units, espionage centers, increased joint operations near the border, and millions of dollars in funding (Fertl, 2004; Fazio, 2004). Since September 11, 2001, the number of security agencies, soldiers, and contractors assigned to Ecuador by the U.S. has increased dramatically, as has the budget (Fazio, 2004). In 2002, the U.S. provided \$136.5 million to Ecuador and the neighboring countries of Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, and Panama (Tate, 2001). U.S. military occupation of Ecuador was consolidated

through the establishment of its Southern Command Base (naval and air) in Manta in 1999. Its intelligence-gathering and surveillance capacity exceeds that of the former Panama Canal Zone. It is equipped with E-3 AWACs and F-16 and F-15 Eagle Fighters to patrol the Amazon region, the Panama Canal Zone, and Central America (Mendonca, 2003). Since 1999, the base has quadrupled in size; in July 2003, it became a main center of electronic espionage in South America, using Pentagon satellite technology (Tate, 2001; Fazio, 2004). The base currently houses 162 U.S. officers and 231 employees. U.S. soldiers and private contractors enjoy complete diplomatic immunity in Ecuador.

In 2002, the Pentagon subcontracted DynCorp, a U.S. enterprise with profits of \$10 billion, to fumigate illegal cultivations as part of Plan Colombia and it is also in charge of logistics, administration, and computer technology services at the Manta base (Fazio, 2004). Besides the Manta base, there are plans to build aerial and naval facilities on the Galapagos Islands (a world-heritage site), in the southern province of El Oro, and a series of special battalions and military camps in the highland and Amazonian regions of the country (Tate, 2001). Cyncorp (also a Pentagon private contractor) is installing three substitute logistics centers in the provinces of Guayas, Azuay, and Sucumbíos.

Training is another important aspect of the U.S.–Ecuador military relationship. In 1999 alone, the U.S. instructed 681 Ecuadorian military and police personnel. Each year, 20 to 28 Ecuadorian students are enrolled in the School of the Americas (the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), infamous for its role in training Latin American dictators, murderers, and torturers. The Ecuadorian police are also currently receiving “antiterrorist” training from the FBI (Fazio, 2004). Ecuadorian militaries are also trained in Argentina, where the objective is to create “a unified military command to combat terrorism...in a battlefield littered with civilians, non-governmental organizations, and potential aggressors” (Mendonca, 2003). It is believed that Ecuador may assume the role Honduras performed during Ronald Reagan’s war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua—collaborating in an undercover war of aggression (Fazio, 2004).

### *Mexico*

With the onset of the armed Zapatista uprising in 1994, President Clinton authorized an arms export package for Mexico, including over \$64 million worth of sophisticated electronic equipment, satellite-guided UH-60 Blackhawk, Huey, and Bell 212 helicopters, C-130 Hercules troop transport planes, and Condor spy planes equipped with infrared sensors and silent flight, all of which have been used against the Zapatistas (Irish Mexico Group, 1997; *Progressive*, 1997). In 1996, Ambassador James Jones declared that the U.S. was willing to provide intelligence, security services, and training to assist Mexico in its fight against the rebel movement. U.S. advisors participated in the creation of counterinsurgency commandos or paramilitary groups among indigenous organizations that were not affiliated with

the Zapatistas. In addition, U.S. intelligence services actively assisted in determining the (alleged) identity of the Zapatista spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos (Irish Mexico Group, 1997).

Training is an important aspect of the military relations between Mexico and the U.S. Most students at U.S. training centers come from the Mexican military. From 1996 to 1998, the Pentagon provided \$44.1 million worth of training as part of an anti-drug and International Military Aid Program. During this period, 603 Mexican soldiers received instruction from the International Military Education Program, a large part of which is provided by the School of the Americas. The anti-drug tactics taught closely resemble the counterinsurgency methods used to train Latin American officers during the Cold War. Of the high-ranking military personnel involved in the conflict in Chiapas, at least 13 graduated from the School of the Americas, including General Juan Lopez Ortiz, who by some accounts oversaw the offensive against the Zapatista rebels in Ocosingo in January 1994, after which several people were found executed (del Rio, 1998).

### **Justifications and Reality**

The U.S. exercises hegemony (in a Gramscian sense) by making its dominance appear to serve universal interests and promote human rights and democracy. The War on Drugs was the pretext needed to maintain the military-industrial complex in the post-Cold War era. Central to shoring up the neoliberal model, it gave ideological cover for a sustained U.S. military presence in Latin America and a strengthening of militaries throughout the region (Aiyer, 2001). After September 11, 2001, the War on Terrorism buttressed the justification for expanded militarization and direct intervention (Petras et al., 2004). The U.S. named Ecuador as one of two South American nations that might have an al Qaeda cell; immediately, FBI agents were dispatched to investigate (Whitten, 2003). In September 2002, the Bush administration's national security strategy declared it had the right to resort to force to eliminate any perceived challenge to U.S. global hegemony (Chomsky, 2003).

U.S. military intervention in Latin America hinges on economic and political considerations. It is part of a worldwide campaign to extend U.S. imperial power and promote its political and economic interests through military bases and client political regimes (Petras, 2002). The War on Terrorism, which is an indirect product of the projection of U.S. power, is used to justify the further extension of that power (Magdoff et al., 2002). Military base expansion directly benefits the U.S. economy through the weapons manufacturing sector and the international arms trade. The Pentagon, with a budget that considerably exceeds that of companies such as Exxon Mobil, Ford, or General Motors, stimulates business in this sector by outsourcing many of the operations and the maintenance of military bases to private contractors such as United Technology and Bell Helicopter Textron (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, 2000).

U.S. military facilities and their local counterparts also serve to ensure access



to areas with strategic resources, especially oil and gas (Magdoff et al., 2002). For instance, Plan Colombia facilitates hydroelectric and petroleum exploitation, as well as mining mega-projects sponsored by the World Bank and the multinationals (Mendonca, 2003). Protection of economic interests entails the maintenance of client regimes. Thus, the U.S. military presence in the region also serves to destabilize independent governments and to strengthen decaying client regimes (Petrás, 2002). Social movements represent a challenge to the latter; the goal, then, is to monitor and prevent popular mobilizations and to intervene whenever they threaten to overthrow elite regimes that subordinate their national economies to foreign capital. In Colombia, the FARC and other guerrilla groups are the focus of the funds allocated for Plan Colombia and the thousands of U.S. military personnel who are working closely with the Colombian military. The State Department clearly articulated this focus: "the new counter-narcotics bases located in Ecuador... will be strategic points for closely following the steps of the [Colombian] guerrillas" (in Poland, 2001a). Similarly, it is not a coincidence that a claim surfaced linking Ecuador to an al Qaeda cell, given the existence of a significant indigenous peasant movement there (Whitten, 2003). In Mexico, the War on Drugs has become a pretext to attack the EZLN, a movement that opposes neoliberalism and NAFTA. As noted by Alfredo Vásquez Carrizosa, president of the Colombian Permanent Committee for Human Rights, since the time of John Kennedy, U.S. administrations have taken "great pains to transform our regular armies into counter-insurgency brigades, accepting the new strategy of the death squads" (Chomsky, 2003).

### **Repression, Violence, and Militarization: The Human Costs**

The prevalence of repressive and coercive practices (dating back to the military dictatorships), the invention of new methods of monitoring and social control, the increased militarization of the region with a mission clearly rooted in economic concerns, and the involvement of military personnel in the sphere of civil society have had tragic consequences with respect to human rights and lives. Beyond the limited version of democracy, throughout the region are spreading waves of terror that consist of repression and violence (which are ultimately state sanctioned, notwithstanding the appearance of multiple sources). They are directed against those who challenge structural inequalities and injustices in any way.

Marx and Engels' (1968) conception of ideology gives insight into how the consolidation of this machinery of terror within the structure of the state is made possible by the National Security Doctrine. Central to the concept of ideology is the separation of the ruling ideas from the class that produced them, thereby obscuring the particular economic and political interests they promote. After September 11, 2001, the National Security Doctrine was reintroduced in the three countries discussed here, supposedly to address internal threats to peace, stability, and security. In reality, such threats are created and maintained by those in power and used as an instrument of fear that generates a state of desperation within the population—a

favorable ground for selling the promise of security at a high price. By popularizing the danger of the "internal enemy," the perpetrators of violence can persecute their victims in the name of security, thus criminalizing social struggles for basic human rights. According to Chomsky (2003: 21), the National Security Doctrine of Latin American states is not a defense against an external enemy, but the right to fight and exterminate social workers, trade unionists, and men and women who do not support the establishment. Social movements and organizations are no longer the only target. The "internal enemy" against which this low-intensity or "below the radar" war is waged under the cover of the War on Drugs or the War on Terrorism includes entire sectors of society that have been excluded and marginalized by the current economic model, who are potential sources of challenge with their demands for social justice.

According to Amnesty International, more human rights campaigners are killed in Latin America than anywhere else in the world (Kingstone, 2003). In certain parts of the region, such as Colombia, the persecution of human rights activists has reached emergency proportions and takes the form of threats, torture, and assassinations. The unofficial criminalization of activist work is an approach often used by politicians in the region to portray human rights campaigners as subversives, criminals, or terrorists. For example, President Uribe responded to international concerns about the safety of human rights workers in Colombia by stating: "Every time a security policy aimed at defeating terrorism appears in Colombia, every time the terrorists start to feel weak, they send their mouthpieces to talk about human rights" (in Fernandez, 2003). Abundant evidence illustrates that many of the Latin American states are democracies only in appearance; in reality, they more closely resemble a "democratatorship"—a term coined by Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, referring to the presence of democratic formalities along with features of dictatorships (Giraldo, 1996).

### *Colombia*

Colombia has become the site of the hemisphere's deadliest conflict and of horrifying human rights violations. New antiterrorism legislation enhanced the police and judicial powers of the armed forces, including the authority to detain suspects without warrants for up to 36 hours, search homes, wiretap phones, and interrogate suspects without the presence of a lawyer (Leech, 2004). A network of one million civilian informants was set up as part of the Democratic Security policy, which allowed for malicious accusations against neighbors or foes (Ferrer, 2002). The result has been massacres, mass detentions, and abductions of teachers, campesinos, union leaders, indigenous leaders, and members of other civil organizations.

U.S. financial and military aid has created the conditions for intensified repression within Colombia and dragged the region into a sustained counterinsurgency war (Aiyer, 2001). Since 1990, over 3,000 trade unionists have been killed (ICFTU, 2004). Between 2002 and August 2003 alone, over 250 unionists were murdered

(Petras et al., 2004). According to the Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared, forced disappearances have increased dramatically—3,593 people in a one-year period (2002 to 2003), compared with 3,413 in a seven-year period (1994 to 2001). According to the Human Rights and Displacement Consultancy, forced displacements have also increased. In 2002, 412,553 people were forcibly displaced, a 20% increase over the previous year (Leech, 2004). Currently, there are close to three million internal refugees, 75% of whom are women and children.

How do we give faces to the thousands of cases of human rights violations? On November 26, 2002, the paramilitary abducted Cristóbal Hinestroza Paz, a member of the Afro-Colombian community of Jiguamiando. He was murdered and decapitated, with his body mutilated into 77 pieces. The judicial authorities refused to cooperate (Interchurch Commission of Justice and Peace, 2002). After being threatened for her community work, on October 16, 2003, human rights worker Esperanza Amaris Miranda was dragged from her home in Barrancabermeja by paramilitaries; five minutes later, she was shot and killed in front of a school. Authorities were aware of previous threats, but failed to protect her from the paramilitary attack (Vivanco, 2004). On January 28, 2004, members of the paramilitary abducted and tortured human rights activist and journalist Inés Peña, a member of the Popular Women's Organization in Barrancabermeja. They tortured her by shaving her head and burning her feet (*Colombia Week*, 2004).

According to a 2004 report by the International Centre for Trade Union Rights, from December 3 to December 17, 2003, four members of various unions were assassinated by the paramilitary. The anti-privatization activism of the National Association of Colombian Hospital Workers (ANTHOC), for example, has been a target of state-directed and paramilitary violence. Since 1998, 300 ANTHOC members have been displaced from their homes, 84 assassinated, 30 unjustly imprisoned, and 15 disappeared (*Colombia Week*, 2003b). Thousands of campesinos have been massacred because of alleged connections to guerrillas, including indigenous and Afro-Colombians who are the targets of ever-increasing, deadly aggression. For example, on December 31, 2003, in the southern Department of Cauca, army troops shot to death Olmedo Secue. An indigenous resident of Los Chorros and a member of the Huelles Caloto reservation, he was killed for no apparent reason while riding a motorcycle along a road lined by army troops (WNU, 2004). Union leaders see the growing number of arrests, abductions, and killings of unionists and campesinos as part of a government plan to destroy the labor movement and all opposition to its authoritarian neoliberal policies (Interchurch Commission of Justice and Peace, 2002).

### *Ecuador*

During the January 2001 massive demonstrations held by 10,000 indigenous people in Quito, after a 10-day struggle, the Red Cross reported four dead, 80 injured, and 900 arrested. In Puerto Napo, the police killed three CONAIE demonstrators and

another indigenous man in Tungurahua (Bannowsky, 2001). The police embargoed food, water, and medicine from 5,000 indigenous activists and also beat, gassed, and arrested many. In 2002, the military in the northern Ecuadorian Amazon province of Orellana and Sucumbíos fired on people who had occupied sites of petroleum exploitation, killing four and wounding many (Whitten, 2003). Since 2003, death threats and violence have increased against peasants and indigenous leaders. On November 4, 2003, Ángel Shingre was murdered (WNU, 2003). He had been the leader of a peasant and environmental organization that denounced the ecological damage inflicted by Texaco (now Chevron–Texaco), a U.S. oil company. On February 1, 2004, CONAIE's leader, Leoniz Iza, and his wife and family survived an assassination attempt that seriously injured his son, brother, and nephew on the way from the Quito airport as they returned from the Hemispheric Congress in Havana against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (WNU, 2004). Several radio stations and some newspapers that were highly critical of the government have been closed down. On February 16, 2004, tens of thousands of Ecuadorians poured into the streets to demand the resignation of President Lucio Gutiérrez and an end to corruption and military ties with the U.S. In Nabon, in the Province of Cotopaxi, at least four protesters were killed and dozens injured when police used bullets to quell the demonstrations (Fertl, 2004).

President Gutiérrez militarized many rural areas of the country to protect the oil exploration activities of various foreign companies (Ponce, 2004). The following case illustrates the challenges experienced by the indigenous (and non-indigenous) population in the countryside and the government's response. The Sarayaku indigenous people of Ecuador's Amazon region have faced a stepped-up invasion of their homeland by the military. In December 2003, the Sarayaku people initiated a march for peace and a defense of their collective rights over territory that has been endangered by the Argentine oil company, CGC. On the day of the march, 120 people were detained by army personnel and brutally assaulted with sticks, stones, machetes, and gunshots (*Sarayaku News Alert*, 2003). The Sarayaku people's denunciation of the Ecuadorian state and CGC was brought before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, D.C., on February 29, 2004. Gunmen assaulted Marlon Santi, the Sarayaku organization's president, hours before his flight to Washington, took his travel documents and the documents prepared for the Commission, and threatened him: "You Sarayaku people will die like dogs." In March 2004, the Minister of Energy and Mines, Carlos Arboleda Heredia, a colonel serving in a civilian capacity, made official his position that force and censorship are the best way to resolve conflicts. The Sarayaku people, he stated, must pay the indemnifications Ecuador owes CGC for impeding its seismic activities. On March 31, the head of the Armed Forces Joint Command, General Octavio Romero, accompanied by heavily armed military police and other army officials, entered Sarayaku's central village area. According to Marlon Santi, the visit was intended to threaten the community and was evidence of government

militarization of Sarayaku territory to guarantee CGC's ongoing activities, without consideration of Sarayaku's ancestral rights (*Sarayaku News Alert*, 2004a).

### *Mexico*

Officially, Mexico underwent a democratic transition when Vicente Fox defeated the long-entrenched PRI electorally in 2000. Yet, on the ground little has changed. The *caciques* (local landlords), who are often backed up by the Mexican military, rely on violence to maintain their power. Violence connected to the drug trade has become intertwined with struggles over political control and natural resources, as well as counterinsurgency efforts against the guerrillas in Chiapas and other militant rural movements. Massacres in the countryside have been reported with alarming regularity and are part of a strategy by paramilitaries to incite terror and repression. The paramilitaries are overseen by *caciques* and are clandestinely armed by the federal military to try to "terrorize rebellious Indians back into submission." During Christmas of 1997, 45 unarmed Tzotzil Maya were massacred in Acteal. In November 2001, the court freed six members of the "Red Mask" paramilitary group that committed the massacre (Weinberg, 2002).

Since the 1994 Zapatista uprising, indigenous peasants have experienced daily harassment and frequent brutality from paramilitary and state armed forces, especially in the states of Guerrero, Chiapas, and Oaxaca. As part of these counterinsurgency and anti-drug campaigns, the army has been given policing duties and 30,000 troops have been deployed, at great cost to human rights. During drug trafficking investigations, soldiers often commit murders, torture, and rapes (Orlandi, 2003). On April 14, 1998, the federal army, judicial police, public security forces, and immigration officials launched a joint operation against the Zapatista community in Altamirano. Several people were beaten severely during the operation, many became sick from inhaling tear gas, and a number of women were sexually assaulted. On June 2, 1998, public security police and paramilitary squads drove 30 families of EZLN sympathizers in the community of Nabil in Tenejapa out of their homes. On June 10, 1998, over 1,000 federal troops, judicial police, and state public security forces attacked various communities of the Autonomous Municipality of San Juan de la Libertad. During the operation, which included the burning of houses and the use of helicopter gunships to attack civilians, eight Zapatistas were killed, with nine injured and 57 detained (EZLN Archives, 1998b). As Plan Puebla Panama and the FTAA unfold, repression intensifies against those perceived to be obstacles to the strategic interests of the multinationals. In January 2004, in the remote Montes Azules jungle area of Chiapas, the armed forces attacked the Zapatista community of Nuevo San Rafael, burning down 23 homes and forcibly evicting the Chol indigenous people. Also, 110 other Zapatista villages and settlements in the same area have been threatened with eviction (Edinburgh-Chiapas Solidarity Group, 2004).

Evidence from Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico illustrates that paramilitary

attacks and state-army violations are not isolated, temporary, or accidental occurrences. They indicate patterns that must be considered in relation to wider political and economic processes. Such violence is carried out against: guerrillas and civilians residing in guerrilla-controlled territories; members of peaceful popular organizations and movements that denounce or fight against the current economic model and policies that impoverish the working class; populations residing in areas rich in natural resources; and human rights activists and lawyers, educators, and intellectuals. Hence, paramilitary attacks are motivated by the need to establish and maintain conditions conducive to ongoing, unrestrained capital accumulation, with the heavy human cost this entails. Violence and the specialized "art of torture" armed actors gain through counterinsurgency training form part of a strategy to eliminate and forestall new social forces from seeking to build a model that places priority on protecting human life instead of profit.

### Conclusion

During the 1990s, neoliberal restructuring under democratically elected regimes in Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico has intensified poverty, inequality, repression, violence, and militarization. Popular movements have emerged in response to the deterioration in the living conditions of the low-income majority in each country, the continuous manipulation of the state by the elite, and the increase in foreign control over natural resources and strategic sectors of national economies. The connection between the pursuit of economic interests and capital accumulation on one hand, and violence on the other, is not coincidental. To prevent collective mobilizations that may lead to viable alternatives to the neoliberal model, campaigns of terror have been directed at members of popular movements and at low-income sectors of the population to paralyze through fear any process of conscientization.

Those interested in maintaining the status quo portray concerns with social justice and the protection of human rights as dangerous, destructive forces that threaten freedom, democracy, and stability. The "internal security doctrine" functions ideologically to persuade the public that bloodshed, abductions, torture, rape, and forced displacement are inevitable and necessary to ensure "security." Yet the increasing militarization of the region has not assured the basic human security of the people in this hemisphere. Billions of dollars have been devoted to "counterinsurgency operations," or to use Chomsky's (2003) term, on state-sponsored terrorism. Such violence has played an increasingly crucial role for the U.S. in safeguarding a structure of production that serves its imperial interests, especially in the face of an economic crisis and challenges from the European Union and Japan.

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