Manuscript Title: Locating Guatemala in Global Counterinsurgency

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Abstract

Guatemala, a country that during the 1980s experienced one of the most lethal counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns during the Cold War, is currently witnessing a revival of counterinsurgent order-making within the context of the global renaissance of COIN. Against this background, this article locates Guatemala within the context of the “global counterinsurgency.” It highlights how contemporary COIN, through depoliticizing and criminalizing forms of counterinsurgent knowledge production that frame Guatemala as a country facing a transnational “criminal insurgency,” becomes increasingly integrated into externally supported and community-centered “democratic” police reform and neoliberal development agendas, promoted within the context of the Central American Security Initiative (CARI). This integration, the article highlights, increasingly blurs the boundaries between war-making, law enforcement, peacebuilding and development, thereby contributing to the reappearance of counterinsurgent order-making in post-conflict Guatemala.

KEYWORDS: Guatemala, Central America, Counterinsurgency, Warfare, US Foreign Policy, Transnational Security Governance

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Locating Guatemala in Global Counterinsurgency

Introduction

The liberal wars—from the war on terror to the multiple wars against drugs and crime—of the post-9/11 world that claim adherence to the rule of law, legality as well as ethical and humanitarian principles not only have brought counterinsurgency (COIN) back on the geopolitical agenda of Western states (Khalili, 2013, p. 3), they have literally contributed to the emergence of “global counterinsurgency” (Kelly et al., 2010). This global revival of COIN reiterates old 19th-century beliefs that military action and coercion are crucial mechanisms for the dissemination of Western civilizational standards, capable of triggering large-scale socio-political and -economic transformations in non-Western societies (Porch, 2013, p. 1).

In contrast to “classic” forms of COIN that often followed a “kinetic” approach that primarily aimed at killing the enemy, contemporary COIN approaches increasingly recognize the “centrality of the civilian” and “the importance of nonmilitary efforts and actors” (Sewall, 2007, p. xxv) for winning the battle by winning the “hearts, minds and acquiescence of the population” (Kilcullen, 2010, p. 29). Emblematic figures like General David Petraeus or General Stanley McChrystal as well as their military advisors—like the Australian ex-soldier and current Professor of Security Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, David J. Kilcullen—have henceforth promoted the idea that in order to win the “Global War on Terror,” (GWOT) “protecting the people is the mission,” not destroying the enemy (McChrystal quoted in Gurman, 2013, p. 2). To this end, they promote “bottom-up, community-based, civil-society approaches” (Kilcullen, 2010, p. 160) that should “go beyond classical counterinsurgency, in search of models that better explain how conflict happens on the ground, and how local patterns of conflict nest in a wider system of human activity” (Kilcullen, 2013, p. 16). Such “civic action” efforts, to be sure, have always been central to COIN (e.g. Ronning and Barber, 1966). However,
contemporary COIN practices of “civilianizing warfare” (Bell, 2011) pushed this emphasis on bottom-up, community-based, civil-society efforts towards a qualitatively new level (Wiuff Moe, forthcoming). Following Khalili (2013), this approach, because of its proclaimed adherence to basic principals of liberal thought, such as the role of civil society, legality, humanitarianism and “good” institutional practices, can be termed “liberal counterinsurgency.”

In this article we seek to locate Guatemala within the context of the global renaissance of liberal COIN. At first sight, Guatemala is not one of the “usual suspects” that come to one’s mind when thinking about contemporary theatres of counterinsurgent warfare, which are mostly associated with transnational terrorism. However, at a closer inspection it becomes apparent that during many important historical turning points, counterinsurgent practices of political order-making have shaped the country’s development throughout most of the 20th century (Grandin, 2004; McClintock, 1985; Schirmer, 1998), including the “kinetic” COIN campaigns during the 1980s and the “total war at the grassroots” (Jonas, 1991, p. 148), which killed more than 200,000 Guatemalans. Moreover, it was during these years that Guatemala, as a key site of what Grandin termed the Central American “workshop” for US imperial ambitions, became a veritable “laboratory of repression” (Grandin, 2007, p. 109) in which basic patterns of US foreign policy, geopolitics and military interventionism that laid the foundations for the revival of COIN as a core ingredient of the “punitive idealism” in our post/911 world were forged (Grandin, 2007, pp. 6-7).

While the Guatemalan COIN experience, in this regard, contributed substantially to the contemporary global revival of COIN, this article demonstrates how this globalization process also “travels back” to post-conflict Guatemala, contributing to the renaissance of counterinsurgent political order-making within the context of a transnational “war” on crime and youth gangs that are increasingly framed as criminal insurgents. In particular, we show how the import of external security governance expertise and globalized securocratic knowledge
production contributes, in Guatemala’s post-conflict context, to the unfolding of an inherently transnational form of liberal COIN centered on containing the “criminal” insurgency threat represented by transnational street gangs.

In analyzing these processes we demonstrate how the Guatemalan case provides useful insights regarding the expansionist logic of the globalization of COIN beyond narrowly defined military domains and the major theatres of the GWOT. Specifically, we highlight how liberal COIN as a “more ‘humane’ and developmental [form of] warfare” (Khalili 2013, p. 4), through depoliticizing and criminalizing forms of counterinsurgent knowledge production becomes increasingly integrated into “democratic” police reform and securitized neoliberal development agendas, thereby blurring the boundaries between war-making, law enforcement, peacebuilding and development in Guatemala’s “securitized democracy” (Pearce, 2010).

In order to develop this argument, we focus on two closely related aspects that are core causal factors behind the re-emergence of counterinsurgent violence in Guatemala. First, we analyze the Small Wars Journal (SWJ) as an important site of COIN-related law enforcement-centered knowledge production and an important node within an influential network that connects COIN-practitioners, law enforcement bureaucrats, academics and politicians united by a shared concern regarding the containment of “criminal insurgencies” in the Americas. After assessing the way Guatemala is framed by the SWJ community as a country facing a “criminal insurgency” and how this framing finds its way into US foreign policy debates, we then turn to the analysis of the resulting export of policing “best practices” in the guise of community policing efforts and community-centered development projects promoted within the Central American Regional Security Initiative (Carsi), which aim at the containment of street gangs in so-called “communities at risk.” In the conclusion, we summarize the main findings of the article and highlight their implications for a deeper understanding of the globalization of liberal COIN beyond the GWOT.
Framing the Guatemalan Criminal Insurgency

Central to the global renaissance of COIN has been the rise of a “COIN-dinista” (Ricks, 2009) core of intellectual soldier “insurgents” (Kaplan, 2013) in the United States (US) military establishment in the post-9/11 context and their personal networks inside the US military and foreign policy establishment. In this section, and by turning to the SWJ, we will analyze how an “underground” network of COIN-dinista “senior military officers, civilian policy makers, and their advisers, as well as prominent academics, think-tankers, and bloggers aligned to the military” (Gurman, 2013, p. 2)—and the knowledge produced and disseminated by this network—also played a crucial role in the framing of contemporary Guatemala as a breeding ground for transnational criminal insurgencies in the Americas.

In order to assess the importance of SWJ for the globalization of COIN, turning to David Kilcullen’s Counterinsurgency is instructive. On the first pages of this best-selling publication that promotes liberal COIN, readers find the following dedication: “For Dave Dilegge and Bill Nagle, founders and editors of Small Wars Journal. They gave the counterguerrilla underground a home, at a time when misguided leaders banned even the word ‘insurgency,’ though busily losing to one. Scholars, warriors, and agitators, Dave and Bill laid the foundation for battlefield success; our generation owes them a debt of gratitude” (Kilcullen, 2010, p. vii).

The SWJ is an online publication published on a regular basis since 2005. It is available free of charge and financed by the Small Wars Foundation. While SWJ covers all contemporary theaters of “global counterinsurgency,” its El Centro initiative specifically focuses on insurgencies in contemporary Latin America: “The elephant in the hemispheric room is clearly the epidemic criminal, cartel and gang threat, fueled by a drug and migration economy, rising to the level of local and national criminal insurgencies and a significant U.S. national security

1 Retrieved from http://smallwars.org/content/about.
El Centro’s goal is to contribute to a “better understanding” of the Latin American insurgency “threat.” To this end, it provides a reading list, including publications in Spanish, and research links on Latin American insurgencies for interested readers. In addition to this, El Centro also has a group of fellows who “agree with SWJ’s general approach to advancing discussion and awareness in the field [of Latin American insurgencies] through community dialog and publishing.”

As becomes apparent from El Centro’s mission statement, the insurgencies emanating from contemporary Latin America are “criminal” and not “classic” political insurgencies, defined as “organized movement[s] aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government” (FM 3-24, p. 2).

In contrast to this standard understanding of insurgencies, the SWJ community portrays Latin America’s contemporary criminal insurgencies as apolitical: “The criminal insurgent is resolutely apolitical; he challenges the will of the state because he seeks to sever its regulatory arms” (Sullivan and Elkus, 2008, p. 7; see also Sullivan, 2009, p. 2; 2012).

With the invention of the criminal insurgency concept, a de-politization-through criminalization of conventional understandings of insurgencies takes place. This discursive move that reduces politics to the narrowly defined domain of taking over state power, while at the same time identifying a growing “convergence of crime and war” (Sullivan 2005), displaces conventional understandings of insurgencies as political-military struggles from the terrain of warfare to the realm of (militarized) policing and law enforcement. As this is the main professional field in which most of the abovementioned authors are active (see below), this discursive move not only enhances their symbolic capital and position vis-à-vis other security experts within the ongoing struggles over dominant understandings of what security, related risks and threats are (Bigo, 2008). Moreover, the discursive merging of COIN and law enforcement/crime-fighting and war-making also opens the door towards the export of COIN practices within

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the context of transnational police and security sector reform initiatives focusing on Guatemala and other Central American countries as well as the amalgamation of internal and external security agendas. The latter becomes possible, because the principal “insurgent” actors identified by the SWJ community are “sophisticated, internationally-oriented, and extremely violent gangs” (Brands, 2009a, p. 1). These “new insurgents” are not just threatening Central American states but also the security of the US, because of their inherently transnational character: “Transnational criminal organizations and gangs are threatening state institutions throughout the Americas. In extreme circumstances, cartels, gangs or maras, drug trafficking organizations, and their paramilitary enforcers are waging de facto criminal insurgencies to free themselves from the influence of the state” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 1). It is this transnationalization of the criminal insurgency narrative that, in addition to linking internal and external US security concerns, also brings in Guatemala.

SWJ contributors depict Guatemala as a transnational destabilizing factor that substantially contributes to “Mexico’s criminal insurgency” and the related “danger for the United States” (Sullivan and Elkus, 2009, p. 7). This is due to the fact that Guatemala’s “state weakness” has converted the country into a safe haven for Mexican criminal insurgents who retreat to Guatemala in order to evade Mexican law enforcement (Fricano, 2013, p. 1). The resulting presence of Mexican criminal insurgents, like los Zetas, in Guatemala is seen as a military threat for the Guatemalan state (Bunker, 2010, p. 7). This threat is further exacerbated by the challenge transnational street gangs-cum-criminal insurgents pose for the Guatemalan state. In fact, and by drawing parallels with the political insurgencies of the 1970s and 1980s, for the SWJ community gangs-cum-criminal insurgents have forced the Guatemalan state to retreat from parts of its territory, creating veritable “liberated” areas.
The gangs then use these areas as free zones for drug trafficking, arms smuggling and other illegal activities, and actually begin to exert their own form of governance over the population. They collect ‘taxes’ through extortion, and lay down a code of conduct for residents of the zone. Those who comply receive protection as well as limited social services like food, toys and clothing; those who do not subjected to brutal punishment. Just as the Latin American insurgents of the 1970s and 1980s had their ‘liberated zones,’ the gangs now have their own domains where they—rather than the government—can dominate the population and impose a degree of ‘order’ (Brands, 2009a, p. 5).

As the mix of state weakness, the lingering shadow of an insurgent past, inefficient law enforcement, expanding transnational cartel and gang activities, as well as the geographic proximity to Mexico, are regarded as threats to the stability of the entire region, Guatemala is converted into a paradigmatic case of the transnational destabilization potential and challenge “these non-state (network) threats [transnational criminal insurgents]” represent for “the institutions of the many nations affected,” including “the loyalty of the indigenous populations to the state itself” (Bunker, 2010, p. 2). In light of this scenario, it seems justifiable to make a “plea to the Barack Obama Administration and both Houses of Congress” for elevating “the drug cartels and narco-gangs of the Americas” to the “#1 strategic threat to the United States” (Bunker, 2010, p. 2).

Such statements, however, are at odds with findings of recent academic studies on Central American gangs. While the existence of gangs in Central America is undeniable—according to a recent assessment transnational street gangs in Central America are said to have about 10,500 members in El Salvador, 14,000 in Guatemala and some 36,000 in El Salvador (Stiles, 2012, p. 137)—the actual transnational threat “potential,” presence, and connections of street gangs across the Americas are unclear (Wolf, 2011, pp. 65-68). Moreover, recent research pointed out
that despite the undeniable involvement of transnational gangs in extortion, robbery, drug dealing and violence (including homicides), the lack of coordination between different cliques of the same gang, their “democratic anarchic leadership” structure and the size of these gangs are factors that all militate against their qualification as serious transnational organized criminal actors (Ward, 2013, pp. 161-171; Müller, forthcoming).

While in light of such observations, pleas for elevating gangs to the number 1 strategic threat for the US, as well as the publication and blog-related activities around the SWJ and El Centro, seem exaggerated and could easily be discarded as seemingly irrelevant activities by off-duty COIN-dinistas, at a closer inspection, their impact on the US security agenda towards Latin America, including related policies targeting Guatemala cannot be ignored. Here it has to be kept in mind that most of the authors, bloggers and active members of the SWJ community, including El Centro fellows, are not just a bunch of unimportant military aficionados. Many, if not most of them, are recognized academics, security experts and practitioners. El Centro fellows' and SWJ contributors include, for instance, Hal Brands, Assistant Professor of Public Policy at Duke University, and author of *Latin America’s Cold War*, published by Harvard University Press in 2012. Brands has also written reports on Latin America for the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense and the United States Southern Command, including a document entitled *Mexico’s Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy* (Brands, 2009b) for the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) at the US Army War College. Other SWJ contributors include John P. Sullivan, Senior Research Fellow at Center for Advanced Studies on Terrorism and a lieutenant of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Office, whose so-called “police diplomacy” activities are crucial for the export of anti-gang policing strategies from California towards Central America, including Guatemala (Müller, forthcoming), Max G. Manwaring, Research Professor of Military Strategy at of the US Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute, or Robert J. Bunker, an

4 See http://smallwarsjournal.com/elcentro/fellows.
instructor with the Los Angeles High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area as well as Visiting Professor and Minerva Chair at the SSI, and former member of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Behavioral Science Unit as well as former Professor for National Security studies at California State University, San Bernardino.

The academic and professional security expertise of these and other members of the SWJ community can be considered as a form of symbolic capital, conceived as “the acquisition of an image or reputation for competence, respectability and honorability that are easily converted into political positions as a local or national notable” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 291). It is this symbolic capital in addition to the embeddedness of many El Centro fellows within securocratic networks linking US law enforcement, academic, military and foreign policy circles as well as highly influential think tanks that has allowed these underground COIN-dinistas to place the criminal insurgency narrative, including the related image of Guatemala, on the US security agenda towards Latin America.

The general importance of SWJ as a recognized place of COIN-related knowledge production can be seen in the fact that Joseph C. Collins, current director of the Center for Complex Operations (CCO), at National Defense University (NDU) and Michael Miklaucic, CCO’s director of research and editor of PRISM, one of the leading publication venues for US military “informal doctrine” (on informal doctrine, see Bickel, 2000, pp. 4-7) in terms of “complex operations,” recently joined the SWJ’s debates on COIN (Collins, 2015; Miklaucic, 2010). CCO has been in charge of revising and updating Counterinsurgency Field Manual FM 3-24 in light of recent “lessons learned,” a process leading to the publication of JP 3-24 Counterinsurgency in 2013. Tellingly, JP 3-24 not only discusses “insurgencies driven by commercial or criminal objectives” (JP 3-24, II-2), a type of insurgencies not mentioned in FM 3-24, which clearly distinguishes politically motivated insurgents from criminal groups (see, for instance, FM 3-24, 19-20; 29; 33; 96; 112). Moreover, JP 3-24’s small reference matter also includes a monograph
by SWJ contributor Scott Manwaring that analyzes gangs as “mutations of insurgents” (Manwaring 2007, p. 2). In addition to such a direct integration of the SWJ’s “criminal insurgency” narrative into its own publications, CCO also seeks an active collaboration with the SWJ community, as can be seen in Collin’s SWJ contribution that ends with an outright invitation to “the readers of Small Wars Journal to relate their key, strategic lessons, either as comments to this article, or in an email to the author.” Such a statement by the director of one of the leading US institutions producing and disseminating military knowledge on “complex operations” clearly reflects the recognition and importance of the SWJ’s COIN-related knowledge production for the wider US military and foreign policy establishment and gives credibility to the criminal insurgency narrative.

This credibility is further enhanced by SWJ’s connections to influential think tanks like the Brookings Institution, the Terrorism Research Center—since 2007 owned by the founder of Blackwater, David Prince—or the Center for a New American Security (CNAS). CNAS former director was Col. Ret. John A. Nagl, a leading proponent and practitioner of liberal COIN. Its list of former affiliated scholars includes, amongst others, David Kilcullen and CNAS Senior Fellow and SWJ El Centro’s fellow Robert Killebrew has co-authored a CNAS report titled Crime Wars: Gangs, Cartels and US National Security (Killebrew and Bernal, 2010). The report basically reiterates most of the SWJ narrative regarding “criminal insurgescies” by stating that “crime, terrorism and insurgency are interwoven in new and dangerous ways that threaten not just the welfare but also the security of societies in the Western Hemisphere“ (Killebrew and Bernal, 2010: 6). Other El Centro fellows, like Gary J. Hale, are well connected to US law enforcement and military agencies. Hale was former Chief of Intelligence in the Houston Field Division of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). He served as the DEA intelligence chief at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City and as the Law Enforcement-Intelligence Program

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Coordinator for the Mérida Initiative (MI) at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City between 2011 and 2012.

MI is particularly illustrative of the political impact of the SWJ network in framing US security policies. A telling episode can be found in two joint hearings before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere regarding the progress of MI, in 2011. Announced in October 2007, MI is a multi-year US foreign aid and security package, providing security assistance to Mexico and Central American countries. In 2010, Central American countries were excluded from MI, which now focuses exclusively on Mexico, and put into the newly designed Central America Regional Security Initiative (Carsi, see below). However there is an undeniable presence of Central America, notably Guatemala, in MI’s security discourse, to a substantial degree due to the SWJ community.

In the first of the above-mentioned public hearings, SWJ’s Robert J. Bunker, introduced as a “senior fellow, Small Wars Journal, El Centro” (USC, 2011a, p. 24), gave a statement entitled “Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas: What you need to know, not what you want to hear” (USC, 2011a, p. 25). His testimony reiterates basic arguments of the SWJ’s criminal insurgency narrative, including its portrayal of Guatemala as contributing to the transnationalization of criminal insurgencies in the region: (a) by the migration-related “spreading [of] the maras in the Western Hemisphere” (USC, 2011a, p. 39), and (b) by offering Mexican cartels safe havens, a process that “coupled with the growth of the maras […] has resulted in a bottom up gang and top down cartel assault on nations such as Guatemala” (USC, 2011a, p. 40). Such statements were reinforced by other members of the subcommittee, like Michael McCaul (R-TX), former Chief of Counter Terrorism and National Security in the U.S. Attorney’s office, and current Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security. Reflecting upon his own visit to the country he stated: “Guatemala, as we were down there, 25 farmers got their—were decapitated by the Zetas. And that is truly a failed State in Guatemala”
(USC, 2011a, p. 40). The second public hearing, under the title “Mérida Part Two: Insurgency and Terrorism in Mexico” (USC, 2011b), highlights the lasting impact of the criminal insurgency narrative advanced by the SWJ on the framing of the MI, visible, for instance, in a call by Congressman Connie Mack (R-FL), the subcommittee’s chairman, whose security policy proposals are frequently mentioned in the SWJ blog, for a straightforward counterinsurgency strategy for Mexico (USC, 2011b, p.2). His effort culminated in the introduction of Bill H.R. 3401, in November 2011, titled the Enhanced Border Security Act. It explicitly calls for applying “counterinsurgency tactics under a coordinated and targeted strategy to combat the terrorist insurgency in Mexico waged by transnational criminal organizations, and for other purposes.”

While the bill has not yet been approved, CARSI is already a step ahead. In fact, if Mexico’s “criminal insurgency” is a potential threat to the US, and if the Mexican “insurgency” is to a large extent a product of Guatemalan state failure and transnational gang activities emanating from the country, then the containment of the “criminal insurgency” threat to the US needs to move beyond Mexico and target its root causes in Guatemala. In line with the particular farming of the Central American security crisis propagated by the SWJ’s depoliticizing “criminal insurgency” narrative and the related identification of transitional street gangs as a major threat to the security of Guatemala (and other Central American states) and the US, CARSI, is actively implementing liberal COIN practices, particularly within the realm of community-oriented security and development projects.

**CARS1 and the Making of Counterinsurgent Communities**

CARS1 aims at confronting the “rapidly deteriorating security situation” in Central America. This effort specifically targets the “expansion of national and transnational gangs [that] has

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created communities of fear where gangs effectively control entire neighborhoods.”

A central goal of CARSI is “ensuring citizen safety” (DOS, 2012a) by “taking back the neighborhoods of the region,” in particular in so-called “communities at risk.”

The preferred security policies promoted by CARSI in order to achieve these objectives are “community policing initiatives” and other “citizen-based crime prevention programs” (DOS, 2012b). In Guatemala, these efforts include the creation of a university-level degree in community policing (COP) at the local police academy; the establishment of a so-called “model-precinct” program in predominantly urban areas of Coban, Villa Nueva and Mixco, which emphasizes crime prevention and targeted intelligence-driven policing (Seelke, 2013, p. 18); as well as more ad-hoc local initiatives, like the plan cuadrante in Antigua, which “seeks to improve the relationship between the population and the security forces through foot patrols.”

The US-supported COP programs are coordinated by the Narcotics Affairs Section of the US Embassy in collaboration with other US agencies, including “U.S. government federal law enforcement agencies, the Police Reform Commission, U.S. military representatives in Guatemala, and USAID.” The programs are “community driven” and use “citizen complaints” and “crime incident reporting to determine where best to direct patrolling, and investigations”.

This general program outline clearly reflects the standard idea of COP as international “best practices,” which has been popularized by international development aid programs after the end of the Cold War (Stanley, 2006). However, criminologists have long pointed out that the world of citizen–police relations echoed by community policing “harks back to a harmonious idyll, where the police were everyone’s friend” and warned that “[i]t was never thus, and it is unlikely that it will ever be” (Waddington, 1984, p. 5). It is precisely this ideal world of harmonious citizen–

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10 Retrieved from https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=69a916f23c021c2c413d41cafce03d68&tab=core&_cview=1.
police relations and the related “mythology of policing by consent” (Brogden and Ellison, 2013, p. 8) that has made COP such an attractive export commodity towards Latin American countries undergoing democratic transitions and post-conflict security sector reform (see Arias and Ungar, 2010; Müller, 2010; Policing & Society 2011), including Guatemala.

What community policing promises is a depoliticization/demilitarization of previously highly politicized and repressive security apparatuses. Additionally, COP offers an inclusive, democratic vision of security provision that through the active participation of the population also promises local empowerment (see IEPADES, 2004). The most visible manifestation of this promise of empowerment through policing is the redefinition of internal security in Guatemala as citizen security, which has become the buzzword in local security and police reform initiatives.

However, as a recent episode fittingly exemplifies, the discursive reframing of security is not the magic silver bullet that automatically demilitarizes local security practices. In the summer of 2013, President Otto Pérez Molina presented the creation of six new special force squads (fuerzas de tarea) that specifically deal with gangs and organized crime, and which should strengthen the territorial presence of the Guatemalan state (Baires Quezada, 2013; Rivera Clavería, 2012). They are composed of military units, the Guatemalan Civil National Police and agents of the Public Ministry and presented as a veritable effort of strengthening “citizen security” through cross-institutional collaboration in the investigations of crime as well as “civil and military intelligence gathering by re-collecting citizen information.”

This shows that the citizen security discourse—and related practices—is quite compatible with militarized anti-gang policing, most of all, because the pillar of the citizen security policing model, COP, reflects core elements of liberal COIN. This compatibility is clearly apparent in the growing reimport of COIN from the urban battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan to urban policing in the US and the

interest of COIN-dinistas, including the SWJ community, and COP practitioners in each other’s tool boxes (Bertetto, 2013; Murray, 2012; Pilcher, 2010).

Moreover, when taking a closer look at the externally promoted community policing efforts in Guatemala, it also becomes apparent how much the growing convergence of liberal COIN and COP has already evolved in practice, mostly regarding the local gang “problem” as the clearest manifestation of the “criminal insurgency.” That the merging of COP and COIN promises a powerful answer to this problem can be seen in the following quote from a US law enforcement officer who has been in charge of implementing a COIN-inspired anti-gang effort. As he argues: “Insurgents and gang members both want to operate in a failed area – a failed community or a failed state. […] They know they can live off the passive support of the community, where the local community is not going to call or engage the local police” (quoted in Washington Times 2013). A first aspect that needs to be considered in this regard is that both COP and liberal COIN operate on the basis of an identical worldview that divides local populations into “good” and “bad.” While COP aims at protecting “good” citizens from the criminal “other,” branded the delinquent non-citizen, the overall aim of COIN is to “[c]ontinuously secure the people and separate them from the insurgents” (FM 3-24, p. 178). Both approaches thus share an effort to separate an imagined “other” from a given community and ultimately seek to control the “community from which the ‘enemy’ derives” (Jamieson and McEvoy, 2005, p. 8). As the above-presented description of the “model precinct” program indicates, central to controlling local communities in Guatemala is “community input,” which can be translated into intelligence, gathered through “information collection and processing, and community relationships” (USAID, 2011, p. 9).

While externally promoted COP in Guatemala portrays intelligence-based “prevention” and “security” as ends in themselves, liberal COIN offers a different reading of the COP emphasis on prevention. It suggests that providing security is also an essential means for intelligence
gathering. As FM 3-24 states: “Counterinsurgents need to get as close as possible to the people to secure them and glean the maximum amount of quality information” (FM 3-24, p. 167). In this regard, and in reflecting upon the insights of community-centered anti-gang policing for COIN operations in Iraq, John A. Nagl, a leading COIN-dinista argued: “Police use saturation patrolling and anonymous tip lines to get the gang leaders off the streets.” Therefore, “the police as the closest force to the population, [are] the key to gathering intelligence on insurgent identities and locations and protecting the people from the insurgents” (Nagl, 2015, pp. 77-78).

And as in contemporary theaters of the GWOT, where “tip hotlines” have proved to be essential community-based intelligence gathering tools for COIN operations (FM 3-24, p. 122), the externally promoted “Community-Based Prevention Approach” (USAID, 2011, p. 11) in Guatemala also includes the “anonymous tip-line,” named Cuéntaselo a Waldemar, (tell it to Waldemar) which is considered particularly relevant for the program’s anti-gang component (USAID, 2011, p. 10).

Another point of convergence between externally promoted COP in Guatemala and liberal COIN is a shared commitment to a “clear, hold, build, and sustain” strategy in the “communities at risk” (USAID, 2011, p. 8, original emphasis). With this focus, the externally promoted COP effort in Guatemala mirrors the “clear-hold-build” COIN approach, popularized in related publications with reference to the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment’s (US) operation in Tal Afar in Northern Iraq in 2005 (FM 3-24, pp. 182–84). In Tal Afar, local insurgents were first killed, captured or expelled (clear), then the presence of security forces was expanded (hold), and finally, in the so-called build phase, “with the insurgents driven out of their city, the local population accepted guidance and projects to reestablish control by the Iraqi government” (FM 3-24, p. 183).

A final element that deserves attention when discussing the COIN–COP convergence in Guatemala relates to the emphasis placed on the necessity of embedding COP in “economic and
social programs to provide alternative livelihoods and activities for at-risk youth” as well as offering “academic and technical training to break the cycle of poverty that yields recruits for gangs, traffickers, and organized crime” (DOS, 2012b). This emphasis on combining policing with social assistance programs reflects another popular COIN mantra that presents liberal COIN as “armed social work,” defined as “community organizing, welfare, domestic assistance, economic support—under conditions of extreme threat requiring armed support” (Kilcullen, 2010, p. 43).

In fact, a central element that shapes the local version of liberal COIN is the discursive appropriation of neoliberal development discourses on “decentralization, democracy, and poder local [local power]” and their inscription into Guatemalan governance practices (González-Izás, 2013, p. 282, original emphasis). This trend can also be observed within the realm of security governance, reflected, for instance in CARSI’s above-mentioned focus on “communities at risk”. This focus represents an important discursive and strategic shift from the straightforward crafting of state institutions towards the fostering of local “resilience” (and AUTHOR). As transnational security governance transfers and liberal statebuilding projects, such as police reform, have largely failed to deliver the expected results (see ICG, 2012), the empowerment of local communities and the decentralizing integration of emergent state institutions into the social fabric of local communities seems a promising road towards the creation of “resilient” security communities, in particular within the field of anti-gang policies. The centrality of liberal COIN as “armed social work” within these developments can be illustrated with reference to the Mi Familia Progresa (MIFAPRO) program, a conditional cash transfer program for mothers to buy school supplies for their children and pay tuition, that aims at reducing school dropouts. MIFAPRO, however, is more than just a poverty eradication effort; it is also a policy instrument that serves the implementation of neoliberal self-governance and the responsibilization of the local population, as reflected in a shift from state assistance policies towards securitized
investment-oriented service provision that aims at “positive modification of the peoples’ living conditions and their future opportunities” (PNUD, 2011, p. 17). This not only resembles previous counterinsurgency efforts of “reconstitut[ing] civilian society by way of education [and] persuasion” (Schirmer, 1998, p. 235), the program additionally—and in contrast to local critics that claimed that MIFAPRO would potentially negatively affect local security as it would siphon “away money from public security, including the police” (ICG, 2012, p. 5)—clearly reflects liberal COIN doctrine of “[r]ecognizing the interrelationship of security and governance” and the related necessity of providing adequate funding “for services, education and health care” in order to conduct “effective COIN operations” (FM 3–24, p. 202). In an environment where gangs and other “criminal insurgents” are presented as “invading” and “taking hostage” whole communities, MIFAPRO is, indeed, regarded as a necessary policy tool for countering the spread of these “criminal insurgents” by “strengthen[ing] educational opportunities” and for steering “at-risk youth away from gangs and violence” (DOS, 2012c).

In light of these observations, externally promoted COP, and its embeddedness within community-centered neoliberal and securitized social assistance programs introduces the military logic of liberal COIN as well as the related community control strategies into a local context that has a long history of counterinsurgent state practices. In this regard, far from moving Guatemalan policing away from the authoritarian legacy towards democratic citizen security, COP contributes to the continuity of counterinsurgent violence in Guatemala that is based on “coercion and concessions” (Williams, 2011, p. 82) and uses the “whole set of diverse counterinsurgency techniques that operate through different modes of power and therefore encompass remarkably ‘friendly’ performative practices as well as pedagogic interventions,” which have also been identified in other contexts (Streicher, 2013, p. 31). As a result, externally promoted COP along the lines of the programs mentioned above has become a central element of the “war by other means” in post-war Guatemala (McAllister and Nelson, 2013). This “war by
other means” enables the coercion-backed reproduction of highly unequal and exclusionary social relations in a democratic post-conflict setting and draws its legitimacy from a new, externally promoted and locally appropriated, community-centered security discourse that, as during the COIN campaigns of the 1980s, divides the social space of the community up into an antagonistic field of friends and enemies.

This is probably most visible in the proliferation of formal/informal forms of community policing centered on the so-called Juntas Locales de Seguridad (JLS), which clearly reflects the problematic embrace of neoliberal development and security discourses of “the local” and “the community” as seemingly authentic, legitimate and efficient security providers (González-Isas, 2013). The JLS, which are also integrated in the model precinct approach and its overall effort of “creating environments in which proactive local stakeholders (such as local governments, community organizations, and private-sector organizations), when available, can collaborate around a unified goal of crime prevention” (USAID, 2011, p. 13), are a mix of “bottom-up” security privatization—in the guise of vigilantism and the formation of self-defense groups—and a “top-down” privatization as part of an official policy that formally transfers security provision to non-state actors.

Community policing by the Juntas results frequently in the reproduction of surveillance strategies that operate on the basis of a “panopticum dynamic […] in which observers and observed coexist in the same community” (Argueta, 2013, p. 43). Moreover, the emergence of the Juntas is inseparable from the impact of neoliberal responsibilization strategies within the realm of Guatemalan security governance (Argueta, 2013, p. 105) and the related “broad-scale transference of state functions to private citizens” (Thomas et al., 2011, p. 2). Within the context of Guatemala’s post-conflict politics, this security-related responsibilization of citizens, however, is highly problematic as this turns out to contribute to a “bottom-up” prolongation of COIN practices implemented during the 1980s.
This holds particularly true for the rural parts of Guatemala that witnessed the creation of *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* (Civil Self-Defense Patrols, PACs) during the counterinsurgency campaign of 1982–1984. Up to 1 million men were recruited for the PACs (Amnesty International 2002, p. 2), providing the military “with free day-and-night surveillance in rural communities [...] and a means to control any local opposition, without a formal military presence in these communities” (Jay, 1996, p. 17). While clearly being a product of the Guatemalan military, the PACs also contributed to the emergence of “a strong sense of localized sovereignty within these communities.” In taking the military’s “promise” of the inclusion of indigenous communities into the counterinsurgent state project seriously, the PACs also “have provided the villages with their own means of self-defense” (Schirmer, 1998, p. 97).

The emergence of and external support for the JLS interacts with these ambivalent legacies of the early 1980s, contributing to a process of civil patrol re-formation, with former PAC members often being the main protagonists behind the creation of JLS (Argueta, 2013, p. 110). Thereby, they “revived” previous patterns of community conflicts between former guerrillas, ex-PAC members and people that “were *forcivoluntariamente* serving in the civil patrols” (McAllister and Nelson, 2013, p. 3, original emphasis). This form of responsibilized COP therefore recycles COIN practices of the “persecution by proxy” (Jay, 1996), which are now re-articulated with a neoliberal ideology of self-surveillance, mixed up with indigenous forms of social control—as well as within the US supported anti-gang activities through COP-cum-COIN, contributing to a new phase of externally promoted but “civilianized” (Bell, 2011) counterinsurgent order-making in the country.

**Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated that counterinsurgent violence continues to shape Guatemala’s “securitized democracy.” This continuing presence of counterinsurgent violence results from the contingent convergence of efforts by US COIN-dinistas of framing Guatemala as a country facing a “criminal insurgency” and US-driven security policies targeting the “root causes” of this insurgency through the implementation of community-oriented security programs. While contemporary COIN in Guatemala is inherently “liberal,” centered on improving the “rule of law,” “citizen security” and local democratic empowerment, it is nonetheless a form of warfare targeting the most marginalized segments of the local population by portraying them as the “criminal other.” Liberal COIN practices of “armed social work,” it seems, are highly appealing to many well-intentioned actors, from NGOs to academics, politicians, aid workers and international donors, because liberal COIN’s discovery of “the restoration of public security” as “a key to insulating civilians from insurgents and restoring trust in local authorities” (Sewall, 2007, p. xxvi) resonates with globally dominant international practices in and through which Western actors try to confront the “dangers” emanating from seemingly “ungoverned” spaces in our post-9/11 world. As this article has demonstrated, these efforts are not confined to theaters of the GWOT but are increasingly finding their way into the discursive and practical repertoires of externally promoted security and development programs targeting democratic post-conflict settings like Guatemala, thereby contributing to the globalization of liberal COIN.

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