



Fact Sheet

Guatemala's Elite Special Forces Unit: The Kaibiles

While former members of Guatemala's Elite Special Forces Unit (Kaibiles) are finally being sentenced for human rights atrocities committed during the 36-year internal armed conflict, Guatemala continues to train Kaibiles and their role is expanding to include combating organized crime. Despite a congressional ban restricting direct funding to the Guatemalan army due to its involvement in brutal violence, the United States continues to support, train, and coordinate with the Kaibiles.

Kaibil Training

- In 1975 Kaibiles were created as an **Elite Special Force Unit** in Poptún, Petén as part of the counterinsurgency campaign against guerilla forces
- **Intense training program** reportedly includes raising puppies and killing them after bonding with them, biting off chicken heads and drinking water out of a fired artillery shell
- **Recruitment is voluntary** and a **60-day training** is offered twice annually
- Only about 20% graduate from each course. Total number of graduates (as of 2011): **6,800**
- There is little evidence to suggest that Kaibil training has changed since the Guatemala's armed conflict, during which time the Kaibiles were involved in numerous massacres, widespread rape, and acts of genocide against Guatemala's indigenous population.

Expanding Role of the Kaibiles

- **Former Kaibiles have been named to the top three military positions.** The Minister of Defense was the director of the Kaibil training academy until 2009, and the Commander and Deputy Commander of the Joint Chiefs of Defense were both Kaibil instructors.
- The army, including Kaibiles, has regularly been used in the **eviction of indigenous and peasant communities.**
- In December 2011, President Pérez Molina announced an increased use of Kaibiles in his "iron-fist"-strategy to combat organized crime.

Kaibiles' Connections to Drug Cartels

- **"Los Zetas" drug cartel** recruits current and former members of the Kaibiles for their operations
 - **August 2006:** Ex-Kaibiles arrest working for narco-traffickers in Chiapas, Mexico
 - **May 2011:** Ex-Kaibil charged with having commanded and participated in a massacre of 27 farm workers in Northern Guatemala
 - **December 2011:** U.S. defense contractor CNA's reported that there is "an abundance of evidence that criminal organizations engaged in trafficking have penetrated even the highest levels of the Guatemalan military and police."¹
 - January 2012: Army Spokesman announced the arrest of **14 to 16 Ex-Kaibiles** linked to "Los Zetas"



Kaibiles Motto: "If I advance, follow me. If I stop, urge me on. If I retreat, kill me"
[photo: www.prensalibre.com]



Former Kaibil instructor sentenced to 6,060 years in prison
[photo: www.prensalibre.com]

Kaibiles Convicted in Dos Erres Massacre

On Dec. 5, 1982, during the de facto administration of Ríos Montt, a unit of Kaibiles massacred the inhabitants of Dos Erres, Libertad, Petén. 201 men, women and children were tortured and killed, thrown down a local well. Of those killed, 113 were children under the age of 14. Others were marched into the nearby forest, executed, and buried in a mass grave.

A case was filed in 1994, and 17 arrest warrants were ultimately issued, but it wasn't until 2011 that four Kaibiles stood trial and were sentenced to 6,060 years in prison for involvement in massacre. In March 2012 another former Kaibil, Pedro Pimentel Ríos, was also sentenced to 6,060 years in prison.



Kaibiles going through intense 60-day training
[photo: www.amaderdesh.com]

US Funding for the Guatemalan Military

Support during internal armed conflict

- Funding continued throughout the 1960s and 70s despite proof that the US was aware of human rights violations on the part of the Guatemalan army, totaling, 20 million dollars-
- **US aid to the military has been limited** through Foreign Appropriations since 1990 due to concerns about human rights abuses committed by the Guatemalan military (more than 200,000 Guatemalans were tortured, disappeared or assassinated).
- **Currently, the ban applies to:**
 - **IMET** (International Military Education and Training): United States Security Assistance Program which resembles a student exchange program (foreign officers are invited to attend military schools in the US)
 - **FMF** (Foreign Military Financing): Foreign Operations Funding to the Guatemalan Army
- **Current Funding:**
 - Extended IMET is now allowed to the Guatemalan Army, as well as funds for the Air force, Navy, and Army Corp of Engineers
 - Funding through the Department of Defense has been used to train and support Guatemalan soldiers, including Kaibiles
 - **The US has also supplied heavy weapons**, training in “air assaults, small unit tactics and structure breaches”
- **1999 – 2010: 3,555 Guatemalan soldiers trained** by the US at the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, (formerly the School of the Americas), the Coast Guard Training Center and the Inter-American Air Force Academy among others



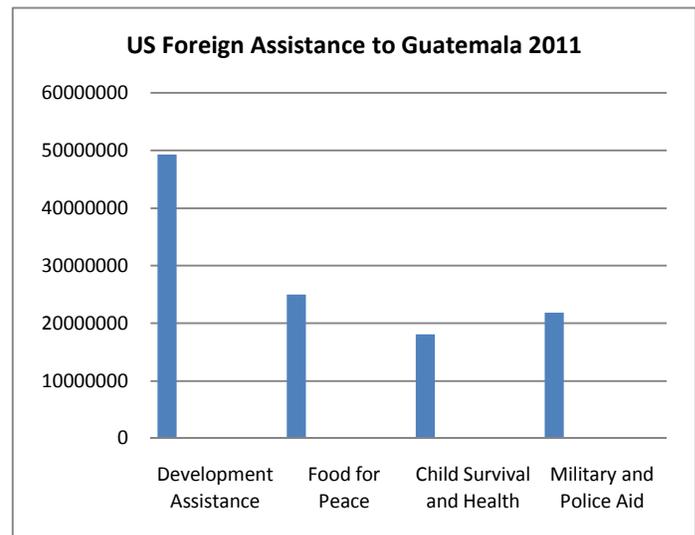
US Marines training with Kaibiles in Petén, Guatemala
[photo: www.marines.mil]



Guatemalan Army Colonel with U.S. Marine Major General
[photo: news.antiwar.com]

US Training and Support of the Kaibiles

- **2009: Renovation of Kaibil barracks** in Poptún, where training facility “El Infierno” (“Hell”), is located
- **2010: Continuing Promise** (humanitarian civic assistance operation): A contingent of 40 marines was sent to “El Infierno” to exchange knowledge and experience



Source: Just the Facts [www.justf.org]

*Note: Foreign Assistance does not include defense spending.

Defense Department Counter-Drug Construction Projects

- **Poptún (2009)**
Project: Renovation of Barracks of Kaibiles Base
Funding: US \$754,000
- **Puerto San José, Escuintla (2009)**
Project: Construction of Operations Center & Barracks
Funding: US \$665,000
- **Puerto Barrios (2010)**
Project: Construction of Operations Center and Barracks (US \$900,000), Construction of Pier (US \$650,000), Boat Ramp (US \$300,000) and Wharf Repair (US \$200,000)

Further reading and sources:

1 CNA, “Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking in Guatemala’s Border Communities.” Dec. 2011. p. 14
www.elperiodico.com.gt, www.prensalibre.com, www.insightcrime.org, www.justf.org, www.wikileaks.org, www.marines.mil

Founded in 1982, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, humanitarian organization that monitors, documents, and reports on the human rights situation in Guatemala, advocates for survivors of human rights abuses in Guatemala, and works toward positive, systemic change.