

Imperialism, War, and the Global Climate Refugee Crisis

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Introduction

The climate crisis is an increasingly pressing issue for scientists, scholars, political leaders, and citizens all around the world. However, insufficient attention is directed towards those who are already suffering most from the severe impacts of climate change. In 2016, 24 million people were displaced due to extreme weather related disasters (GRID, 2017). The United Nations University estimated that there will be 25 million to one billion climate refugees by 2050 (UNU, 2017), as people flee in greater numbers from lands rendered uninhabitable by the effects of climate change. Yet the term “climate refugee” does not exist in international law. Furthermore, the wave of xenophobic and nationalist sentiments spreading across the globe contributes to the great insecurity and suffering experienced by climate refugees.

In order to adequately address the climate refugee crisis, there must be thorough interdisciplinary research in regard to the fundamental causes and complex nature of this issue. In this paper, we ask: *how does U.S. imperialism play a central role in exacerbating the global climate refugee crisis?* To answer this, we illuminate and analyze the relationships between four key phenomena - global capitalism, U.S. imperialism, climate change, and war - that constitute some of the most urgent issues of our time. Using Guatemala as a case study, we show how the historical context of U.S. imperialist practices, including economic exploitation and military intervention, have contributed to the devastating circumstances in Guatemala which give rise to the nation’s current refugee crisis.

Literature Review

There seems to be little to no scholarship which illuminates the connections between global capitalism, U.S. imperialism, war, and climate change as we attempt to do in this paper. However, a number of scholars have addressed similar issues. Christian Parenti (2011, 2016) depicts the “catastrophic

convergence” of militarism, neoliberalism, and climate change. Crises of poverty and inequality in the Global South, the consequence of U.S. “counterinsurgency” efforts and neoliberalism, intersect with climate crises to cause further violence, suffering, and human migration. As poor nations struggle to cope with the impending climate crisis, it could give an opportunity for the U.S. and European nations to take an even stronger authoritarian role over poorer nations, what Parenti terms “climate fascism” (2016:35). He calls for attention to more obscure political and economic factors in implementing measures towards climate adaptation and mitigation. However, he does not go as far as to analyze or denounce the explicit role of global capitalism and U.S. imperialism in the collision of militarism, neoliberalism, and climate change.

In *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014), Naomi Klein depicts in no uncertain terms the ravages of the global neoliberal capitalist economy on the climate. She warns that corporate interests could, as they have in the past, take advantage of the climate crisis to further consolidate wealth and power in the hands of the elite. Klein makes an urgent and passionate call for the climate crisis to serve as the catalyst for a powerful mass movement for structural reforms that reduce wealth inequalities, strengthen local economies and public infrastructure, reinvigorate democracy and more, while transitioning to a zero carbon society.

Medical anthropologists Hans Baer and Merrill Singer are two leading scholars in the critical study of climate change. Singer, in his recent book *Climate Change and Social Inequality* (2019), uses a “critical anthropology of climate change” to define the direct relationship between global capitalism and climate change. In a volume edited by Hodge and Singer (2010), *The War Machine and Global Health*, Baer illustrates the relationship between the military industrial complex and climate change. The military industrial complex consumes fossil fuels and generates a considerable amount of greenhouse gas emissions, which exacerbate climate change. In turn, the effects of climate change contribute to armed conflict. Baer brings in capitalism and imperialism to his discussion, for the global capitalist economy depends on oil for transportation and production. Attempts to procure and control this resource - termed “petro-imperialism” (Baer in Hodge and Singer, 2010:161) - cause military conflict between states. In the

same volume, Hodge and Singer use the work of critical geographers David Harvey and Neil Smith to frame the connections between the military industrial complex or the “war machine,” imperialist projects for territorial expansion, and capital accumulation. This discussion is continued in the following section.

Theory of Imperialism

In *The New Imperialism* (2003), David Harvey presents his theory of “capitalist imperialism”, as the relationship between two logics of power: the “territorial” or political logic, and the “capitalist” or economic logic. The territorial logic features imperialism as a political project in which nation-states utilize their human and natural resources and various strategies in pursuit of their political, economic, and military interests. The capitalist logic features imperialism as a political-economic process in which the primary aim is the accumulation of, and command over capital by state or private actors.

The literature on imperialism and empire, Harvey argues, too often portrays these two logics of power as perfectly in relationship with one another: that political-economic processes are led by the state, which is always motivated towards capitalistic ends. He emphasizes that in reality, this relationship is complex and often contradictory, and that the political and the economic motives should each be considered in an analysis of imperialism. That said, political and economic motives are often in relationship in imperialistic practice. In Harvey’s theory, the “capitalist” or economic logic dominates. The role of the state is to sustain and exploit asymmetrical relationships with other states, to allow continued exploitation of human and natural resources and facilitating maximum capital accumulation.

Harvey uses a historical perspective to illustrate the United States’ role as the world’s greatest imperialist power. After the U.S. emerged post-World War II as by far the most dominant power, the nation has used a variety of means to maintain its hegemonic role. These include outright warfare and ruthless violence, including the Vietnam war and CIA-supported military coups, to more coercive means such as structural adjustment programs enforced by international financial institutions and trade embargos on nations such as Cuba, Iraq, and Iran.

As justification for its continued mission of expansion and exploitation, the United States portrays itself as the defender of global peace, freedom, and liberty, providing economic and military support to elites who defend American politics in their respective nations. Harvey emphasizes that essential to the U.S. imperialist strategy is that regardless of political, economic, or military affairs abroad, the social order within the U.S. should remain stable and domestic capital accumulation and consumption should continue to expand. Racism serves as the key to bridge the divide between nationalist pride and exploitation, both abroad and within state lines.

Says Harvey (2003:42), “money, productive capacity, and military might are the three legs upon which hegemony stands under capitalism.” As capital must be endlessly accumulated, the U.S. as a capital-imperialist power must endlessly seek to expand and intensify its global power. Even when *The New Imperialism* was published in 2003, Harvey observed that the U.S. had extended its military, political, and economic powers to a precarious point. The “new imperialism,” then, is not so distinct from the imperialism of the twentieth century, but the United States’ last desperate attempt to sustain its dominant role in the global economy by using its military power to secure control of the key resource, oil, needed by the emerging economies in Europe and China.

Singer and Hodge (2010) use Harvey’s theory of imperialism to illustrate the connections between processes of capital accumulation, territorial expansion and domination, and the “war machine” and human health. They emphasize that the scenes of violence, war, oppression, and exploitation visible throughout the world all emerge from the very same capital-imperialist logic, manifested differently throughout time and space. Stable processes of capital accumulation are paid for with the health and very lives of massive numbers of people.

Military Industrial Complex

This section seeks to discuss how the imperialist and capitalist pursuits of the United States are supported by its military industrial complex. Comprised of an alliance between the U.S. armed forces, politicians, and large military corporations, the military industrial complex integrates the “military,

development, and propaganda machineries into innovative apparatuses capable of bringing a lasting end to insurgencies” (Feichtinger, 2012, p. 36). As the United States seeks to protect its dominant position in global affairs, its strategy continues to call for increases in military power, size and influence.

In a post-colonial era, the health and maintenance of the military industrial machine is paramount to achieve the hegemonic and neocolonial goals of the nation-state. The parties involved in this alliance ensure that war, inequality and poverty continue in the Global South; if needed, the political and economic leaders of the United States do not hesitate to create such conflict. This does not mean the United States sends troops to each nation it wishes to strip of its sovereignty; rather, the imperialist power acts discreetly. The goals of the United States can be “accomplished in either a neocolonial or an imperialist manner in a search of new markets, new raw material, cheap labor to exploit, or a combination of these” (Singer, 2010, p. 309). Masked in neoliberal and neocolonial policy, the United States destabilizes and delegitimizes the government of the newly independent and vulnerable nation-state.

Following the final wave of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s, “the idea of retaining indirect influence in formally dependent states replaced the hopes for continued direct rule. Instead of aiming to quash all independence efforts, the goal [for Western states] became to ensure an ‘orderly transition’” (Feichtinger, 2012, p. 38). Falsely hidden as modernization and development, this strategy replaced colonial rule and “formed the correlate to military force, which would orient itself with all the greater vehemence against insurgents” (Feichtinger, 2012, p. 39). This shift in policy created an illusion of independence, modernization, and revolution in formerly colonized states, while the United States expanded its political, military and economic powers in the region.

In the era of the Cold War, this meant prioritizing the containment of communism in the developing world. After completing several trips through Latin America, the brother and advisor of President Eisenhower voiced “that development and democracy were inextricably linked and the absence of both were a liability for United States national security” (Tulchin, 1998, p. 9). In the following administration, President Kennedy aimed to create a sense of community between the United States and Latin America as nations sharing the same hemisphere. Using diplomatic strategies, the United States

sought to present itself as a humanitarian and giving neighbor, as a state dedicated to the progress of the developing world and as one that shared the values and goals of the Latinx people. Through the creation of alliances and the proliferation of financial aid, the administration hoped Latin American countries would believe a relationship with the United States was necessary for the advancement of their state.

As plans for development and democratization failed to come to fruition, paired with Kennedy's mishandling of the Cuban missile crisis, the false correlation between democracy and development began to crumble. Socialism gained popularity and criticism and distrust of the United States in the region increased. The United States relies on the compliance of the developing state it seeks to control, meaning the imperialist state will suppress any attempts at rebellion and revolution using force, propaganda, and fear as needed. As a result, its foreign policy approach shifted from providing aid to focusing on counterinsurgency in order to defend the causes of the free world (Tulchin, 1988, p. 26). Differing from conventional warfare that attacks an opposing military, "counterinsurgency seeks to control society. Thus, the counterinsurgent's task is to isolate and destroy the guerrillas by gaining control of the population through violence as well as psychological and ideological control. Society is the target, and as such, society is damaged" (Parenti, 2016, p. 26). This approach is especially harmful to the developing state, as the imperialist power uses paramilitary forces to complete their dirty work. Though the U.S. appeared to no longer intervene in the region, its strategy weakened the public's belief that their government could serve and protect its citizens, while giving "even greater prominence of influence to the security forces operating in each country" (Tulchin, 1988, p. 27). The intention of the United States was never to create impartial democracies but to place pro-U.S. politicians in power that would enforce policies to keep the region, its people and resources submissive and at the mercy of the U.S. hegemony.

The military industrial complex relies not only on political pawns, but also on severe economic inequality and hardship in the developing state. Beginning in the 1820s, Latin American countries acquired significant debt. In order to pay for public works and development, these countries first accepted loans from Europe and then slowly transitioned to solely relying on the United States. Following the Great Depression, many nations were unable to make payments and began to default on loans worth

millions of dollars. As markets for traditional exports collapsed, “from the 1930s until the 1980s, many developing economies in the Global South followed a model of state-directed import-substitution industrialisation, or ISI” (Parenti, 2016, p. 29). This model replaced foreign imports with domestic production, spanning from food and beverages to durable goods and machinery. Under ISI, labor productivity, living standards and the economy overall increased, but the oil boycott of 1973 shocked the world markets. As unemployment soared in the United States, the Reagan administration drastically increased interest payments on existing debt from 7.9% in 1979 to 16.4% in 1981 (Parenti, 2016, p. 30). Initiating the Latin American debt crisis, nations turned to the IMF's structural adjustment programme. In exchange for help with debt repayment, developing nations had to cut public spending, restrict imports and devalue their currency, only to result in higher unemployment, poverty, and civilian riots. Along with creating an unstable political environment, the neoliberal policy of the United States contributed to the suffering and exploitation of the Latinx people.

In the contemporary capitalist system and economy, Latin America falls victim to “the systematic exploitation of nature through a global division of labor” (Jorgenson, 2009, p. 627). While industrial production happens in developed countries, “the concentration of agriculture and raw material extraction in underdeveloped zones’ conditioned processes of uneven development” and contributes to global inequalities (Jorgenson, 2009, p. 627). Domestic consumption of such resources is suppressed in order to meet the export demands of developed countries, but the appetite of a capitalist and imperial power is insatiable. Access to the resources of Latin America was paramount to the United States; the expansion of the military allowed the state to secure limitless consumption of the region’s nature and “sink capacity of less-powerful, underdeveloped nations” (Jorgenson, 2009, p. 628). The shift towards a massive and well-funded military reinforces the unequal conditions that the United States seeks to maintain, positioning itself as a global hegemony while undermining the economic, political and environmental progress of developing states.

The commitment of the United States to its hegemonic and capitalist goals led to the formation of the modern-day military industrial complex, “a natural coalition of interest groups with an economic,

political, or professional stake in defense and space” (Adams, 1968, p. 655). As defined by Adams (1968), this complex “includes the armed services, the industrial contractors who produce for them, the labor unions that represent their workers, the lobbyists who tout their wares in the name of ‘free enterprise’ and ‘national security,’ and the legislators who, for reasons of pork or patriotism, vote the sizable funds to underwrite the show” (Adams, 1968, p. 655). Parenti refers to this phenomenon as a new security-industrial complex, as it “offers an array of services for home and abroad: surveillance, intelligence, border security, detention, facility and base construction, anti-terrorism consulting, military and police logistics, analysis, planning, training and, of course, personal security” (Parenti, 2016, p. 33). The result of this alliance is an “overdeveloped military capacity [that] has created powerful interests that are dependent on war and therefore promote it” (Parenti, 2016, p. 33). Rooted in the goal to maintain and worsen global inequalities, the military industrial complex anticipates conflict and responds when the imperialist pursuits of the United States may be jeopardized.

The corporate interests of the United States play a decisive and instrumental role in its domestic and foreign policy. Rather than appease its constituents, the U.S. government serves its lobbyists, which “not only permits and facilitates the entrenchment of private power but serves as its fountain-head” (Adams, 1968, p. 652). The desires of those who seek to maximize and control capital is prioritized, and their desire is to profit from war. Private corporations that supply the military with technology and arms have “achieved autonomy from government control. Whatever it cannot do for itself to assure survival and growth, a compliant government does on its behalf- assuring the maintenance of full employment; eliminating the risk of and subsidizing the investment in research and development; and assuring the supply of scientific and technical skills required by the modern technostructure” (Adams, 1968, p. 652). The private industry requires the continuation of war and the goals of the United States will feed into this need - ensuring that global conflict and inequality will persist, politicians will continue to vote for the expansion of the military budget, and security corporations will always be in business.

As the largest military in the world, Posen (2003) argues that following the Cold War, the United States enjoys command of the commons. He defines the commons as the space, sea and air and command

refers to the fact that “the United States gets vastly more military use out of the sea, space, and air than do others; that it can credibly threaten to deny their use to others; and that others would lose a military contest for the commons if they attempted to deny them to the United States” (Posen, 2003, p. 8). In large scale military developments, the U.S “can locate and identify military targets with considerable fidelity and communicate this information to offensive forces in a timely fashion” (Posen, 2003, p. 9). The size and capabilities of its military, coupled with the massive disparity in overall economic power between the United States and its potential challengers, secures the hegemonic role and goals of the nation-state.

Inevitably, a capitalist system that requires limitless growth and endless consumption would be detrimental to a planet with limited resources. The industrialization of warfare allows the United States to take the lives of human beings and simultaneously, destroy and exploit the environment. Given its nature and “emphasis on national security, the military produces a treadmill of destruction, which undermines environmental protection. Even outside of war, military institutions and their activities consume massive amounts of nonrenewable energy and other resources to sustain their overall infrastructures and hardware” (Jorgenson, 2009, p. 625). As the budget for military expenditures continues to increase, “the U.S. Department of Defense is the world’s largest institutional user of petroleum and correspondingly, the single largest producer of greenhouse gases in the world” (Hussain, 2019). As the single biggest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world, the presence and consequences of the U.S. military is felt by all.

U.S Military and the Environment:

Fossil fuel combustion for energy production is the primary source of greenhouse gas emissions, particularly carbon dioxide (CO₂) (Höök, 2013). In 2017, burning fossil fuels for energy accounted for 93% of all U.S CO₂ emission and about 76% of total U.S. anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (EIA, 2019). The U.S Department of Defense, with its \$700 billion budget, is the largest institutional consumer of petroleum (oil), and thus the single largest producer of greenhouse gases in the world, contributing largely to those emissions (Crawford, 2019). The use of petroleum rose in tandem with the rise in the global automobile and aircraft industries, which consume almost half of the world’s oil (Baer, 2010). A

2007 Post Carbon Institute report cited the Pentagon at using 320,000 barrels of oil per day. In 2005, the Pentagon consumed 134 million barrels of oil, producing 6,630 million tons of CO₂ (EIA, 2011). The U.S military burned about one gallon of oil per soldier per day during World War II (Baer, 2010), then four gallons per soldier per day during the first Gulf War, and 16 gallons per soldier per day during the Bush wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Smith, 1991). 50% of all U.S economic activity is associated with the military thus the U.S military operates according to corporate interests. Circa 2007, military appropriations made up about 25% of the Congressional budget, but the multiplicity of military involvement expanded well beyond that percentage (Marinot, 2007). Much to the destruction of the Earth, the U.S military is a dominant force in the country's economy which often shapes the global economic landscape.

Climate Change:

The science of climate change, although disputed politically, is clear. There is a consensus among at least 97% of scientists, that the Earth's climate is warming and human behavior is the 'primary driver' (NASA, 2020). But what are these behaviors? In the second assessment report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a panel of 1,300 scientists of varying backgrounds, it was concluded that "evidence suggests that there is a discernible human influence on global climate," (IPCC, 1995). By the fifth assessment report, it was concluded that industrial activities have nearly doubled atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels in the last 150 years and that the greenhouse effect has caused most of the global temperature increase over the past 50 years (NASA, 2020). Greenhouse gas emissions have continuously increased from 1970 to 2010 with a larger spike between 2000 and 2010, as a direct result of energy (47%), industry (30%), transport (11%) and building (3%). According to the IPCC (2015), "Globally, economic and population growth continue to be the most important drivers of increases in CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion," (p.5). Additionally, increased use of coal has reversed the long-standing trend of reducing the carbon intensity of the world's energy supply (IPCC, 2015).

The impact of climate change on natural and human systems varies across the globe. This impact is strongest for natural systems, whereas the impact on human systems depends not only on the climate, but on social and economic factors. Based on scientific literature between 2007 and 2014, climate change has made both minor and major contributions to physical and biological systems in North, Central and South America. In the United States this includes, but is not limited to, an adverse impact on rivers and lakes causing floods and droughts, terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and human health and livelihood. Central and South America present the same with the additional impact on food production (IPCC, 2015).

Let's unpack this impact. Changes in precipitation or melting snow and ice result altering the quality and quantity of water resources. As glaciers melt and permafrost thaws, the sea levels rise, land is lost, and ecosystems are disrupted. As a result, terrestrial, freshwater, and marine species are displaced, shifting their migration patterns, seasonal activities and species interactions, and increasing risk of extinction (IPCC, 2015, p.8). As previously mentioned, human impact varies in style and intensity. According to the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land (IPCC, 2019), global population growth and the corresponding increase in consumption (i.e food, feed, fibre, timber, and energy) has led to approximately 70% of freshwater to be used for agriculture. The expansion of agriculture and forestry has contributed largely to increasing greenhouse gas emissions, natural ecosystems loss, and declining biodiversity. Despite data showing a large increase in per capita supply of vegetable oils, meat, and food calories, about 25-30% of food is lost or wasted. Even with this increase causing about two billions adults as overweight or obese, an estimated 821 million remain undernourished (IPCC, 2019, p.7).

Land provides the basis for human livelihoods and well-being through primary productivity, supply of food and freshwater supply. 71% of all the land in the world was being used as of 2015 (IPCC, 2019, p.85). Global warming has reduced freshwater availability, further stressed plant and animal biodiversity, and disrupted growing cycles and reduced yield. Soil erosion from agricultural fields is currently estimated to be 10 to 100 times higher than the soil formation rate. Climate change exacerbates land degradation, particularly in low-lying coastal areas, river deltas, drylands and in permafrost areas. From 1961–2013, the area of drylands in drought has increased about 1% per year, with large variability

(IPCC, 2019). In 2015, an estimated 500 million people lived within areas which experienced desertification since the 1980s. Those most impacted are in South and East Asia, the Sahara region of North Africa, and the Middle East (IPCC, 2019). Regions in the Mediterranean, Asia, South America, and much of Africa have suffered an increase in droughts and extreme weather events (eg. extended heat waves and hurricanes). The increase in frequency and severity of such events has negatively impacted food security in these drylands. Furthermore, mitigation efforts like bioenergy (eg. windmills) and afforestation/reforestation will likely compete with existing uses of land. This competition could increase food prices and intensify fertiliser and water use, potentially increasing water and air pollution and biodiversity loss (IPCC, 2019).

Climate Refugees:

Land degradation and climate change leave the vulnerable highly sensitive to major climate events which trigger poverty, food insecurity due to productivity loss and migration, conflict and loss of cultural heritage (Adger, 2014). Shishmaref is the Inupiat village in Alaska considered ground zero of climate change since the arctic is heating nearly twice as fast as the rest of the country (CNN, 2017). Global warming has been melting sea ice and reducing snow coverage in the Arctic, causing rapid permafrost thaw and extensive erosion. Coastal land erosion in Shishmaref is driving floods, land loss, and infrastructure damage. Villagers are steadily losing their homes, being forced to relocate. Shishmaref is just one of numerous native tribes grieving this loss (Marino, 2015, p. 4-5).

Migration and mobility are prevalent in every part of the world as adaptation strategies to maintain livelihoods in response to social and environmental changes. Many vulnerable groups, however, do not have the resources to migrate to avoid the impacts of floods, storms, and droughts. `Such constraint places them at higher risk. For those who can migrate, it is the last resort as people would rather avoid the uncertainty, debt, and additional vulnerability it creates (Warner and Afifi, 2013). This was the case in Shishmaref, causing a divide between the older generations that wish to remain as close to their ancestral land as possible, and the younger generations that want their culture to survive elsewhere

in their people since the land will soon be gone (CNN, 2017). In 1992, the U.S Environmental Protection Agency released a report titled, *Environmental Equity: Reducing Risk to All Communities*, then formed the Office of Environmental Equity to address environmental justice at a national level. Defined by Robert Bullard, Environmental Racism “*refers to any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color. It also includes exclusionary and restrictive practices that limit participation by people of color in decision-making boards, commissions, and regulatory bodies,*” (1993). One example of such differential impact of industrialization is “Garbage Imperialism,” specifically with illegal waste dumping on Native lands and placing landfills in Black and Latinx communities (Bullard, 1993). Later studies showed that income was a strong predictor of such disparities, however, race had the strongest effect (Cole & Foster, 2001). Furthermore, women and girls are disproportionately impacted by displacement, suffering adverse mental health outcomes, the loss of social capital and networks, and gender based violence (Tunstall et al., 2006; Oswald Spring, 2008). Such disparities which exacerbate the socio-economic inequities forged by colonization and slavery tether environmental racism, climate change, and U.S imperialism.

Structural economic causes of social vulnerability may determine whether temporary displacement turns into permanent migration. Rural to urban migration remains the most common trend in migration patterns with more than 50% of the global population in 2009 and is projected to reach 59% by 2030 (Grimm et al., 2008). According to de Sherbinin et al. (2012) the past 40 years have shown migration out from mountain regions and drylands. Rural farmers in Guatemala, for instance, have attributed their outmigration to soil degradation, pursuing better agricultural prospects (Lopez-Carr, 2002). Migrants may be vulnerable to climate change impacts in destination areas, particularly in urban centers in developing countries (IPCC, 2019). A study in the Peruvian Andes found that while cultural attachment to place and ecosystems often prevents migration, the perception of worsening environmental conditions as a threat to well-being and cultural integrity will become a more significant driver of migration in the future (Adams and Adger, 2013).

But when is that future? In 2016, 24 million people were displaced due to extreme weather related disasters (OCHA, 2017). The United Nations University (2017) estimated that there will be 25 million to one billion climate refugees by 2050. The World Bank (2017) projects there will be 17 million internal climate migrants in Latin America alone. Yet, the phrase ‘climate refugee’ does not exist in international law, nor is it endorsed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. There is much debate on the efficacy of formalizing the phrase. Detractors consider the phrase “scientifically and legally problematic” (IPCC, 2014, p.771), while supporters call for the necessary law and international policy that first requires precise language for this growing population facilitating existential threat (McDonnel, 2018). The rise in xenophobic nationalism anti-immigrant policy has “*made it a challenge for the U.N. to even get governments to follow existing refugee protocol, let alone expand it to cover an entirely new class of refugee,*” according to migration expert, Nina Hall of Johns Hopkins University (McDonnel, 2018, Alvarez, 2006). This failure to legally define ‘climate refugees’ obstructs effective policy design, delaying the implementation of mitigation plans. Ultimately reinforcing the climate migrant crisis.

Guatemala Case Study

The United States has had a long standing and extremely complex history in Latin America dating back to the 1800s. The majority of this history can be perceived through a capitalistic lens and the fact that Latin America is very rich in natural resources giving the United States both political and economic motive. In 1904 President Roosevelt took on a ‘Big Stick’ approach to dealing with Latin America which eventually turned into the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (Nester, 2019). The Roosevelt Corollary states that, “the United States would intervene as a last resort to ensure that other nations in the Western hemisphere fulfilled their obligations to international creditors, and did not violate the rights of the United States of invite ‘foreign aggression to the detriment of the entire body of American nations’” (Nester, 2019) . Originally created to handle relations between Europe and the

Western Hemisphere, the Roosevelt Corollary is most effectively known as being used for justification for United States intervention in Latin America.

After gaining independence from Spain in 1821, it wasn't until April 5th of 1844 when the United States recognized Guatemala as an independent state (Calderon, 2011). Starting in the early 1900s, foreign powers began to gain footholds in the country over land and natural resources. An American corporation, The United Fruit Company (UFCO), more commonly known as the 'Chiquita' brand, started to gain territory in Guatemala in 1906 producing bananas and shipping them north to the United States and throughout Europe (Barrett, 2011). Similarly, Germany was developing its own niche in the area. In 1913, over 36 percent of all coffee produced in the country came from a German-owned coffee farm in Guatemala (Barrett, 2011). In 1931, Jorge Ubico was elected president and built a totalitarian regime. Under his leadership, many indigenous people were forced to work for large privatized companies such as the UFCO for very little pay alongside many of the German born immigrants located within the country (Russell, 2015). Employment at these privatized foreign companies typically resulted in very poor working conditions that were hardly addressed and fell into the shadows of massive profits being made by both the Guatemalan government and the individual companies. In addition to being the country's largest exporter, the United Fruit Company had ownership over the railroad and communication systems such as the telephone and telegraph within the country (Russell, 2015).

Several years later, World War II had broken out, and upon the United States entering the conflict, concern over the spread of communism was growing. Because of this concern, President Ubico had been forced to deport all Germans from the country as a foothold of UFCO's influence in the country's finances and lobbying of support from the United States government. President Ubico was overthrown in 1944 and marked the beginning of the social reforms for the country (Barrett, 2011). Elected in 1951, Arbenz was dedicated to continuing the legacy of social and democratic reform in the interests of his people. Arbenz's presidency can be characterized by the reclamation of plantations from the United Fruit Company and redistribution of land to indigenous peoples (Russell, 2015). In addition, Arbenz planned to nationalize roads and highways to allow for more rural trade and further break down

the monopolies within the country. At this point in time, the UFCO was the largest landowner in Guatemala, controlling seventy percent of the country's territory while the indigenous population was forced to live off the remaining lands that were usually arid and agriculturally unproductive (Barrett, 2011). President Arbenz's attempt to redistribute land was perceived as an attack on the United Fruit Company and its power over Guatemalan affairs.

Rallying for support under the motive of stopping the spread of communism, the United Fruit Company persuaded the State Department, and in turn President Eisenhower, to intervene in Guatemala's affairs (Calderon, 2011). Under the guise of the Roosevelt Corollary, in 1954 the CIA planned to replace President Arbenz with Carlos Castillo Armas in a military coup which became known as "Operation Success." The 1954 coup set the scene for extreme hardship and challenges that affected all aspects of society in Guatemala. With the majority of fertile land under private corporate ownership and not efficiently utilized, the indigenous people were left to attempt to sustain themselves on arid lands. Castillo's presidency was immediately recognized by the United States and aid was given to a country in shambles (Calderon, 2011). In alignment with U.S. interests, President Castillo began returning land to privatized foreign companies and the United Fruit Company was able to maintain its land ownership and influence over a broken and unstable government. From this point on, Guatemala catapulted into a thirty six year long civil war, a period of massive human rights violations, structural instability, and increased vulnerability.

Within Central America, Guatemala is located within the region known as the "Dry Corridor," along with Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. This region suffers from extreme and variable weather patterns due to the proximity of El Niño which is the warm phase of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation cycle causing increasingly warm ocean temperatures (Looney, 2019). These warm ocean temperatures mixed with the wind patterns cause increasingly uncertain weather patterns which often result in extreme droughts and destructive flooding. When coupled with the impact of global warming, the devastating effects throughout the region continue to magnify in intensity.

A major challenge currently facing the region is referred to as ‘climate change crop driven failure’. Its three main features include the frequency and severity of tropical storms, land degradation, and invasive pests (McGillivray, 2019). These factors have made it increasingly difficult for local people to produce enough crops to sustain their families and make a living, resulting in a negative effect on the economy of Guatemala. According to the World Food Program USA, approximately eighty percent of the population suffers from extreme food shortages as of 2016 (World Food Program, 2017). This massively inadequate supply of food has been concluded as the leading cause for the drastic increases in migration to the United States. The United Nation World Food Program conducted a study in 2017 to determine the cause of this increasing emigration from countries of the dry corridor and asked families that have recently immigrated to the United States what was the main reason for leaving their home country. Their findings showed that the main ‘push factor’ for leaving was drought which resulted in subsequent financial instability and severe food insecurity. Of the families that were interviewed, forty seven percent of the families had stated they experienced extreme food shortages and seventy two percent had said they had applied for emergency assistance prior to leaving (World Food Program, 2017). Based on this study, the World Food Program concluded that the link between food insecurity and emigration was an explanatory factor in the massive waves of immigration being seen in the United States from this region (World Food Program, 2017).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to do what scholars apparently have not done before, but which seemed like a clear imperative to us. This is to reveal the relationships between global capitalism, U.S. imperialism, climate change, and war, all of which combine to create the growing global climate refugee crisis.

To summarize, as scholars have argued before us (Klein, 2014 and Singer, 2019, among many others) the global capitalist economy which must perpetually expand and grow, causes the natural resource extraction, landscape destruction, contamination, and greenhouse gas emissions which constitute

humanity's deeply unsustainable relationship to the earth and have given rise to the global climate crisis. U.S. imperialism, a capitalist project in which the government utilizes its political, economic, and military power to acquire resources, cheap labor, and new markets to fulfill corporate interests (Harvey, 2003), is inextricably connected to the nation's military industrial complex (Baer, 2010), which besides its staggering financial cost is the single largest producer of greenhouse gases in the world (Crawford, 2019). Military conflict thus contributes to climate change, which in turn gives rise to further conflict (Baer, 2010). Similarly, evidence shows that large-scale violent conflict harms infrastructure, institutions, natural and social capital, and livelihood opportunities, increasing vulnerability to climate change impacts (IPCC, 2019).

While wealthy nations and corporate executives profit from this confluence of exploitative and violent processes, the most vulnerable populations in the world, being mainly peasant farmers in rural areas of the Global South, suffer increasingly from unusual weather events, declining agricultural productivity, unemployment, hunger, and violence, driving them to migrate in search of stability and a means of livelihood. The rise in xenophobic and nationalist sentiments around the world create further difficulty, instability, and trauma associated with climate refugees' experience.

Furthermore, as Parenti (2011; 2016) and others warn, growing violence, civil unrest, and economic collapse in the Global South as a consequence of climate change could give way to a new "climate fascism," in which the U.S. and its European allies use their combined political, economic and military power to assume complete authoritarian control over struggling nations.

This discussion must be given much greater attention and understood in all of its complexity by international leaders, politicians, scholars, and citizens alike. Climate refugees must be acknowledged and supported in relocating to secure, welcoming, and promising new surroundings. The United States (and other Western imperial powers) must cease its capitalist-imperialist project, defund the military industrial complex, transition to a sustainable and equitable economy, and provide resources for other nations to do the same with full autonomy. As scholars, U.S. residents, and consumers of fossil fuels and other resources, it is our responsibility to understand and address these most urgent issues of our time.

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