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In 1982, investigative journalist [Allan Nairn](#) interviewed a Guatemalan general named "Tito" on camera during the height of the [indigenous](#) massacres. It turns out the man was actually Otto Pérez Molina, the current Guatemalan president. We air the original interview footage and speak to Nairn about the U.S. role backing the Guatemalan dictatorship. Last week, Nairn flew to

[Guatemala](#)

where he had been scheduled to testify in the trial of former U.S.-backed dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, the first head of state in the Americas to stand trial for genocide. Ríos Montt was charged in connection with the slaughter of more than 1,700 people in Guatemala's Ixil region after he seized power in 1982. His 17-month rule is seen as one of the bloodiest chapters in Guatemala's decades-long campaign against Maya indigenous people, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands. The trial took a surprising turn last week when Guatemala President Gen. Otto Pérez Molina was directly accused of ordering executions. A former

[military](#)

mechanic named Hugo Reyes told the court that Pérez Molina, then serving as an

[army](#)

major and using the name Tito Arias, ordered soldiers to burn and pillage a Maya Ixil area in the 1980s.

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of the trial from Nairn in Guatemala City.

Transcript

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AMY GOODMAN: This is *Democracy Now!*, [democracynow.org](#), *The War and Peace Report*. I'm

[Amy Goodman](#)

, with Juan González. We continue our coverage of the historic trial of former U.S.-backed Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity.

[Allan Nairn](#)

joined us in our studio last week before he flew to

[Guatemala](#)

. I began by asking him to describe just who Ríos Montt is.

ALLAN NAIRN: Ríos Montt was the dictator of Guatemala during 1982, '83. He seized power in a [military](#) coup. He was trained in the U.S. He had served in Washington as head of the Inter-American Defense College. And while he was president, he was embraced by Ronald Reagan as a man of great integrity, someone totally devoted to [democracy](#).

. And he killed many tens of thousands of civilians, particularly in the Mayan northwest highlands. In this particular trial, he is being charged with 1,771 specific murders in the area of the Ixil Mayans. These charges are being brought because the prosecutors have the names of each of these victims. They've been able to dig up the bones of most of them.

AMY GOODMAN: Talk about how this campaign, this slaughter, was carried out and how it links to, well, the current government in Guatemala today.

ALLAN NAIRN: The [army](#) swept through the northwest highlands. And according to soldiers who I interviewed at the time, as they were carrying out the sweeps, they would go into villages, surround them, pull people out of their homes, line them up, execute them. A forensic witness testified in the trial that 80 percent of the remains they've recovered had gunshot wounds to the head. Witnesses have—witnesses and survivors have described Ríos Montt's troops beheading people. One talked about an old woman who was beheaded, and then they kicked her head around the floor. They ripped the hearts out of children as their bodies were still warm, and they piled them on a table for their parents to see.

The soldiers I interviewed would describe their interrogation techniques, which they had been taught at the army general staff. And they said they would ask people, "Who in the town are the guerrillas?" And if the people would respond, "We don't know," then they would strangle them to death. These sweeps were intense. The soldiers said that often they would kill about a third of a town's population. Another third they would capture and resettle in army camps. And the rest would flee into the mountains. There, in the mountains, the military would pursue them using U.S.-supplied helicopters, U.S.- and Israeli-supplied planes. They would drop U.S. 50-kilogram bombs on them, and they would machine-gun them from U.S. Huey and Bell helicopters, using U.S.-supplied heavy-caliber machine guns.

AMY GOODMAN: Let's turn to a clip of you interviewing a soldier in the highlands. This is from a Finnish documentary—is that right? And when was this done? When were you talking to soldiers there?

ALLAN NAIRN: This was in September of 1982 in the Ixil zone in the area surrounding the town of Nebaj.

AMY GOODMAN: Let's go to a clip of this interview.

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] This is how we are successful. And also, if we have already interrogated them, the only thing we can do is kill them.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] And how many did you kill?

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] We killed the majority. There is nothing else to do than kill them.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] So you killed them at once?

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] Yes. If they do not want to do the right things, there is nothing more to do than bomb the houses.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] Bomb? With what?

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] Well, with grenades or collective bombs.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] What is a collective bomb?

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] They are like cannons.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] Do you use helicopters?

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] Yes.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] What is the largest amount of people you have killed at once?

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] Well, really, in Sololá, around 500 people.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] And how do they react when you arrive?

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] Who?

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] The people from the small villages.

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] When the army arrives, they flee from their houses. And so, as they flee to the mountains, the army is forced to kill them.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] And in which small village did the army do that kind of thing?

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] That happened a lot of times.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] Specifically, could you give me some examples where these things happened?

GUATEMALAN SOLDIER: [translated] In Salquil, Sumal Chiquito, Sumal Grande, Acul.

AMY GOODMAN: When did you interview this soldier, Allan?

ALLAN NAIRN: This was in September of '82.

AMY GOODMAN: What were you doing there?

ALLAN NAIRN: Making a documentary for Scandinavian television.

AMY GOODMAN: So you have soldiers talking about killing civilians, the brutal interrogations that they were engaged in. Why would they be telling you this? You're a journalist. They're talking about crimes they're committing.

ALLAN NAIRN: Well, because this is their everyday life. They do this all the time. They do it under orders from the top of the chain of command, at that time Ríos Montt. And they had hardly ever seen journalists at that time. It was very rare for an outside journalist or even a local journalist to go into that area.

AMY GOODMAN: So let's take this to the current day, to the president of Guatemala today, because at the same time you were interviewing these soldiers, you interviewed the Guatemalan president—at least the Guatemalan president today in 2013.

ALLAN NAIRN: Yes, the senior officer, the commander in Nebaj, was a man who used the code name "Mayor Tito," Major Tito. It turns out that that man's real name was Otto Pérez Molina. Otto Pérez Molina later ascended to general, and today he is the president of Guatemala. So he is the one who was the local implementer of the program of genocide which Ríos Montt is accused of carrying out.

AMY GOODMAN: This is a huge charge. I mean, right now, it's an historic trial when it's 25 years after a past president is now being charged. Let's go to a clip of Otto Pérez Molina, the current president of Guatemala, but this is 1982 in the heartland area of Quiché in northwest Guatemala, northwest of Guatemala City. In this video clip, Otto Pérez Molina is seen reading from political literature found on one of the bodies. This is your interview with him.

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] "The [poor](#) artisan fights alongside the worker. The poor peasant fights alongside the worker. The wealth is produced by us, the poor. The army takes the poor peasants. Together, we have an [invincible](#) force. All the families are with the guerrilla, the guerrilla army of the poor, toward final victory forever." These are the different fronts that they have.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] So here they are saying that the army killed some people.

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] Exactly.

AMY GOODMAN: I mean, this is astounding. This is the current president of Guatemala standing over these bodies. Tell us more.

ALLAN NAIRN: Well, as one of the soldiers says in the sound in the background, the—Pérez Molina interrogated these men. And soon after, they were—they were dead. And one soldier told me off camera that in fact after Pérez Molina interrogated them, they finished them off.

AMY GOODMAN: This man, Pérez Molina, the president, actually was going by a code name at the time. When was it clear that this is Pérez Molina? Though we have a very clear shot of him.

ALLAN NAIRN: For a long time, Pérez Molina was trying to obscure his past and apparently hide the fact that he played this role in a supervisory position during the highland massacres. During the Guatemalan presidential campaign, which Pérez Molina eventually won, about two

years ago, I got calls while I was in Asia from the Guatemalan press, from

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Journal

, asking whether I could vouch for the fact that Mayor Tito, the man in the video who I encountered in the northwest highlands in the midst of the massacres—whether I could vouch for the fact that Mayor Tito was in fact General Otto Pérez Molina, the presidential candidate. And I said that I couldn't, just from looking at the current videos. You know, people can change a lot visually over 30 years, so I said I couldn't be sure. It turns out that—and during the campaign, when reporters would ask the Pérez Molina campaign, "Is Pérez Molina Mayor Tito?" they would dodge the question. They would evade. They were running from it. It turns out, though, we just learned this week, that Pérez Molina had admitted back in 2000 that he was Mayor Tito. But then, apparently afterward, he thought better of it and was trying to bury it. And now, this is potentially trouble for him. He's currently president, and so, under Guatemalan law, he enjoys immunity. But once he leaves the presidency, he could, in theory, be subject to prosecution, just as Ríos Montt is now being prosecuted.

AMY GOODMAN: That could be a serious motivation for him declaring himself president for life.

ALLAN NAIRN: Well, Ríos Montt seized power by a coup, but one of the important facts about the situation now is that the military men don't have the power that they used to. The fact that this trial is happening is an indication of that. This trial is happening because the survivors refused to give up. They persisted—the survivors have been working on this for decades, pushing to bring Ríos Montt and the other generals to justice. They refused to give up. They got support from international—some international [human rights](#) lawyers. And within the Guatemalan justice system, there were a few people of integrity who ascended to positions of some authority within the prosecutorial system, within the judiciary. And so, we now have this near-political miracle of a country bringing to trial its former dictator for genocide, while the president of the country, who was implicated in those killings, sits by.

AMY GOODMAN: Allan, this video that we have of you interviewing Pérez Molina—again, as you said, he admitted to the Guatemalan newspaper, *Prensa Libre*, in 2000 that he used the nickname Tito—is quite astounding. So let's go to another clip, where you're talking to him about the kind of support that he wants.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] The United States is considering giving military help here in the form of helicopters. What is the importance of helicopters for all of you?

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] A helicopter is an apparatus that's become of great importance not only here in Guatemala but also in other countries where they've had problems of a counterinsurgency.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] Like in Vietnam?

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] In Vietnam, for example, the helicopter was an apparatus that was used a lot.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] Can you also use it in combat?

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] Yes, of course. The helicopters that are military types, they are equipped to support operations in the field. They have machine guns and rocket launchers.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] What type of mortars are you guys using?

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] There's various types of mortars. We have small mortars and the mortars Tampella.

ALLAN NAIRN: Tampella.

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] Yes, it's a mortar that's 60 millimeters.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] Is it very powerful? Does it have a lot of force to destroy things?

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] Yes, it's a weapon that's very effective. It's very useful, and it has a very good result in our operation in defense of the country.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] Is it against a person or...?

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] Yes, it's an anti-personnel weapon.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] Do you have one here?

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] It's light and easy to transport, as well.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] So, it's very light, and you can use it with your hand.

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] Exactly, with the hand.

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] Where did you get them?

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] These, we got from [Israel](#) .

ALLAN NAIRN: [translated] And where do you get the ammunition?

MAYOR OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: [translated] That's also from Israel.

AMY GOODMAN: So, this is, again, the current president, Pérez Molina, of Guatemala, the general you met in the highlands in 1982, asking for more aid. Talk about the relationship between Guatemala then and the United States.

ALLAN NAIRN: Well, the U.S. was the sponsor of the Guatemalan army, as it had been for many decades, as the U.S. has and continues to sponsor dozens and dozens of repressive armies all over the world. In the case of Guatemala, if you go into the military academy and you see the pictures of the past presidents of military academy, some of them are actually Americans. They're actual American officers there who were openly running the Guatemalan military training. By the '80s, when the Ríos Montt massacres were being carried out, the U.S. Congress was under the impression that they had successfully stopped U.S. military aid to Guatemala. But in fact it was continuing. The CIA had an extensive program of backing the G-2, the G-2, the military intelligence service, which selected the targets for assassination and disappearance. They even—they even built a headquarters for—a secret headquarters for the G-2 near the Guatemala City airport. They had American advisers working

inside the headquarters. Out in the field, Guatemalan troops were receiving from the U.S. ammunition, weapons.

And most importantly, the U.S., beginning under the Carter administration but continuing under Reagan and after, asked the Israelis to come in and fill the gap that was caused by congressional restrictions. So Israel was doing massive shipments of Galil automatic rifles and other weapons. And Pérez Molina, as you saw in the video, actually had one of his subordinates come over and show me an Israeli-made mortar. That mortar and the helicopters he was asking for from the U.S., those were the kind of weapons they would use to bomb villages and attack people as they were fleeing in the mountains. In listening to the testimony in the trial up to this moment, I was struck by the fact that almost every witness mentioned that they had been attacked from the air, that either their village had been bombed or strafed or that they were bombed or strafed as they were fleeing in the mountains. This testimony suggests that the use of this U.S. and Israeli aircraft and U.S. munitions against the civilians in the Ixil highlands was actually much more extensive than we understood at the time.

Beyond that, beyond the material U.S. support, there's the question of doctrine. Yesterday in the trial, the Ríos Montt defense called forward a general, a former commander of the G-2, as an expert witness on the defense side. And at the end of his testimony, the prosecution read to this general an excerpt from a Guatemalan military training document. And the document said it is often difficult for soldiers to accept the fact that they may be required to execute repressive actions against civilian women, children and sick people, but with proper training, they can be made to do so. So, the prosecutor asked the Ríos Montt general, "Well, General, what is your response to this document?" And the general responded by saying, "Well, that training document which we use is an almost literal translation of a U.S. training document." So this doctrine of killing civilians, even down to women, children and sick people, was, as the general testified, adopted from the U.S. Indeed, years before, the U.S. military attaché in Guatemala, Colonel [John](#) Webber, had said to *Time* magazine that the Guatemalan army was licensed to kill guerrillas and potential guerrillas. And, of course, the category of potential guerrillas can include anyone, including children.

And the point of guerrilla civilians is actually very important to understanding this. Those bodies that Pérez Molina was standing over in Nebaj in 1982 in the [film](#) we saw, those were actually an exception to the rule, because the truth commission which investigated the massacres in Guatemala found that 93 percent of the victims were civilians killed by the Guatemalan army. But there was also some combat going on between the army and guerrillas. And in that case, in the video we saw, the bodies Pérez Molina was standing over were guerrillas, guerrillas that

the army had captured. And one of them in captivity had set off a hand grenade as a suicide act, but apparently, from what I saw and what the soldiers told me, apparently they survived the blast, and they were then turned over to Pérez Molina for interrogation. He interrogated them, and then, as we saw, they turned up dead. But in the vast majority of cases, they were civilians, completely unarmed people, who were targeted by Ríos Montt's army for elimination.

And I asked Ríos Montt about this practice on two different occasions, first in an interview with him two months after he seized power in 1982, and then later, years later, after he had been thrown out of power. And when I asked him in '82 about the fact that so many civilians were being killed by the army, he said, "Look, for each one who is shooting, there are 10 who are standing behind him," meaning: Behind the guerrillas there are vast numbers of civilians. His senior aide and his spokesman, a man named Francisco Bianchi, who was sitting next to him at this interview, then expanded on the point. Bianchi said the guerrillas—well, the [indigenous](#) population—he called them "indios," which is a slur in Guatemalan Spanish—

AMY GOODMAN: For Indians.

ALLAN NAIRN: Yes—were collaborating with the guerrilla, therefore it was necessary to kill Indians. "And people would say," Bianchi continued, "'Oh, you're massacring all these innocent Indians'—'innocent Indios,' in his words. But Bianchi then said, "But, no, they are not innocent, because they had sold out to subversion." So this is the—this is the doctrine of killing civilians, and particularly Mayans, because the army saw them collectively as a group. They didn't view them as individuals, but they saw them collectively as a group as sold out to subversion. And this was a doctrine that the U.S. supported.

AMY GOODMAN: Journalist Allan Nairn. The interview we did was recorded last week just before he left for Guatemala to testify in the trial against the Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt. But at the last minute, his testimony was canceled late yesterday. The trial was canceled. We'll continue with the interview in a minute.

[break]

AMY GOODMAN: Mercedes Sosa, here on *Democracy Now!*, democracynow.org, *The War and Peace Report*

, as we continue our coverage of the historic trial of former U.S.-backed Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity. Allan Nairn joined us in our studio last week before he flew to Guatemala. His testimony was canceled. The trial was canceled last night. But I asked Allan to talk about how he managed to interview the Guatemalan dictator, Ríos Montt, two months after he seized power in the 1980s.

ALLAN NAIRN: Well, he was—he was giving press interviews. This was an interview in the palace. I was there with a couple of other reporters. Ríos Montt was very outspoken. He would go on TV and say, "Today we are going to begin a merciless struggle. We are going to kill, but we are going to kill legally." That was his style, to speak directly. And it's in great contrast to what he's doing today. I mean, it's very interesting from point of view of people who've survived these kind of generals who live on the blood of the people, not just in Guatemala but in Salvador, in East Timor, in [Indonesia](#), in countless countries where the U.S. has backed this kind of terror. You have the spectacle now of this general, who once made poor people tremble at the sight of him, at the mention of him, now he's hiding. In the trial, he refuses to talk. He will not defend himself. He's like a common thug taken off the streets who invokes his Fifth Amendment—invokes his Fifth Amendment rights. But back then, when he had the power, when no one could challenge him, he would speak fairly openly. In fact, the second time I spoke to him, a number of years after, I asked Ríos Montt whether he thought that he should be executed, whether he should be tried and executed because of his own responsibility for the highland massacres, and he responded by jumping to his feet and shouting, "Yes! Put me on trial. Put me against the wall. But if you're going to put me on trial, you have to try the Americans first, including Ronald Reagan."

AMY GOODMAN: Allan Nairn, at the time in Guatemala, you not only were interviewing, well, now the current president, Pérez Molina, who was in the highlands at the time standing over dead bodies, but you were also talking to U.S. officials, and I want to go to this issue of U.S. involvement in what happened in Guatemala. Tell us about U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Stephen Bosworth, a man you got to interview at the time during the Ríos Montt years.

ALLAN NAIRN: Well, Bosworth was, at the time, an important player in U.S. Central American policy. And he, along with Elliott Abrams, for example, attacked Amnesty International when Amnesty was trying to report on the assassinations of labor leaders and priests and peasant organizers and activists in the Mayan highlands. And he also was denying that the U.S. was

giving military assistance to the Guatemalan army that was carrying out those crimes.

AMY GOODMAN: Let's turn to the interview you did with then U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Stephen Bosworth.

STEPHEN BOSWORTH: Well, I think the important factor is that there has been, over the last six months, evidence of significant improvement in the human rights situation in Guatemala. Since the coming into power of the Ríos Montt government, the level of violence in the country, politically inspired violence, particularly in the urban areas, has declined rather dramatically. That being said, however, I think it's important also to note that the level of violence in the countryside continues at a level which is of concern to all. And while it is difficult, if not impossible, to attribute responsibility for that violence in each instance, it is clear that in the countryside the government does indeed need to make further progress in terms of improving its control over government troops.

AMY GOODMAN: You also, Allan Nairn, asked the then-U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Stephen Bosworth precisely what was the U.S. military presence and role in Guatemala. This is how Bosworth responded.

STEPHEN BOSWORTH: We have no military presence or role. We have, as a part of our diplomatic establishment, a defense attaché office and a military representative. But that is the same sort of representation that we have in virtually all other countries in the world. We do not have American trainers working with the Guatemalan army. We do not have American military personnel active in Guatemala in that—in that sort of area.

ALLAN NAIRN: There are no American trainers there?

STEPHEN BOSWORTH: No.

ALLAN NAIRN: None performing the types of functions that go on in [El Salvador](#) , for instance?

STEPHEN BOSWORTH: No, there are not.

AMY GOODMAN: That was then-U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Stephen Bosworth. Respond to what he said, and tell us who he later became, who he is today in the U.S. government.

ALLAN NAIRN: Well, first, just about everything that Bosworth said there was a lie. He said that the killings were down. In fact, they increased dramatically under Ríos Montt. He said, quite interestingly, that it was impossible to know and attribute responsibility for what was happening. Well, the Conference of Catholic Bishops had no difficulty knowing and attributing responsibility. They said that the killings have reached the extreme of genocide. They were saying this at the moment that the massacres were happening and at the moment that Bosworth was denying it. And they and the survivors and the human rights groups were all clearly blaming it on the army.

And then, finally, he said that the army has to be careful to maintain control over its troops. Well, there was a very strict control. In fact, the officers in the field in the Ixil zone that I interviewed at the time said they were on a very short leash and that there were only three layers of command between themselves in the field and Ríos Montt. And, in fact, a few weeks earlier, there had been only two layers of command between themselves and Ríos Montt.

Then, Bosworth went on to say that the U.S. was not giving any military assistance to Guatemala, but I guess it was a couple weeks after that interview when we went down to

Guatemala, I met a U.S. Green Beret, Captain Jesse Garcia, who was training the Guatemalan military in combat techniques, including what he called how—in his words, "how to destroy towns." This was apart from the weapons and U.S. munitions that I mentioned before, apart from the CIA trainers who were working in the CIA-built headquarters of the G-2, the military intelligence service that was doing the assassinations and disappearances.

AMY GOODMAN: The G-2 being the Guatemalan G-2. Now, today Stephen Bosworth is the dean of the Fletcher School at Tufts University. But before that, in 2009, well, he played a key role in the [Obama](#) administration.

ALLAN NAIRN: Yes, rather than being—you know, in what you might consider to be a normally functioning political system, if a high government official lied like that about matters of such grave, life-and-death importance and was involved in the supply of arms to terrorists, in this case the Guatemalan military, you would expect him at the minimum to be fired and disgraced, or maybe brought up on charges. But Bosworth was actually promoted. And under the Obama administration, Hillary Clinton chose him as the special envoy to [North Korea](#). He's been in the news a great deal in recent times because of his very prominent role there.

AMY GOODMAN: In 1995, Allan Nairn was interviewed on *Charlie Rose* about his piece in *The Nation* called "CIA Death Squad," in which he described how Americans were directly involved in killings by the Guatemalan army. He was interviewed alongside Elliott Abrams, who challenged what he was saying. Abrams had served as assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs under President Reagan from 1981 to 1985. This clip begins with Elliott Abrams.

ELLIOTT ABRAMS: Wait a minute. We're not here to refight the Cold [War](#). We're here to talk about, I thought, a specific case in which an allegation is being made that—of the husband of an American and, another case, an American citizen were killed, and there was a CIA connection with—allegedly with the person allegedly involved in it. Now, I'm happy to talk about

that kind of thing. If Mr. Nairn thinks we should have been on the other side in Guatemala—that is, we should have been in favor of a guerrilla victory—I disagree with him.

ALLAN NAIRN: So you're then admitting that you were on the side of the Guatemalan military.

ELLIOTT ABRAMS: I am admitting that it was the policy of the United States, under Democrats and Republicans, approved by Congress repeatedly, to oppose a communist guerrilla victory anywhere in Central America, including in Guatemala.

CHARLIE ROSE: Alright, well, I—

ALLAN NAIRN: A communist guerrilla victory.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yeah, I—

ALLAN NAIRN: Ninety-five percent of these victims are civilians—peasant organizers, human rights leaders—

CHARLIE ROSE: I am happy to invite both of you—

ALLAN NAIRN: —priests—assassinated by the U.S.-backed Guatemalan army. Let's look at reality here. In reality, we're not talking about two murders, one colonel. We're talking about

more than 100,000 murders, an entire army, many of its top officers employees of the U.S. government. We're talking about crimes, and we're also talking about criminals, not just people like the Guatemalan colonels, but also the U.S. agents who have been working with them and the higher-level U.S. officials. I mean, I think you have to be—you have to apply uniform standards. [President Bush](#) once talked about putting Saddam Hussein on trial for crimes against humanity, Nuremberg-style tribunal. I think that's a good idea. But if you're serious, you have to be even-handed. If we look at a case like this, I think we have to talk—start talking about putting Guatemalan and U.S. officials on trial. I think someone like Mr. Abrams would be a fit—a subject for such a Nuremberg-style inquiry. But I agree with Mr. Abrams that Democrats would have to be in the dock with him. The Congress has been in on this. The Congress approved the sale of 16,000 M-16s to Guatemala. In '87 and '88—

CHARLIE ROSE: Alright, but hold on one second. I just—before—because the—

ALLAN NAIRN: They voted more military aid than the Republicans asked for.

CHARLIE ROSE: Again, I invite you and Elliott Abrams back to discuss what he did. But right now, you—

ELLIOTT ABRAMS: No, thanks, Charlie, but I won't accept—

CHARLIE ROSE: Hold on one second. Go ahead. You want to repeat the question, of you want to be in the dock?

ELLIOTT ABRAMS: It is ludicrous. It is ludicrous to respond to that kind of stupidity. This guy thinks we were on the wrong side in the Cold War. Maybe he personally was on the wrong side. I am one of the many millions of Americans who thinks we were happy to win.

CHARLIE ROSE: Alright, I don't—

ALLAN NAIRN: Mr. Abrams, you were on the wrong side in supporting the massacre of peasants and organizers, anyone who dared to speak, absolutely.

CHARLIE ROSE: What I want to do is I want to ask the following question.

ALLAN NAIRN: And that's a crime. That's a crime, Mr. Abrams, for which people should be tried. U.S. laws—

ELLIOTT ABRAMS: Why don't you—yes, right, we'll put all the American officials who won the Cold War in the dock.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Elliott Abrams—he served as assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs under President Reagan from '81 to '85—debating investigative journalist Allan Nairn on the *Charlie Rose* show. Actually, Congressman Robert Torricelli, then from New Jersey, before he became senator, was also in that discussion at another point. Allan, the significance of what Mr. Abrams was saying? He went on, Abrams, to deal with the [Middle East](#)

ALLAN NAIRN: Yes. Well, he—when I said that he should be tried by a Nuremberg-style tribunal, he basically reacted by saying I was crazy, that this was a crazy idea that you could try U.S. officials for supplying weapons to armies that kill civilians. But people also thought that it

was crazy that Ríos Montt could face justice in Guatemala. But after decades of work by the survivors of his Mayan highland massacres, today, as we speak, Ríos Montt is sitting in the dock.

AMY GOODMAN: Award-winning journalist Allan Nairn, speaking last week before he flew to Guatemala. On Thursday, a landmark genocide trial against former Guatemalan dictator Ríos Montt was suspended after the trial threatened to implicate the current president of Guatemala in the mass killings of civilians. Allan reports Guatemalan army associates had threatened the lives of case judges and prosecutors and that the case had been annulled after intervention by Guatemala's president, General Otto Pérez Molina. Some of the video footage used in the show comes from a [1983 documentary](#) directed by Mikael Wahlforss. We'll link to it at democracynow.org and to Allan Nairn's website, allannairn.org.