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Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights, and Peace

The Human Cost of America's Arms Sales America's Defense Monitor

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NARRATOR: In this country, reporters who criticize the government are tortured and executed. Here, political candidates are gunned down in the street. In this country, it's illegal to speak the native tongue. What do these countries have in common? --- None are true democracies and the United States sells weapons to all of them.

ADMIRAL CARROLL: Welcome to *America's Defense Monitor*. On the 50th Anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, we thought it would be appropriate to take a look at the connection between U.S. weapons sales to foreign countries and human rights abuses. We think you will be appalled with what we uncovered.

NARRATOR: The United States is the world's biggest arms dealer. Year in and year out, America outsells the competition. The most sought after weapons are made in the U.S.A. At foreign trade fairs, like the Paris Air Show, you can watch as the latest military aircraft are put through their paces. If you like what you see -- you can order factory direct. Short on cash? Bad Credit? No problem. Uncle Sam will loan you the money with a taxpayer backed guarantee to buy the weapons back if you can't pay your bills. U.S. arms sales abroad help make American weapons builders like *Lockheed Martin*, *Northrop Grumman*, and *Boeing* some of the richest corporations in the world, but not without a price. Lost in the high stakes world of international arms sales are the voices of those who find themselves at the barrel end of America's weapons deals.

RICKARD: "All too often the only way which a non-democratic regime stays in power is at the point of a bayonet."

NARRATOR: As executive director of Amnesty International USA, Stephen Rickard works to limit weapons sales to non-democratic regimes and those with persistent human rights violations.

RICKARD: "if the United States is going to provide weapons, they should be weapons to countries that aren't keeping dictators in power, that they should be used for external defense not external aggression, and they should be used to defend the people of a country not to repress the people of a country."

NARRATOR: During the Cold War the United States armed many of this century's most notorious and brutal dictators ignoring their abuses - as long as they supported U.S. policy or had the raw materials the U.S. needed Indonesia's General Suharto, Zaire's Mobuto, Panama's Noriega, Haiti's Duvaliers, even Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

Lawrence Korb is a former *Assistant Secretary of Defense* in the Reagan Administration, and an expert on arms sales.

KORB: "We were engaged in a struggle with Soviet communist expansionism both of us had allies and client states and we wanted to sell to those who would help us contain the Soviet Union even if in fact those countries didn't meet our standards for democracy and for support of human rights, because we felt that the greater good was to prevent the Soviet Empire from taking over the world."

NARRATOR: Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. share of the global arms trade has more than doubled. But who's buying? The U.S. sells weapons to over 150 countries worldwide. Eighty percent of current recipients of U.S. weapons are unelected governments, and about 2/3 of them are in the State Department's public record of human rights abusers. Why does the U.S. continue to sell weapons abroad? Handsome profits for American weapons producers, access to oil and minerals, and U.S. business investments are some of the economic reasons why the United States continues to arm foreign governments. But supplying foreign countries with weapons is not without its costs.

KORB: "When you sell arms to another country you want to be sure that those arms will be used for legitimate self defense rather than for dealing with enemies of the government. And if the government has a poor human rights record chances are the weapons that we sell could be turned against the people as in the case for example of Turkey."

{ON SCREEN} No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile. --
Universal Declaration of Human Rights

NARRATOR: For nearly 50 years, the United States has extended generous political and military support to Turkey. As a member of the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (or *NATO*), the U.S. helped Turkey build up its arms industry and supplied it with a steady stream of weapons. Some 80% of the weapons and supplies in the modern Turkish military are American made. F-16 fighter jets, Black Hawk helicopters, and

tanks were originally supplied to Turkey to defend its borders against the Soviet Union. But tragically, many of these weapons have been used by the Turkish military to threaten neighboring countries like Greece, and to fight a bloody 14 year long internal war against the minority Kurdish population in southeastern Turkey.

AMITAY: "Some of the US sales are particularly egregious because they have been documented in use against Kurdish civilians in Turkey."

NARRATOR: As director of the *Washington Kurdish Institute*, Mike Amitay works to bring attention to Kurdish issues in the Middle East.

AMITAY: "One of Turkey's major security - one of the reasons they justify the requests for attack helicopters, for armored personnel carriers and crowd control vehicles is because they want to deal with what they call their "terrorist problem", which is really the excuse not to deal constructively with the grievances of the Kurdish population of Turkey"

NARRATOR: For years, human rights groups and the *U.S. State Department* have reported that the Turkish military and police have committed persistent severe human rights violations against Turkey's own citizens - often with weapons provided by the United States.

AMITAY: "You only need to read the *State Department's* own report to see that torture is a major problem, widespread systematic, you know journalists have been murdered, death squads with connections to security forces and high level officials have killed Kurdish dissidents, journalists, they have bombed newspaper - you know- Kurdish newspaper offices, I mean this is not democratic behavior."

NARRATOR: Birusk Tugan is a journalist in exile. Born and educated in Turkey, he was an editor for a Kurdish newspaper until death threats forced him to leave. Birusk now lives in Washington DC, not far from a memorial that honors journalists who have died in the line of duty.

TUGAN: "These people are Kurdish journalists.... Hafiz Akdemir was killed in mid day ... Musa Anter he's a well known Kurdish writer. ... he was lured to resolve a feud between two families and was shot to death he was 76 years old. Husseyin Deniz was Musa Anter's nephew he was killed a month before his uncle. He was writing for our newspaper."

NARRATOR: *Ozgur Gundem*, the Kurdish newspaper Birusk worked for, often reported attacks by the Turkish military on Kurdish villages - attacks made with U.S. weapons.

TUGAN: "Well, those villages were destroyed by, skorskies, Sikorsky helicopters, US made helicopter, skorskies um cobras, and also, tanks, destroyers , those weapons were all bought from the United States - either bought or, given to the Turkish state as a military aid."

NARRATOR: Press reports like these made the newspaper a target.

TUGAN: "On Dec. 10, 1994 we were , about to finish the newspaper, the next day newspaper. The building, newspaper building was, surrounded by, scores of police. And everybody who was in the building in that moment was arrested. Around 130 people. ... But sixteen people, I was one of them, were hold - were held for fourteen days. I was tortured for fourteen days. I was under interrogation ...- and, after 14 days, the police told me that if I go back to working for the newspaper, Ozgur Gundem, I would be killed."

NARRATOR: One month after Birusk left Turkey his newspaper office was bombed.

TUGAN: "This is a Turkish newspaper reporting the bombing of Ozgur Gundem newspaper offices in three different Turkish cities the same night and of course it was done by the government forces."

NARRATOR: Since 1984, the war in Turkey has claimed more than 30,000 lives from both sides. Between 650,000 and 2 Million Kurdish civilians are refugees of the conflict.

AMITAY: "Well unfortunately the civilians have been caught in the crossfire between the rebels and the government, but what's happened is that over three thousand villages have been de-populated as a result of this ... many of these operations have been supported by US made equipment, I mean you know it's been very closely documented, the State Department has documented this, life in the South-East of Turkey has really become a hell."

{ON SCREEN} Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. --
Universal Declaration of Human Rights

NARRATOR: This is the AH-1 Cobra helicopter. It is fast, heavily armed, and highly maneuverable. Borne out of the U.S. military's early experiences with guerrilla warfare in Southeast Asia, it was used extensively in the rice paddies, highlands and jungles of Vietnam. Advanced American helicopters, like the Cobra, may soon end up in the arsenal of Colombia, a South American country that since the end of the Cold War has emerged as the largest recipient of U.S. military weapons and training in Latin America. Colombia also has the distinction of having the worst human rights record in

the Western Hemisphere, according to the *U.S. State Department* and international human rights organizations.

RODRIGUEZ: "The human rights situation in Colombia is the most serious of the Western Hemisphere."

NARRATOR: Carlos Rodriguez Mejia is a lawyer for the *Colombian Commission of Jurists*, a leading human rights group in Colombia.

RODRIGUEZ: "Since 1988 ten people are killed or disappear on average every day for political or socio-political reasons. There is no other country in the Americas where this has been going on for such a long time."

NARRATOR: Despite Colombia's grave human rights record, the United States has provided over \$500 million dollars worth of weapons to the Colombian military and police forces - most of it for counter drug efforts. Some 80% of the cocaine and much of the heroin on America's streets originates in Colombia, where a volatile mix of government corruption, booming drug production, political unrest, and a long and bloody guerrilla war have hampered efforts to deal with the drug issue. U.S. policymakers have "labeled" drug production in Colombia as an external threat and have supplied Colombia with Black Hawk helicopters, M-60 machine guns, and C-130 transport planes to fight a "war on drugs." U.S. weapons and military support have been welcomed by a beleaguered Colombian military which has struggled in its war against guerrillas and drug cartels.

RODRIGUEZ: "We have heard the explanation from the U.S. government that its military aid which includes weapons, training and other aspects is dedicated to the fight against drug trafficking. What we don't understand is how the United States draws a distinction between those units of the armed forces that only fight drug trafficking from those that are also involved in fighting the guerillas and in fighting or dealing with other aspects of the situation in Colombia we think this is very difficult."

NARRATOR: Continued U.S. weapons and support for Colombia's so called "war on drugs" has blurred the line between fighting drug traffickers and fighting rebels in a conflict where unarmed civilians are increasingly the victims. The *State Department's* own report on human rights notes that Colombia's armed forces and police have an extensive history of severe human rights abuse, including death squad activity within the military. The military also has ties to Colombia's notoriously violent paramilitary groups, armed militias that have carried out numerous massacres in rural Colombian villages.

CABELLERO: "A group of paramilitary men went there it is a very little town, and they began to kill people, accusing them of being part of the guerilla forces ... when I went there to Marpidepan it was a ghost town"

NARRATOR: Christina Cabellero is a well respected Colombian journalist who has closely covered the civil war.

CABELLERO: "We found that two planes, two airplanes, had arrived in San Jose Guavier. This is relatively close to Marcipan, two days before, no? The massacre, two or three days before the massacre, landed in a military or in an airport that is controlled by military forces, no? And allegedly in that two planes were transported the paramilitary forces from the north of the country, from Urapa to San Jose Guavier in the south of the country"

NARRATOR: The ongoing conflict has taken its toll on the Colombian population. In 1997, there were over 3,500 politically motivated killings. Some 250,000 Colombians became refugees. And over 3,000 persons have "disappeared."

GALINDEZ: "I left Las Valles when my partner, the father of my first child was disappeared, she was seven months old when he was disappeared"

NARRATOR: Gloria Galindez is president of the *Association of Relatives of the Detained or Disappeared*. Her search for her missing husband led her to join the group to help others.

GALINDEZ: "I spent one and half years in the process I call the search process, I took several initiatives. We eventually found my partner murdered and buried in a cemetery as an unidentified person and with no name."

NARRATOR: Although members of the military and police are often accused of crimes, they are rarely brought to justice. This has further eroded the legitimacy of the armed forces in the eyes of Colombians.

RODRIGUEZ: "Both the police and army have their own judges who investigate charges and who apparently judge them or place them on trial. In the case of human rights abuses committed by the police or members of the military they are always absolved. Therefore we think that some U.S. taxpayer money is helping torture civilians, helping to disappear civilians, helping to murder civilians."

{ON SCREEN} No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. --**Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

NARRATOR: Half way around the globe from Colombia lies East Timor. It is half of a small island in the South Pacific, just few hundred miles north of Australia. East Timor is part of the larger island chain that makes up Indonesia - the world's fourth largest country. Although most Americans are unaware of this small corner of the world, the U.S. government and American oil companies have long been involved in Indonesia. Since Indonesia invaded and illegally occupied East Timor in 1975, human rights groups estimate at least 1/3 of the population -- over 200,000 people -- have been killed by the Indonesian military -- operating with American weapons and American approval.

The invasion of East Timor in 1975 took place only 24 hours after President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visited Indonesia, and met with then dictator General Suharto. Every US administration since has maintained friendly relations with the brutal Indonesian regime. These pictures were smuggled out of East Timor over the past few years. They graphically depict the inhumane treatment of the East Timorese at the hands of Indonesian occupation troops.

NAIRN: "The Indonesian Military is still getting some weapons, spare parts, and ammunition, as well as there are indications they're still getting some training covertly. There are also contracts of companies like Textron - US contracts with the Indonesian military to manufacture helicopters on site in Indonesia, that are then used by the Indonesian Army."

NARRATOR: On November 12th, 1991, Alan Nairn was on assignment for *The New Yorker* magazine when the Indonesian military attacked thousands of unarmed Timorese protesters at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, East Timor. Allan Nairn describes what happened just outside the cemetery and beyond the camera's view.

NAIRN: "Outside the troops came marching up the road hundreds maybe thousands I never saw the end of the column. ... they got a step or two passed us ... they just raised their rifles all at once and opened fire on the crowd and people were falling everywhere. They were wielding American M-16s. It was American M-16s these troops were using. People were falling, the street was coated with blood and the soldiers would leap over those who were down and pick off survivors in the back ... people came running through the gate to the cemetery which piled up with bodies ... nobody outside of the army knows exactly how many Timorese were killed, they are estimated at about 271 and then hundreds more of the wounded massacred later that day and the next day."

NARRATOR: After the Dili massacre, pressure from American citizens and non-governmental organizations forced Congress to cut off military training to Indonesia, but U.S. weapons sales continued. Throughout the 1990's, several more bans on U.S. weapons have sent a signal to the Indonesian military to stop the inhumane treatment of

the East Timorese. During 1996 and 1997 the Clinton administration pressed for the sale of nine F-16 fighters to Indonesia. But on June 6th, 1997 Indonesia canceled its order for the planes citing criticism from members of Congress and concerned American citizens.

ALI ALATAS: "In a letter dated the 26th of May 1997, President Suharto conveyed the intention to President Clinton and I quote 'wholly unjustified criticism in US Congress against Indonesia which are linked to its participation in the *IMET* program and the planned purchase of F-16's planes' as one of the factors that led to this decision."

RAMOS-HORTA: "The small initiatives taken by the U.S. Congress and the Administration such as banning *IMET* a few years ago, banning the delivery of small arms, have had an enormous impact, maybe not a material direct impact on the ability of the Indonesian military to continue to exercise their use of force, but it has had an enormous impact psychologically and politically."

NARRATOR: Since 1975, Jose Ramos-Horta has served as special representative for the East Timorese people to the international community. In 1996 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with an East Timorese Catholic Bishop for their tireless efforts to help the people of East Timor.

RAMOS-HORTA: "U.S. policies over the years have been brutally insensitive, totally disregarding the rights and the suffering of these people of East Timor, and I hope that at this late stage that they actually change - they are shifting in the U.S. administration there is no doubt. I would like to see them state unequivocally that Indonesia must get out of East Timor."

NARRATOR: Recently, Congress passed legislation that bans the use of U.S.-supplied weapons by the Indonesian military in East Timor.

NAIRN: "There still is a pipeline of support that runs from Washington to the Indonesian military but its much less than there used to be and there's now legislation in Congress to completely sever that support to Indonesia"

NARRATOR: Weapons exports are a tiny fraction of the nearly one trillion dollars worth of goods and services the United States sells to foreign countries annually. Yet weapons sales to undemocratic or corrupt regimes have enormous potential to cause instability and destroy lives.

RAMOS-HORTA: "By introducing weapons into some sensitive areas you [escalate the] arms race, get more instability, and in the end a conflict breaks out, and people get killed because of U.S. policies. So whenever the U.S. wants to consider making some

money out of, with weapons sales, think twice, A: about the morality, of weapons sales to dictatorships, but also think about the security and strategic stupidity of this kind of policy that often backfires on the United States."

NAIRN: "Sometimes people say, I don't want to get involved. Well unfortunately if you're a US citizen or resident you don't have that option, you're already involved whether you know it or not, whether you like it or not. It's your tax dollars in your name that are being used to do things like provide weapons to the Indonesia military, provide training to security forces from Mexico and Colombia that are involved in internal torture, and repression, and I think that if most Americans knew about this and were consulted about this, they would not approve.... So, I think what we have to do is get the facts out, and let people make the choice. And I think enough people will have the simple decency to say "no."

ADMIRAL CARROLL: "The overriding reason the United States sells weapons to 150 different countries around the world is for profit. These sales are often characterized as benign business transactions, but the consequences can be deadly when these weapons are sold to non-democratic governments and those with little regard for their own citizens. The only way to prevent the sale of weapons to undemocratic countries is through an open dialogue between our elected officials and you the American public. For *America's Defense Monitor*, I'm Eugene Carroll."

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