

## **Perspectives on the Impact of Historical and Contemporary Terrorism on the World's Indigenous Peoples**

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### **Abstract**

By now, many have seen the late 19th century photo of Geronimo brandishing a rifle along with three members of his Apache band more recently captioned with the telling phrase: "Fighting Terrorism Since 1492." The effect is to deliberately stand commonly accepted definitions and perceptions of terrorism on their head.

This brief overview of the recent literature serves to illuminate how those definitions determine the context in which the issue has been viewed by both the powerful and the relatively powerless historically and in the 21st century.

From the time of exploration and Columbus, through such episodes as Sullivan's campaign of terror against the Iroquois Confederacy, and the violence and terrorism directed against the Cherokee people in the 19th Century, history is replete with examples. Stannard, Barker, Hoffman, Amnesty International, New Internationalist, Means, La Duke, and many others insist various forms of terrorism continue to impact native peoples around the globe today. Indigenous activists resisting physical and cultural genocide, land grabs, and environmental desecration often have recently (post 9-11) passed antiterrorism laws used by agents of the state to subdue them. Examples can be found in Brazil, Chile, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Ecuador, Colombia, Bangladesh, and Peru, to name but a few of the most overt.

In the words of Amnesty International: "Indigenous human rights defenders who speak out face intimidation and violence, often with the collaboration of the state. In many instances, peaceful support for efforts of Indigenous Peoples to maintain their own cultural identity or exercise control over their traditional lands and resources is branded treason or support for terrorism, leading to violent treatment at the hands of authorities" -- the very kind of thing Noam Chomsky describes as the "terror of counterterrorism". This paper explores what several contemporary scholars have brought to light regarding this aspect of terrorism virtually ignored by the mainstream media and most post 9-11 academic endeavors.

### **Introduction**

The world has been increasingly concerned with terrorism in the late twentieth century. In part because the United States government, media, and military have been so aggressive in their global responses since September 11, 2001, but also because the aspirations of many historically marginalized groups have been organized and groups have taken action to promote their interests against those of the state. Agreeing on a definition of terrorism is itself often contentious, subject to the perspective and interests of those doing the defining: hence, counter-terrorist activities are often hard to distinguish from the terrorism they are allegedly combating. "Indeed, virtually any especially abhorrent act of violence perceived as directed against society, whether it involves the activities of antigovernment dissidents or governments themselves...is often labeled



‘terrorism’.”<sup>1</sup> Terrorism is hardly new. The word itself was popularized during the French Revolution and was at that time, used in the context in which this paper focuses. *Regime de la terreur* was understood to involve power wielded by the recently formed revolutionary *state*. “It was designed to consolidate the new government’s power by intimidating counterrevolutionaries, subversives, and all other dissidents whom the new regime regarded as ‘enemies of the people’. The Committee of General Security and the Revolutionary Tribunal were thus accorded wide powers of arrest and judgment.....”<sup>2</sup>

State terrorism goes back a long way. Edward Herman suggests in *Z Magazine*, February, 2006 that the 7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. Assyrians “brought to perfection a systematic terrorization of their adversaries...”<sup>3</sup> Powerful states have brought institutional (military, economic, social, cultural, & legal) force to bear against resistant groups throughout history. Indigenous groups throughout the world have been marginalized and targeted by expanding states for hundreds of years, with disastrous consequences that persist for those cultures today. In the post 9-11 twenty first century, many states like the United States seem to have taken cues from the French Revolution and passed Patriot Act style legislation that grants broad powers to police and intelligence arms of the government to deal with terrorism. In a surprising number of cases across the globe, with or without the support of these enhanced laws, various states have targeted indigenous activist groups resisting genocide, forced relocation, corporate and/or governmental encroachment on traditional lands, and branded them as terrorist in order to dispossess them more efficiently and effectively.

Understanding the vagaries of terrorism, and the elusiveness of a comprehensive, consensus definition, as well as who and where indigenous peoples are in the twenty first century and the dynamics of the relationship and tensions between native peoples and the nation-state (both historic and contemporary) is the focus of this paper.

While terrorism has been evident for centuries, it has been employed with greater urgency and frequency in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. It has become a preoccupation of government leaders around the world. Alarm and concern is evident in military doctrine,

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<sup>1</sup> Hoffman, Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Herman, Edward S., “Globalizing & Idquo,” *Z Magazine*, February, 2006, 34.



budgets, legislation, and speeches that call for intelligence and security agencies to work more closely together, often with the United States supplying training and hardware where lacking. There is no question that the danger is real, but American officials as well as the leaders of other countries have often exaggerated it in order to advance their own political, social, economic and military agendas. Comprehensive legislation such as the Patriot Act, giving governments enhanced and often extraordinary powers to address the perceived threat(s) to security, has been enacted and implemented in many countries.

It is important to come to an understanding of what distinguishes terrorists from other types of activists, irregulars, radicals, & protestors that may be employing non-traditional means to call attention to their interests, positions, and demands. Terrorism eludes comprehensive definition, but is generally understood to mean “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change....designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate object of the terrorist attack.”<sup>4</sup> Perceptions of terror depend on context—mostly, who is in the position of power to shape the definition. This is more often than not the mutually supportive state and corporate interests whose symbiotic institutional relationship is able to perpetuate the status quo and resist challenges to their control. Labeling a group as “terrorist” to a great extent dehumanizes, making harsh or extreme treatment easier for the establishment to justify and easier for the non-targeted populations to accept. As indicated by James Sterba, “most of the clear cases of terrorism directed at innocents are cases of terrorism as practiced by states...the most significant terrorist problem is that of state terrorism or state supported terrorism.”<sup>5</sup> In the post 9-11 environment, where terrorism is widely condemned, use of the term “tends to delegitimize struggles by the weak while legitimating repression by the strong.”<sup>6</sup> Usually, there is an effort to instill fear or intimidate in the opposition, whether that be a rival group, a government or country, or public opinion. The reliance of terrorists on violence to achieve objectives is most often a consequence of legitimate avenues of exercising power having been institutionally blocked by status quo structures and rules. Demands have thus been thwarted or otherwise gone

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<sup>4</sup> Hoffman, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> (Sterba, James P. “Introduction.” In *Terrorism and International Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p.3)

<sup>6</sup> Jaggard, Alison M. “What is Terrorism, Why is it Wrong, and could it Ever Be Morally Permissible?” *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Summer, 2005, p 208.



unrecognized, unheeded and been unattainable for generations or even centuries. If we suggest that any militant organization that does not represent a state is not legitimate, we deligitimate all rebels and insurgents no matter the merits of their cause, the human rights abuses they have suffered, or the oppressive and often unrepresentative nature of the governments they target with their movements. “Violence used to bring about political change and violence used to prevent it are both extremely difficult to justify, and the burden of proof should be against its use by both sides. However, those who have sufficient power to see that political change might be attained in ways other than through violence have an even greater responsibility to avoid bloodshed.”<sup>7</sup> Most groups that organize and pursue an activist agenda through peaceful demonstrations or other non-traditional means are NOT then, terrorist, however distasteful or unacceptable the interests or positions they assert may be to those in control. There is clearly a distinction of major significance between attempts to create power by non-traditional but *legitimate* means, such as arousing the conscience of the majority, hoping that public pressure on power holders will eventually force changes in oppressive/repressive policies, and the *terrorist* tactics of using violence and fear to force demands, or retaliate for demands unmet. Yet, in the global climate since the events of September 11, 2001, officials have discovered that labeling any group that threatens the status quo as “terrorist” greatly facilitates managing, punishing, or even extinguishing it. To be sure, there have been many instances of this label being intentionally misapplied to advance or protect the interests of the establishment. Recently, for example, *Equality Maryland*, the states’ largest gay rights group was one of the peaceful protest groups the Maryland State Police database had classified as terrorist. “The group was designated as a ‘security threat’ by the Homeland Security and Intelligence Division....police kept files on...plans to hold rallies...”<sup>8</sup>

State terrorism, then, under the thinly veiled guise or protective veil of *counter-terrorism* has multiplied beyond the increase in real threats to human life and property, particularly as perceived by elites. “Terrorism always lurks at the back of the shelf of power tools available to those who command the machinery of government. The agencies and weapons that pursue criminals and wage wars are easily adapted to state terrorist use. Whether coping with internal

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<sup>7</sup> Held, Virginia. *How Terrorism Is Wrong: Morality and Political Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.56.

<sup>8</sup> (“No Comment”. *Progressive*, 2009, 10).



opposition or projecting power abroad, holders of state power have frequently chosen terrorism as one of their instruments of action.”<sup>9</sup> We have seen that state terrorism has an ancient history, but in more modern times it is linked to European (and later American) Imperialism/Colonialism as global empires were established and maintained through force often justified on assumptions of moral and cultural superiority. This has been particularly true with regard to the indigenous peoples of the world.

David Stannard makes a provocative comparison between Columbus’ arrival at San Salvador in 1492, and the detonation of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima in 1945. While Hiroshima was unique in that more than 130, 000 civilians were killed in a single blast, two decades after Columbus landed on Hispaniola more than 8,000,000 indigenous people had been killed outright or by disease. In the span of about a generation, “what happened on Hispaniola was the equivalent of fifty Hiroshimas. And Hispaniola was only the beginning.”<sup>10</sup> Even the lines between pestilence and state sponsored genocide are blurred. During the Seven Years War between the French and the English in the mid eighteenth century in the British North American colonies, the diary of General Jeffrey Amherst records one of the first examples of biological terrorism: the deliberate distribution of smallpox infected blankets to the Ottawa Indians (allies of the French) of the Great Lakes.<sup>11</sup>

Not many years later, under orders from Washington, Generals Clinton and Sullivan conducted a brutal scorched earth and extermination campaign against the Iroquois Confederacy during the Revolutionary War. In 1779 more than 6,200 troops –more than a quarter of the rebel army- invaded Seneca, Cayuga & Onondaga country to clear cut and burn these resisting or neutral nations. Washington’s orders were that they were not only to be overrun, but destroyed. The April and September campaign reduced almost all of Iroquoia to shattered hearths and fields of fire. The army burned 50 towns and their surrounding fields with more than 1200 dwellings, as well as destroying more than 1 million bushels of corn.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Barker, Jonathan. *The No Nonsense Guide to Global Terrorism*. Toronto: New Internationalist, 2008, p.63.

<sup>10</sup> Stannard, David E. *American Holocaust*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.x.

<sup>11</sup> Fenn, Elizabeth A. “Biological Warfare in Eighteenth –Century North America: Beyond Jeffery Amherst” in *Journal of American History*, March, 2000, p.1554.

<sup>12</sup> Spiegelman, Robert. “Sullivan-Clinton: Then and Now” <http://sullivanclinton.com> (accessed December 7, 2008).



In many places of European colonization and settlement, indigenous resistance to invaders who seemed like armed thieves threatening their land and livelihood provoked the political drive to authorize and justify the use of state and vigilante military force to clear native peoples from their ancestral lands and either exterminate or confine them. Violence continued to be used to maintain domination and control, to recruit/exploit labor (including forced military service) and to conquer additional territory for expansion—whether for agriculture, the extraction of resources, or general commerce and the ‘settlement’ of communities of colonizers. The history of the Cherokee and other Southeastern Tribes (Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole) in the early United States is instructive.

Known in the early 1800’s as the Five Civilized Tribes because of the successful efforts of many tribal members at adopting white/European dress, Christian religion, English language and formal education, cultural practices and customs (including slaveholding), and free market economic success, these native nations were nonetheless subjected to some of the most blatant terrorism sanctioned by local, state and federal governments. “Rising agricultural property values, Cherokee gold mines, and growing white (and enslaved black) populations all fueled Georgia’s desire for Cherokee lands. State laws were passed that claimed to nullify the Cherokee government, assert ownership of the gold mines and agricultural lands, and deny citizenship to Cherokee people. As violence and terrorism against Cherokee people escalated, Cherokees were denied due process by state law....white depredations against Cherokee people were legally unchecked...”<sup>13</sup> The Supreme Court’s rulings in *Cherokee Nation vs. Georgia* (1831) and *Worcester vs. Georgia* (1832) favored the Cherokee nation, but were flagrantly ignored and deliberately not enforced by President Jackson. It is important to note that the actions taken by Cherokee leaders, then, were to pursue legitimate redress through a series of meetings and correspondence with the President and members of Congress, as well as reliance on the legal system. The Cherokee were not a marginalized people, but an example of a successfully assimilated indigenous minority whose wealth and property was coveted by the dominant majority. Congress’ 1830 Indian Removal Act moved ahead and tens of thousands of indigenous peoples living east of the Mississippi River were moved to territories in present day Oklahoma and Kansas. Legitimate resistance was met first with “treaty trickery” (the Treaty Party of

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<sup>13</sup> Wilkins, David E. and K. Tsianina Lomawaima. *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001, p.82.



signatories only represented 1/16<sup>th</sup> of the nation and was largely comprised of a few cooperative elites, NOT the lawfully elected leaders/Principal Chiefs), then forced removal at the hands of the military. This became known as The Place Where They Cried—or The Trail of Tears—a forced march in 1838-39 of over 18,000 Cherokee during which more than 4,000 died.

The remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in America is replete with other examples of state sponsored terrorism designed to remove or exterminate Indian people. The Sand Creek Massacre of the Cheyenne in 1864, the forced march (Long Walk) of the Navajo to captivity at Bosque Redondo, the 1872-1874 U.S. government sanctioned campaign to eliminate the buffalo herds on the Great Plains, the murders of Lakota leaders Crazy Horse and later Sitting Bull, the persecution and subsequent imprisonment of Geronimo and the Apache, and the massacre of Chief Big Foot's fleeing band of Minneconjou at Wounded Knee in 1890 are among the most infamous.

Noam Chomsky raises the question “What about the boundary between terror and resistance?”<sup>14</sup> In instances like the Santee Sioux Uprising of 1862, where Dakota people had been crowded on to increasingly smaller tracts of reservation land and unscrupulous Indian agents routinely sold off significant portions of government issued rations to line their own pockets, Indians that rustled cattle or stole other food from invading homesteaders to feed their families were branded as terrorist threats and the full force of state power was brought to bear to suppress the “insurgents”. In one of the lesser known episodes of the Civil War and Lincoln administration, 38 Dakota were publically hanged at Mankato, Minnesota in the largest mass execution in United States history.

In the late nineteenth century, it was (and still is) not uncommon for the state to cede political control to (or share it with) private companies. “Some of the worst episodes of terror were carried out under the direction of such companies to further their collection of natural resources. The forced gathering of wild rubber in King Leopold's Congo rivaled in its destructiveness the depredations of the slave trade. Profits from wild rubber were also the incentive for the systematic use of terror...in the Amazon basin.”<sup>15</sup> The exploitation in the early twentieth century of indigenous populations in Honduras and other Central American countries

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<sup>14</sup> Chomsky, Noam. “The Bogus War On Terror”, *Alternative Press Review*, Fall, 2006, p.40.

<sup>15</sup> Barker, p. 64.

by United Fruit Company, as well as native Hawaiians by the Dole enterprise—both with the complicity of the United States government—are well documented.

The shift to more subtle and less direct forms of cultural genocide and state terrorism focused on assimilation (“killing the Indian to save the man”) through the boarding school program and legislation that outlawed the speaking of native languages and practicing indigenous spirituality, reservation policy, and expropriation of Indian lands through the Dawes Allotment Act took hold as the turn of the twentieth century approached. By the time the Indian Reorganization Act restored (limited) tribal sovereignty, while mandating western-style (in place of traditional forms) governments in 1934, 90% of Indian lands held by tribes before the Dawes Act were in private hands.

The question in the twenty-first century is not whether it will happen again, but rather what must be done to stop it. As *The American Holocaust* reminds us, “For the genocide in the Americas and other places where the world’s indigenous people survive, has never really ceased. As recently as 1986, the Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States observed that 40,000 people had simply ‘disappeared’ In Guatemala during the preceding fifteen years. Another 100,000 had been openly murdered. That is the equivalent in the United States of more than 4,000,000 people slaughtered or removed under official government decree....Almost all of those dead and disappeared were Indians.”<sup>16</sup> The weak resistance of indigenous peoples and the need to oppose communism were the oft repeated excuses for this reign of terror (of the Guatemalan government) to which the United States remained supportive with military advisers and equipment, and giving assistance in designing and setting up urban counter-terrorist guerrillas. This, according to Noam Chomsky, was an episode in the War on Terror he convincingly argued was declared by President Reagan twenty years before 9-11. “Reagan’s state-directed war against Nicaragua was condemned by the World Court, backed by two Security Council resolutions (vetoed by the US, with Britain politely abstaining). Another completely clear case is Cuba, where the record by now is voluminous, and not controversial. And there is a long list beyond them. Terrorism directed or supported by the most powerful states continues to the present, often in shocking ways.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Stannard, p. xiii.

<sup>17</sup> Chomsky, pp. 39-40.



There are notable incidents of state terrorism directed against indigenous peoples in the late twentieth century. In the 1970's, indigenous activism was taking hold in various places around the globe, including the United States and Mexico. Here, the American Indian Movement found itself the focus of a counterinsurgency war conducted by the United States government. "The campaign was designed to 'neutralize' that organization's ability to pursue an agenda of Indian treaty rights, land recovery, and national sovereignty in North America. While many of the federal tactics took a directly physical form-assassinations, fabrication of evidence in criminal cases, and the like-a major propaganda effort was also integral to the government's strategy of repression."<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps somewhat more well-known is the ongoing repression of the 1994 Zapatista uprising in the Chiapas region of Mexico that actually has roots at least two decades earlier. The indigenous people of this region had never really stopped struggling to limit the power exercised over them by landowners, labor contractors, and the state, as a century of colonial plantation agriculture had left its mark. Conflict in the nineties gave way to negotiations known as the Dialogue in the Cathedral in February of 1994, but the Mexican political system was crumbling. The era of one-party rule of the PRI was under siege as two assassinations rocked the nation in a six month span. When the 1994 gubernatorial election results in Chiapas (a PRI victory) were challenged by the Zapatista candidate, and a shadow government was created that the locals accepted as legitimate, the stage was set for confrontation. Territory under EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army) control grew dramatically, and the Zapatistas seemed to speak for an increasing number of Mexicans. By February of 1995, the federal government broke the Cathedral cease fire and invaded the Chiapas region, which led eventually to more dialogue that concluded with the San Andres Accords on Indigenous Culture and Rights. These accords put restrictions on military and police violence against indigenous peasants. "Yet at the same time, thousands of federal soldiers stationed in Chiapas set up dozens of military checkpoints and became a permanent daily presence for those mostly indigenous peoples living in the central and eastern regions of the state....Local bosses affiliated with the PRI began arming local vigilante

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<sup>18</sup> Churchill, Ward. "Renegades, Terrorists, and Revolutionaries: The Government's Propaganda War Against the American Indian Movement," in *Native American Voices*, ed. Susan Lobo and Steve Talbot (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2001), p. 219.



groups called ‘paramilitaries’ . Paramilitary activity would reach a culminating point with the massacre of forty-five indigenous women and men at Acteal in December 1997.”<sup>19</sup>

“State sponsored terrorism has had a profound and more broad impact on patterns of terrorism. Since state sponsored terrorism is geared less to obtaining publicity than to pursuing specific foreign policy objectives by covertly bringing pressure to bear on the sponsor’s opponents through acts of violence, it operates under fewer constraints than does ordinary terrorism.”<sup>20</sup> Scholars, activists, and human rights organizations have raised concerns about the increase in state terrorism since 9-11. The climate of fear created has allowed governments to exercise greater powers to suppress dissent and opposition than at any time in recent memory. “It is imperative that anthropologists critically evaluate and speak out about the dangers the war on terrorism will present to native and minority populations around the world if the governments managing them and their lands are given a new international legitimacy to repress them as ‘terrorists’“<sup>21</sup> In fact, Amnesty International recognizes that “indigenous human rights defenders who speak out face intimidation and violence, often with the collaboration of the state. In many instances, peaceful support for efforts of Indigenous Peoples...is branded treason or support for terrorism, leading to violent treatment at the hands of authorities.”<sup>22</sup>

In Mexico, the post 9-11 situation in Chiapas, has taken on an interesting dimension of using NAFTA to justify the cooperation of two states in the suppression of indigenous activism. In March of 2005, the signatory nations launched the *Security and Prosperity Partnership* (SPP) as a next step in regional integration designed to augment both security and prosperity through increased cooperation. NAFTA was, in a sense, armored to protect the agreement from potential attacks, and the SSP is reflective of the priorities of the Bush counter-terrorism agenda. “Plan Mexico” was an American initiative that Congress passed in the summer of 2008, providing \$400 million for the Mexican military and police. “There have been increased attacks on autonomous Zapatista communities in Chiapas, which have been documented by the International Civil Commission on Human Rights. The commission reports a rise in military

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<sup>19</sup> Rus, Jan., Rosalva Aida Hernandez Castillo, and Shannan L. Mattiace. *Mayan Lives, Mayan Utopias: The Indigenous People of Chiapas and the Zapatista Rebellion*. Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003, p18.

<sup>20</sup> Hoffman, p. 261.

<sup>21</sup> Price, David. “Past Wars, Present Dangers, Future Anthropologies,” *Anthropology Today* 18:1 (2002), pp. 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> Amnesty International. “Indigenous Peoples”

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/indigenous-peoples> (accessed December 7, 2008).



incursions, arrests of community leaders using fabricated evidence, and physical abuse and torture of Zapatista militants.”<sup>23</sup>

The oil boom in Ecuador has impacted the Waorani peoples over the last generation. The government began to encourage settlement in the Yasuni Reserve in the late 1960's, and over time, unregulated oil exploration and illegal logging wreaked human and ecological havoc in the region. When challenging the intrusions, indigenous natives faced repression, threats, and even death. By the 1980's, intense conflict between the Tagaeri, who lived in the southern Tiputini Region (which by then had become the center of the southern oil fields) and oil workers broke out with violence on both sides. Oil workers had been speared, and the Ecuadorian military retaliated with helicopter launched rockets into Tagaeri villages and razing of longhouses. While in 1999 the southern part of the reserve was declared by the Ecuadorian government an 'Untouchable Zone', or safe haven for indigenous people who had chosen to live in isolation, illegal logging and prospecting for oil has continued. The Spanish oil corporation REPSOL-YPF allowed a major oil spill early last year, has ignored ongoing court action, and done little if any clean up. "Waorani activist Alicia Cahuiya says that, effectively, the land belonging to her people in Yasuni has been occupied by the oil companies and the military. 'Every step we take is watched, and if we voice a protest REPSOL turns the military on us. If we do not comply, they threaten to beat us. There have been cases where the military have killed Waorani people and thrown bodies in the rivers'"<sup>24</sup>

Indigenous peoples make up some 40 millions of Latin America's population, and are concentrated primarily in Andean and Central American countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico and Guatemala. The state and corporate interests in economic development have most often superseded the needs and rights of natives, and indeed the indigenous populations are frequently seen as standing in the way of economic growth and wealth creation. "An emerging geopolitical discourse identifies indigenous electorates and organizations as a destabilizing force in Latin America and as a potential security concern for the United States and its

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<sup>23</sup> Carlsen, Laura. "Armoring NAFTA: The Battleground for Mexico's Future," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, September/October 2008, p.21.

<sup>24</sup> Baird, Vanessa. "I Will Return and I Will Be Millions," *The New Internationalist*, April, 2008, p.7.



allies...indigenous peoples have long been the targets of violence in the context of weak and radicalized states, poor guarantees of citizenship, and lack of development.”<sup>25</sup>

Much like the situation in Ecuador, foreign mining interests in Guatemala have long had the backing of the government as they invade native lands and extract precious metals. The World Bank funded Marlin Mine, a project of the Canadian Glamis Gold Company, was opposed by indigenous people in rural San Marcos. In early 2005, a standoff occurred as locals attempted to block the delivery of a milling cylinder and thereby interrupt mining operations. The president of Guatemala insisted that the rights of the investors would be enforced, so police and the military were called in to escort the equipment to its intended destination. Shots were fired at protestors trying to block passage, killing one. Sixteen others, including the local indigenous mayor were accused of terrorism. This kind of activity on the part of native peoples in Guatemala who resist unwelcome development is nothing new. “The clearest illustration of this propensity for tragedy when development plans are conceived in the context of endemic structural violence and state repression is the construction of the Chixoy Dam, a World Bank funded hydroelectric project carried out in the 1980’s despite opposition from Mayan populations whose lands were flooded in the process. This opposition was decried as subversion by a virulently anticommunist government, and numerous communities were slaughtered in a series of brutal massacres by state forces and their paramilitary adjuncts”<sup>26</sup>

In Bolivia, where indigenous President Evo Morales was elected three years ago, the situation has been complicated by the opposition to his presidency of local leaders and the presence of the CIA and the DEA, under the auspices of anti- drug efforts connected with the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act. Land Redistribution has been long awaited in Bolivia, as in many Latin American countries, where a few thousand landholders own 70% of the potentially productive land and only five to ten percent of the agricultural land is in the hands of the hundreds of thousands of largely indigenous peasants. In what has become known as the Pando Massacre of September last year, as reported by *Indian Country Today* on December 31, 2008, paramilitary and vigilante groups, backed by local opposition leaders, attacked a peaceful

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<sup>25</sup> Radcliffe, Sarah A. “Latin American Indigenous Geographies of Fear: Living in the Shadow of Racism, Lack of Development, and Antiterror Measures,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97:2 (2007), pp. 386-7.

<sup>26</sup> Fulmer, Amanda M., Angelina Snodgrass Godoy, and Phillip Neff, “Indigenous Rights, Resistance, and the Law: Lessons from a Guatemalan Mine,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 50:4 (2008), p. 92.



group of campesinos on their way to an Assembly. The peasants were attacked with machine gun fire from trees and the assailants were using state vehicles, allegedly provided by the former Governor of Pando, Leopoldo Fernandez.<sup>27</sup> Not coincidentally, Fernandez is a descendant of the rubber bosses that enslaved the indigenous peoples of the Bolivian and Brazilian Amazon region since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and has ties to several of the largest landholding families in the country. Local officials opposed to the Morales government like Fernandez have been equipping and supporting paramilitary youth gangs responsible for a long string of violent provocations against indigenous populations resisting incursions into their land by corporate mining and agricultural interests. In addition, these gangs have targeted media outlets and NGOs (such as the CIDOB-Confederation of Bolivian Indigenous Communities whose members were attacked and beaten last fall) working with native peoples in the forefront of land redistribution efforts. As indicated on the Bank Information Center website, one NGO, the Center for Juridical Studies and Social Investigation (CEJIS) was attacked at least fifteen times in the last five years, culminating in the September 9 storming of their offices that left many wounded.

In Colombia, a similar pattern is evident. Most recently, at least 27 Awa Indians were killed by the guerilla group FARC in February, as reported on Survival International's Website by ONIC, Colombia's National Organization of Indigenous Peoples. According to Survival, "the Awa, like many of Colombia's indigenous people, have suffered for years as a result of violent conflict between the Colombian army, guerillas, and paramilitary groups encroaching on and destroying their land. Out of more than 100 indigenous groups in Colombia, more than twenty-eight are considered to be in imminent danger of physical and cultural extinction. Last fall on El Dia de La Raza (known to Americans as Columbus Day) an indigenous movement/gathering that became known as La Minga began a mobilization and march toward the City of Cali in hopes of obtaining a dialogue with President Uribe regarding concerns over violence against native peoples in Colombia that had seen twenty four members of indigenous communities assassinated since September, and over 400,000 displaced during Uribe's six year term. The government claimed the march was an act of armed subversion and used force in an effort to break it up, while also accusing the marchers themselves of violence. According to the website *Upside Down World*, however, Uribe himself admitted on CNN on 22 October that a police official was

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<sup>27</sup> Kearns, Rick. "Struggles and Persistence: Indigenous Latin Americans in 2008," *Indian Country Today*, December 31, 2008, 9-10.



captured on video firing into the crowd. In addition, in early November, the International Commission of Guarantors released a report exposing the Colombian government's accusations of terrorism against the indigenous and social mobilization as false. Even if we do not concede that they are victims of state terrorism, the Awa are an example of an indigenous people caught in the middle of terror/counter-terror violence, and have suffered dramatically from the effects. According to a joint statement issued by the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) and the regional group, Indigenous Unity of the Awa People (UNIPA), "The UNIPA and ONIC denounce the grave violation of human rights and the collective rights of the Awa People of Narino, which is nothing new....in the last 10 years [in the Awa Territory] there have been four massacres, approximately 200 murders, and 50 people affected by antipersonnel mines...and now 1300 Awa people are trapped in the area due to confrontations between the army, the guerillas, and the para-militaries."<sup>28</sup> While pleading for the warring parties to leave them alone, native activists assert that recent killings are connected to development plans by national and international mining interests and agribusinesses (both legal and illegal) interested in owning that part of southern Colombia where the Awa and other indigenous groups live.

At the 2006 Continental Meeting of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala in Bolivia it was pointed out that turning legitimate protest into a crime is one of the strategies of power groups when trying to contain social struggles. The cooperation of the media in discrediting protestors facilitates repression by the state. The Working Group on Strategic Alliances at the meeting said "We are living in times of militarization and criminalization of social movements. Today as indigenous peoples we are submitted to a new rationale of the so-called democratic or neo fascist security projects. If we do not struggle firmly united against this, our peoples will be only one step away from complete physical extermination as a result of the elimination of our territory, knowledge, identity and culture in general."<sup>29</sup>

In the Philippines, indigenous opposition to the fascist Arroyo regime was evident in pronouncements and demonstrations last summer during recognition of National Minority Week/Indigenous People's Week in August. Gatherings celebrated the International Day of the

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<sup>28</sup> Kearns, Rick. "FARC Massacre of Indigenous in Colombia, More Deaths and Displacement," *Indian Country Today*, March 18, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> ALAI, America Latina en Movimiento. "Criminalization of Social Struggles of Indigenous Peoples." <http://alainet.org/active/16536&lang=es> (accessed April 1, 2009).



World's Indigenous Peoples by calling attention to achievements such as the adoption in 2007 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). On their webpage, the Cordillera People's Alliance emphasized "the human rights situation is at its worst, with the regime being the perpetrator under its policy of political killings, the Oplan Bantay Laya, and the recent Anti-Terrorism Act. Since Arroyo assumed presidency, there are over 900 victims of extrajudicial killings and 193 victims of enforced disappearance. The Arroyo regime has twistedly defined our opposition to destructive projects and the assertion of our legitimate rights and the right to survive as 'terrorism', making us open targets to extrajudicial killings and military terrorism."

Still today in the United States, indigenous peoples are targets of abuse in the name of anti-terrorism and Homeland Security. Jose Matus, a Yaqui ceremonial leader and Director of the Indigenous Alliance Without Borders (IAWB) expressed concern that conditions have not changed much since Obama took office, and that the US Border Patrol and Homeland Security continue to abuse Indian people. The IAWB is also challenging the human rights abuses of the Maricopa County, Arizona Sheriff's Department. "We believe that militarization and border enforcement policies that have been inflicted on the territories of our eight Nations of Indigenous Peoples divided by the US-Mexico border have helped nurture virulent racist Nativism in America, and politicians have used immigration as a wedge issue that has degraded respect for the civil and human rights of us all. Basic protections and rights under the National Historic Preservation Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act have been violated." <sup>30</sup> The abuse of Indigenous Peoples by the US Border Patrol, Homeland Security and Maricopa County Sheriff are among the most censored issues by the media.

Countless other illustrations of state terrorism directed against indigenous peoples can be brought to light. An overview of several can be found in the April 2008 issue of *New Internationalist* where a discussion of the ways native people are being criminalized and targeted using post 9-11 anti-terrorism laws is part of the feature article. Some examples include:

- Chile's anti-terrorist laws were used to give harsh 10 year sentences to Mapuche activists for an alleged arson attack on a forestry plantation on disputed land. The

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<sup>30</sup> Narcosphere. "Censorship and the US Brand of Terrorism at the Border" Reporter's Notebook: Brenda Norrell. <http://narcosphere.narconews.com/notebook/brenda-norrell/2009/02/censorship-and-us> (retrieved 3-31-09).



Mapuche have been labeled and targeted repeatedly by the government. Just this year, the Mapuche School of Self Government (with the aim of facilitating implementation of articles 3 and 4 of the UNDRIP relative to indigenous rights of self-determination and self-government) opened in Temuko. The need for the school arose, according to council leaders, from the marginalization of the Mapuche by Chilean authorities.

- Malaysia's Penan leader, Kelesau Naan, a critic of logging companies, disappeared mysteriously on a hunting trip in 2007
- At least 76 indigenous people were murdered in Brazil in 2007, 63% more than the previous year.
- Colombia's government forced the Nukak people out of their forest lands onto a territory just 2% the size of their original homeland.
- A large number of indigenous people in India are killed by security services each year, often in the process of forcible acquisition of their land for industrial purposes. In the state of Orissa, 14 tribal people were killed in 2006 while protesting against a large steel plant taking their land.
- In Australia, Aboriginal people, who make up 2% of the population, are 15 times more likely to be imprisoned.

These examples, far from being exhaustive, are representative, and indicate that assaults by the state and corporate interests on the sovereignty, independence, human rights, as well as physical and cultural survival of indigenous peoples persists well into the twenty-first century, and have indeed become more frequent and direct in the years after 9-11. These developments are particularly disturbing in light of the recent passage of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September, 2007. This Declaration enumerates fundamental rights recognized in international law, including, among many others, the right to self-determination, autonomy, and freedom from genocide or violence, including forcible removal from their lands. Yet states have passed laws that augment the power of their governments and give them more numerous and powerful tools to deal with any perceived disorder or challenge to authority that could remotely be labeled 'terrorist'. Just recently in March of this year, indigenous leaders from Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Chile came to Washington D.C. to assert



that their governments are criminalizing their right to protest, while marginalizing and persecuting their people. Urging the adoption of an American Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights “condemns the murders of indigenous people carried out by private and state agents and reiterates its concern over the frequency of social conflicts and acts of violence associated with disputes over the lands, territories, and natural resources of indigenous peoples.”<sup>31</sup>

The situation in the Amazon is critical. The President of Peru’s Amazon Indian organization (AIDSESEP) has just been forced into exile, seeking refuge in the Nicaraguan Embassy in Lima after a warrant charging him with sedition, conspiracy and rebellion was issued for his arrest. This followed the violent confrontation between indigenous protesters and riot police on June 5<sup>th</sup> near the town of Bagua in the northern part of the country. The violent tactics used by the police included firing automatic weapons at peacefully assembled Indians and resulted in many deaths on both sides. Police have been accused of trying to diminish the death toll figures by throwing bodies into the Marañon River. The Largely peaceful demonstrations over the last two months have been protesting the Peruvian government’s decrees promoting the opening up of lands to oil and gas companies, without consulting the Indians. AIDSESEP has called for blockades of rivers and roads to halt the oil industry traffic and call attention to the refusal of authorities to negotiate. Peru’s President Alan Garcia has labeled the indigenous protestors ‘savages’, ‘barbaric’, ‘ignorant’ and ‘second-class citizens’.<sup>32</sup>

Other less direct and more subtle actions by governments and private interests continue to dramatically devastate indigenous populations worldwide. Climate change that has caused unprecedented levels of ice melt in the arctic, droughts in east Africa, and rapid drops in crop yield in Vietnam are but a few examples. Government directed relocation programs and imposed development takes away or desecrates sacred ancestral lands, dramatically reduces tribal land holdings and ability to grow enough food to sustain populations, and often has disastrous effects on the health of tribal peoples. Serious questions of environmental justice arise every year, as those who enter and exploit indigenous territory rarely take care of it. Pollution of

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<sup>31</sup> Kearns, Rick. “Seeking Justice, Latin Indigenous Leaders Come to Testify,” *Indian Country Today*, April 8, 2009, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> Survival International. “Indian Leader Forced Into Exile”  
<http://www.survival-international.org/news> (accessed June 11, 2009).



rivers and groundwater sources, contamination of food supplies by agrochemicals and industrial waste and by products, desecration of sacred sites, and a host of other issues related to unlawful intrusions and expropriation of land are far too common in too many places around the globe.

## **Conclusion**

Indigenous people have remained resistant to the illegitimate exercises of state power over the centuries, and have organized and taken activist approaches more frequently in recent years. These have typically provoked anti-terrorist responses from the state with devastating consequences. Five centuries after Columbus, indigenous resistance persists “in various forms, throughout North and South and Central America, as it does among indigenous peoples in other lands that have suffered from the Westerners’ furious wrath....native peoples in most of these places are only remnants now...in each of those places the struggle for physical and cultural survival, and for recovery of deserved pride and autonomy, continues unabated.”<sup>33</sup>

Survival is a strong motive for indigenous peoples across the globe. Cultural resilience and community preservation is given a high value and prioritized over outside pressure for political and economic change. Autonomy and rights to self-government are expected, and are not merely rational political claims, but part and parcel of the spirituality of indigenous communities. “Despite intensive and global pressures for change, many communities will not accept political, economic, and cultural change without some appropriate reinterpretation from within their own culture.”<sup>34</sup> Nation-states will have to recognize and accommodate these dynamics, or risk great difficulty in creating stable and homogenous nationalities. It is understood that in most countries native peoples make up only a small percentage of the total population, their strong sense of community, spirituality, and territory are not as easily assimilated as colonizers originally hoped. Moving away from the strong state tactics associated with anti-terrorism in the post 9-11 environment will help democratize relations and work toward consensus. “Native nations cannot survive easily in an era of global political and economic competition, but they will strive to retain their identities, memories of territory and community organizations. Nation states need to start negotiating more consensual and culturally respectful

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<sup>33</sup> Stannard, p. xv.

<sup>34</sup> Champagne, Duane. *Social Change and Cultural Continuity Among Native Nations*. Lanham: Altamira Press, 2007, p.324.



means of understanding loyalty, citizenship, and national identity that includes the possibility of cultural racial, and sub-national or indigenous identity, as well as cultural and local self-determination.”<sup>35</sup>

When addressing the global concern of terrorism, it is imperative that it be understood in its many dimensions. The threats are real and governments must have the tools to deal with real challenges to the survival of nations. History has shown time and time again, however, that increased powers given to the state for one purpose are often abused and conveniently redirected toward others. Indigenous peoples have been colonized and marginalized for far too long, and in far too many places around the globe. They have survived and demonstrated amazing adaptability and cultural resilience. States do not need augmented powers to further exploit native peoples exercising their rights and defending their homelands and families against unwarranted and illegal intrusions. Rights of indigenous people need to be respected and protected while the concerns and issues they struggle with as a direct result of centuries of exploitation need to be addressed. If there is an area where indeed the world’s governments need to exercise more power, this is it. States need to begin to learn how to use their vast powers on behalf of and in support of their native peoples rather than continuing the past and present practices of marginalization, displacement, environmental injustice, and punishment. The nation states of the world should be marshalling their resources to combat genuine terrorist threats to their security and survival, not squandering their legitimacy on terrorizing populations that are struggling to survive.

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