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## U.S. Donation Increases Guatemala's Armored Vehicle Force

The Guatemalan Army bolsters its fight against narcotrafficking with a U.S. donation of 100 new vehicles.

Jennyfer Hernandez/Diálogo | 31 January 2018



*The U.S. donation made in late 2017 included 41 armored J8 Jeeps, which will bolster several Guatemalan Army brigades as well as the Tecún Umán Interagency Task Force and the Chortí Interagency Task Force. (Photo: Guatemalan Ministry of Defense)*

In late 2017, the U.S. government donated 108 vehicles to the Guatemalan Army through the Department of Defense. This contribution, received on December 11th, 2017, and valued at \$6.6 million, included light tactical armored vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, and tactical mobility trucks, among others.

The new motorized force joins operations to counter narcotrafficking and related crimes. Some of the vehicles were also adapted to perform humanitarian aid functions, and will be put into service in the Guatemalan Army's Humanitarian Aid and Rescue Unit.

"We're getting support and gaining credibility from the United States," Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales noted during the official reception ceremony for the vehicles. "We're bolstering our ground forces to continue fighting against narcotrafficking."

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### Important donation

The donation consisted of 41 J8 Jeeps, 32 Polaris Rangers, 12 9.5-ton and eight 12-ton trucks, and 12 trailers. In addition, the Guatemalan Army received two transport buses and one minibus.

According to Colonel Oscar Pérez Figueroa, press secretary for the Guatemalan Army, the vehicles were assigned to different brigades and special commands within the Army. "We have places like the border areas where this kind of support is needed because these vehicles have sufficient capacity to go into battle when required," Col. Pérez said. "However, the distribution of each vehicle is not made public to maintain the security of our personnel who fight to eradicate the transit of narcotics and track down and capture criminal groups in key regions of Guatemala."

Although not designed for front-line combat, armored J8 Jeeps have a large payload capacity and a flexible, modular structure, which allow for their use in command, patrol, reconnaissance, and liaison duties. The vehicle can also be transferred easily by plane or helicopter.

"We can drive them into water, and they can withstand heavy winds," Col. Pérez said. "They can be equipped with automatic transmission and are capable of carrying people and heavy loads at all times."

Polaris ultralight combat vehicles are all-terrain, enabling transport of personnel and critical equipment for missions on the most extreme terrains. According to Guatemalan Minister of the Interior Francisco Rivas, these vehicles are easily maneuverable on the difficult terrain of border areas.

"The United States is always willing to facilitate the tracking, identification, and interdiction of narcotics and drug precursors," said Rivas. "That's why the vehicles donated come with high-quality ratings and solid warranties."

### The fight against narco trafficking

The threats organized crime and narco trafficking pose to Guatemala's maritime and land borders are serious. Guatemala has a 400-kilometer Caribbean coastal border and a 1,667-kilometer Pacific coastal border with Honduras, Mexico, El Salvador, and Belize.

In its [2017 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report](#)



*The U.S. government donated 108 vehicles to the Guatemalan Army. Some of these vehicles were adapted to perform humanitarian aid functions. (Photo: Guatemalan Ministry of Defense)*

(<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/268025.pdf>), the U.S. Department of State highlights Guatemala as a main route for drug transit due to its location and its porous borders. The department estimates that 90 percent of the cocaine entering the United States comes through Central America and Mexico.

According to the Subdirectorato de Counter-narcotics Information and Analysis (a division of the Guatemalan National Police), Guatemalan authorities seized 13.6 tons of cocaine in 2017. The figures surpass the 12.8 tons seized in 2016.

### International aid

The recent U.S. donation strengthens the efforts of the infantry brigades dedicated to protect Guatemala's Pacific and Caribbean coasts. The vehicles will also support the Tecún Umán Interagency Task Force and the Chortí Interagency Task Force.

Both forces, made up of military and police personnel, were established with support from U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) to fight organized crime, narco trafficking, and smuggling. In 2013, the Tecún Umán Interagency Task Force began its work in the department of San Marcos, located in northwestern Guatemala, on the border with Mexico, with 42 armored vehicles donated by SOUTHCOM.

In turn, the Chortí Interagency Task Force, established in 2014 and headquartered in Zacapa, operates in the departments of Izabal, Chiquimula, Zacapa, El Progreso, Petén, and Alta Verapaz, which all border Honduras. The task force also works with its Honduran counterparts within the framework of the Maya-Chortí Binational Task Force. In 2016, the Chortí Interagency Task Force received 75 vehicles and other equipment from the United States.

"This support is of the utmost importance for our work, which is, ultimately, the protection and security of every Guatemalan," Rivas concluded. "These items reinforce our plan."

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