



Propaganda as “News”: Ecuador Allegedly Sells its Amazon Rainforest to China

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The end of January a news article appeared, “Ecuador To Sell A Third Of Its Amazon Rainforest To Chinese Oil Companies,” and has resurfaced again and again on the internet. Posted on progressive websites such as Reader Supported News, Daily Kos, “The PeoplesVoice.org,” “ThinkGlobalGreen.org,” the story often comes with maps of the affected area, and include pictures of indigenous peoples living peaceably with nature or protesting against oil drilling.

Almost all these stories refer back to one article three years ago, in March 2013, in Australian online journal Business Insider:

Ecuador is [planning](#) to auction off three million of the country’s [8.1 million](#) hectares of pristine Amazonian rainforest to Chinese oil companies, Jonathan Kaiman of The Guardian reports.” And, “Ecuador owed China more than \$7 billion — more than a tenth of its GDP — as of last summer. In 2009 China began loaning Ecuador billions of dollars in exchange for oil shipments. It also helped fund two of the country’s biggest hydroelectric infrastructure projects, and China National Petroleum Corp may soon have a [30 per cent stake](#) in a \$10 billion oil refinery in Ecuador. [\[i\]](#)

The rest of the article becomes a platform for Adam Zuckerman of the US based NGO Amazon Watch to spin his tale of China colonizing Ecuador, with President Correa willingly selling out the environment and the indigenous peoples to pay off his China debt.

The problem is that the story is an invention. This same story slamming Ecuador President Correa and China for forcibly displacing indigenous people and destroying the rainforest for the sake of oil profits reappeared in June-July 2015. This just happened to coincide with a rightwing protests in Ecuador against Correa, over his raising taxes on the rich.

Business Insider takes its disinformation story from another March 2013 Guardian article titled, “Ecuador auctions off Amazon to Chinese oil firms” [\[ii\]](#) an article which provides no evidence to support its title. This Guardian article also mostly relies on Zuckerman of Amazon Watch.

Both articles never state Ecuador did actually sell Amazon rainforests to Chinese companies; they allege Ecuador “planned” to sell a third, though this “plan” is not corroborated by any evidence. Now almost three years later, no rainforest has yet to be sold to China, but the same concocted story is repeated.

Last November, International Business Times reported Ecuador's China debt totaled \$5 billion, while the country's central bank said entire foreign debt was \$20 billion,^[iii] making China's share only a quarter of the total. Ecuador also has one of the lowest foreign debt to GDP (22.4%) in Latin America.^[iv] This hardly substantiates the view that Ecuador is in hock to China.

The Guardian has a history of dishonest reporting on Ecuador. Christian Tym^[v], Aliya Alwi,^[vi]

and Carlos Abad^[vii], *Ecuador Ambassador to Britain*, have all addressed it.

What has happened is that in January 2016 – three years after the Guardian article – Ecuador sold exploration rights to a Chinese company for \$80 million to search for oil in an area of the Amazon one and half times the size of Los Angeles. To place this in context, global oil exploration is an almost trillion dollar business.^[viii]

Certainly Ecuador has a right to explore for oil, as do Chinese companies, which unlike Western corporations, agree to technology and technological know-how transfers to the countries they do business with.

And, for comparison, the Alberta tar sands oil fields are 1,500 times the size of the small area Ecuador opened up for oil exploration in the Yasuni. In comparison, too, last May Obama approved oil drilling in the Arctic Sea, where 20 billion barrels of oil and 90 trillion cubic feet of natural gas are now more available due to the melting of Arctic ice sheets.

Why do we repeatedly see dishonest news articles about President Correa sacrificing the environment and the indigenous to China's thirst for oil? This has even developed into an anti-Correa campaign by some US NGOs such as Amazon Watch, which is sullyng its well-deserved reputation as a leader in the struggle to make Chevron pay for its environmental crimes in Ecuador.^[ix]

There has been a several year old campaign attacking both Correa and China for drilling for oil in the Amazon, supposedly against the wishes of the indigenous who live there. However, as former president Humberto Cholango of the Ecuadoran indigenous federation, CONAIE stated,

« Many nationalities of the Amazonia say “look, we are the owners of the territory, and yes we want it to be exploited.” ^[x] They find it against their interest to leave valuable natural wealth untouched while their people go without adequate schools, housing, roads, medical care and employment.

This anti-Correa campaign happens to coincide with the successes of Ecuador's legal case against Chevron to make it pay up the \$9.5 billion owed for its deliberate oil pollution of a vast area of the Amazon. Chevron, with its powers as a giant multinational corporation, has fought back in and out of court, even seeking to take to court the 30,000 victims and their lawyers. ^[xi]

Christian Tym also notes, “Ever since Julian Assange was granted asylum, western media and NGOs have been taking free hits at Ecuador.”^[xii]

The Amazon Watch campaign against President Correa

Amazon Watch has waged a continual disinformation campaign against Correa's Citizens Revolution in Ecuador.^[xiii] In 2013 the West snubbed Ecuador's Yasuni Initiative, a proposal to keep Yasuni rainforest oil untouched in a revolutionary anti-global warming initiative if the Western countries reimbursed Ecuador for half the value of the oil. Amazon Watch used the Initiative's failure not so much to expose Western government indifference to real action on global warming, but declared, "Correa's own contradictory policies and mismanagement of the initiative may have been its ultimate undoing."^[xiv]

Perhaps Amazon Watch's most outrageous article was one supporting the right-wing backed anti-Correa protests in August 2015. "While police massacre indigenous protesters and citizens, the Government of Rafael Correa dances in the Presidential plaza....All of the rights won by the indigenous nationalities have been repealed, just as the system of bilingual intercultural education, indigenous health services, economic funds, and political organization....Violent confrontations with citizens ensued and resulted in numerous people disappeared, imprisoned, tortured, and dead across the country."^[xv]

That this is deliberate disinformation can be seen from a film of the protestors that day attacking the police in an attempt to seize the presidential palace.^[xvi]

It may not be clear why Amazon Watch engages in this disinformation against this target of the US government, President Correa. But it is clear this NGO relies on corporate backed funders,^[xvii] and markets to corporate elite clientele tours to the "pristine" Amazon and its "natives."^[xviii]

It is also clear the US rulers are preoccupied with combating China as the only world power it sees directly threatening its global domination^[xix], a central reason for the anti-China TransPacific Partnership (TPP). In fact, China provides loans at low interest rates, does not intervene in the internal affairs of other countries, respects other countries' paths of economic and political development, and encourages South-South cooperation as a counter to Western hegemony. It cannot be coincidence that Amazon Watch - or the Guardian - portray China as the new colonizer, as the global power responsible for the concocted environmental and human rights abuses they attribute to Correa.

Stansfield Smith, *Chicago ALBA Solidarity Committee, co-administrator of Facebook page, Friends of Ecuador -North America, leader of former Chicago Committee to Free the Cuban 5, has been on delegations to Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia in 2015.*

Notes

[i] <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/ecuador-selling-its-rainforest-to-china-2013-3>

[ii] <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/26/ecuador-chinese-oil-bids-amazon>

[iii]

<http://www.brecorder.com/markets/equity/americas/267764-ecuador-vows-to-pay-debt-for-first-time-ever.html>

[iv]

<http://www.elciudadano.gob.ec/ecuador-es-uno-de-los-paises-latinoamericanos-con-menor-deuda-externa/>

[v] <http://www.importantcool.com/murder-amazon-guardians-quest-correa/#more-1634>

[vi] <http://www.importantcool.com/six-ways-the-guardian-is-wrong-about-ecuador-again/>

[vii]

http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/27/the-right-to-protest-in-ecuador-is-absolutely-granted?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Copy_to_clipboard

[viii] <http://www.reuters.com/article/oil-explorers-idUSL6N0PL2VD20140710>

[ix]

<http://amazonwatch.org/news/2016/0121-ecuadorian-villagers-ask-un-to-block-chevron-from-attacking-human-rights-defenders>

[x]

<http://lalineadefuego.info/2014/04/11/entrevista-a-humberto-cholango-dios-la-naturaleza-y-las-fuerzas-de-los-espíritus-de-los-líderes-van-a-proteger-para-que-la-conaie-no-caiga-en-manos-de-la-derecha/>

[xi] <https://www.greenleft.org.au/node/60984>

[xii] <http://zcomm.org/znetarticle/why-there-is-a-progressive-case-to-drill-baby-drill-in-ecuador/>

[xiii]

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/analysis/Ecuadors-Citizens-Revolution-Transformed-a-Nation-20150113-0022.html>

[xiv]

<http://amazonwatch.org/news/2013/0816-ecuador-president-pulls-plug-on-innovative-yasuni-itt-initiative>

[xv]

<http://amazonwatch.org/news/2015/0819-ecuadorian-government-violates-human-rights-and-the-constitution>

[xvi] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKcZnH0-zAo>

[xvii] http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Amazon_Watch

[xviii]

<http://www.wrongkindofgreen.org/category/non-profit-industrial-complex-organizations/organizations/amazon-watch/>

[xix] <http://monthlyreview.org/2015/09/01/dangerous-circumstances/>

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