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## The Hearts and Minds of the Citizens

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## The Hearts and Minds of the Citizens

### Abstract

If the US contributes increased military support to Guatemala under the premise of curtailing the drug trade, it could inadvertently further destabilize this already politically unstable country. It certainly will not contribute to developing a sense of political alliance in the hearts and minds of its citizens. Concerns about destabilization in Guatemala (and Central America more generally) and the role of this destabilization in facilitating the drug trade have led the Economist to suggest that the solution is to increase military foreign aid to Guatemala.

### Keywords

Human rights, Guatemala, Drug trafficking, Foreign policy, Military intervention, Peace accords

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## The Hearts and Minds of the Citizens

by Brooke Ackerly

If the US contributes increased military support to Guatemala under the premise of curtailing the drug trade, it could inadvertently further destabilize this already politically unstable country. It certainly will not contribute to developing a sense of political alliance in the hearts and minds of its citizens. Concerns about destabilization in Guatemala (and Central America more generally) and the role of this destabilization in facilitating the drug trade have led *the Economist* to suggest that the solution is to increase military foreign aid to Guatemala. To propose militarization as a foreign policy response to political problems in Central America demonstrates ignorance or naiveté about 1) contemporary use of police and military to support the actions of private security firms; 2) the commitments of the Peace Accords that are the basis of contemporary stability in Guatemala and the abuses of military power they are supposed to curtail; and 3) the long history of US support for non-democratic practices and institutions in the region through financial support and training of militaries. What political interests are behind *the Economist's* proposal? Certainly not those of the Guatemalan people.

Any proposal to use the military to curtail the drug trade needs to examine the role of the military and police in community destabilization and the role of such community destabilization in the drug trade. Guatemalan people in the Polochic Valley have experienced the likely use and misuse of increased military resources. Communities are destabilized when their sources of livelihood are destroyed to make way for large-scale agriculture or other business interests, as seems to have taken place in [March 2011 in Guatemala](#). A plan to increase stability needs to address the sources of instability and the role of private security forces, paramilitary forces, and police in destabilization.

Similarly, such proposals – whether coming from journalists or policy makers – should respect the Peace Accords, which express the government's commitment to enhancing “the legitimacy of its democratic institutions in the interest of the people of Guatemala.” These accords specifically curtail the use of private security firms (IV.A.32), assuring that such firms will operate under the control of the National Civil Police. The violence of March 2011 by a private security firm took place under an observing police force. If this is contemporary interpretation of [the Peace Accords](#), we might expect foreign military aid to be used against the Guatemalan people in ways that might be destabilizing and ultimately conducive to Guatemala's becoming increasingly important in drug trafficking.

Finally, journalists and policy makers need to consider the longer history of the [US military and CIA roles](#) in supporting multinational agricultural interests and interfering in national politics, and the local elites' inclination to use that support against its own population as an important part of the [foreign-policy background](#). Rather than acting ignorant about this history and naïve about its import, *the Economist* might investigate and report on the business and political winners and losers in such a military initiative.

*Professor Ackerly's research interests include democratic theory, feminist methodologies, human rights, social and environmental justice. She integrates into her theoretical work empirical research on activism. Her publications include Political Theory and Feminist Social Criticism (Cambridge 2000), Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference (Cambridge 2008), and Doing Feminist Research with Jacqui True (Palgrave Macmillan 2010). She is currently working on the intersection of global economic, environmental, and gender justice. She teaches courses on feminist theory, feminist research methods, human rights, contemporary political thought, and gender and the history of political thought. She is the winner of the Graduate Teaching Award and the Margaret Cuninggim Mentoring Prize. She is the founder of the Global Feminisms Collaborative, a group of scholars and activists developing ways to collaborate on applied research for social justice. She advises academics and donors on evaluation, methodology, and the ethics of research. She serves the profession through committees in her professional associations including the American Political Science Association (APSA), International Studies Association (ISA), and the Association for Women's Rights and Development. She has been a member of the editorial board for Politics and Gender (Journal of the APSA, Women and Politics Section) since its founding.*