

Subject: Important Info The-Needle

From: xxxx <xxxx@proton.me>

Date: 20/05/2026, 06:30 p. m.

To: "mensajedato@bibliotecapleyades.net" <mensajedato@bibliotecapleyades.net>

Source: <https://www.alilybit.com/p/the-needle-and-the-needles-eye>

The Needle and the Needle's Eye

Notes on the largest empire in human history, assembled without firing a shot since 1775

May 18, 2026

The American empire does not look like an empire, which is the first thing to understand about it. There are no legions camped in Spangdahlem. There is no viceroy installed at the palace in Quito. There is no governor-general signing decrees in Jakarta. There is, instead, a building in Washington called the World Bank, and a building a few blocks over called the International Monetary Fund, and a thousand consulting firms scattered between Boston and Houston whose stationery suggests they exist to draft engineering studies. They do draft engineering studies. They also, in the same breath, draft the financial instruments by which entire countries are turned into long-term creditors of American capital, and they have been doing this work, in the open, in plain English, for sixty years.

The mechanism is so elegant it could be taught in business schools, and probably is, although the syllabus would not call it what it is. Recruitment begins in the obvious places. The National Security Agency keeps an eye on graduate programs at the right universities and conducts interviews of promising candidates that are framed as job offers and conducted as lie detector sessions. The agency is not looking for ideological commitment.

The agency is looking for weaknesses. The successful candidate is the one with appetites the institution can both feed and lever against him later. Sex, money, power, in the durable phrase: the three drugs the system runs on. The recruits are then handed off to private consulting firms that pay them out of contracts billed back to the United States government, which keeps the State Department's fingerprints off the operation and ensures that when the work eventually surfaces in a magazine investigation, the federal government can disclaim responsibility for what private actors chose to do on their own initiative.

The job, once you are in it, is to produce forecasts. The forecasts are the load-bearing lie of the entire apparatus. A target country, generally one sitting on oil or copper or rare earths or a strategic waterway, is approached with the offer of a substantial loan from the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, or some other multilateral lender.

The loan, the country is told, will fund the construction of infrastructure required for economic takeoff: power plants, transmission lines, ports, highways, industrial parks, hydroelectric dams on whatever rivers happen to be available. The economist working on behalf of the consulting firm produces a projection of future GDP growth that, if it materialized, would generate the tax revenue required to service the debt. The projection never materializes, because it was never meant to. It was meant to clear the loan committee. The country signs. Construction begins. The contracts go to Bechtel, to Halliburton, to Stone & Webster, to the other firms whose lobbyists have made themselves useful in Washington over the preceding several decades. Roughly ninety cents of every dollar borrowed never leaves the United States in any meaningful sense; it travels from a World Bank ledger to a Houston invoice. The infrastructure, once complete, serves the wealthiest five percent of the host country, which is precisely the five percent of the host country that has been bribed into signing the loan in the first place. Everyone else inherits the debt.

Ecuador is a clean example, because the books are open and the math is uncontested. As of December 2025, Ecuador's national debt reached \$87.5 billion, or roughly 67 percent of GDP, which means that a country of eighteen million people, sitting on oil reserves the global market still wants and rivers the global market is happy to dam, exists in a state of permanent financial captivity to creditors most of its citizens could not name.

The loans were never going to be repaid in any honest accounting, because they were not structured to be

repaid; they were structured to be refinanced, perpetually, on terms that grow worse, the way a credit card debt grows worse when you pay only the minimum, except that the credit card company is the World Bank and the cardholder is twenty million human beings who never signed for the purchase.

Nigeria, sitting on oil and now, in 2026, sitting also on roughly sixteen percent inflation according to IMF estimates, is the financial weather report for a country that has been pumping crude for half a century and somehow has nothing to show for it.

Venezuela is currently running projected inflation in excess of three hundred and eighty percent annually, a number so catastrophic it functions less as an economic indicator than as a memorial plaque.

When you are this far in debt to the right people, the right people own you. They demand, as the operative phrasing inside the consulting firms goes, their pound of flesh. They demand the oil concession. They demand the canal. They demand a vote at the United Nations. They demand a port. The vocabulary the diplomats use for this is structural adjustment, and the policy papers are written in a register so anesthetized you could read one in a dental chair without flinching, but the substance of structural adjustment is this: cut the schools, cut the clinics, sell the water utility to a French conglomerate, devalue the currency, and we will reschedule your payments. The internal slang for this work, among the men who did it, was hit man. The accuracy of the language was one of the few honest things in the operation.

The countries pulled into this system in the postwar era are a long list, and the list reads as a map of the world's contested resources. Indonesia, where the work began on Java and expanded to Sulawesi. Iran, before the bottom fell out. Colombia. Panama. Egypt. Guatemala. The countries inducted into the arrangement have not, by and large, escaped it. The ones that tried got their presidents killed.

This is the part of the story the foreign-policy magazines avoid, because the foreign-policy magazines are mostly written by people who attended the same dinner parties that originally produced the operation. When the economic instrument fails, the next instrument is sent in, and the next instrument is a CIA-trained operative working under the institutional euphemism of intelligence asset. The job is to foment a coup. Failing that, the job is to assassinate. The practice is older than the agency that conducts it, and older even than the empire that funds the agency. Rome did this. The British did this. The novelty of the American version is mainly the paperwork.

Jaime Roldós of Ecuador was an unusually inconvenient kind of inconvenient. He had won the presidency in 1979 on a platform of human rights and labor reform, and he had the unforgivable habit of meaning what he said. He declined to attend Ronald Reagan's January 1981 inauguration on the grounds of bilateral disagreements he considered worth honoring.

On May 24, 1981, after delivering a speech in Loja commemorating the Battle of Pichincha, in which he told his country that the fight for Latin American independence remained unfinished and that Ecuador should pursue a humanist agenda rather than enlist in Washington's hemispheric crusades, he boarded a Beechcraft Super King Air. Within an hour of the speech, Roldós and his wife Martha Bucaram were dead, their aircraft having crashed into Huairapungo Mountain, fifteen kilometers from Loja. Killed alongside the president were the minister of defense, his wife, two aides-de-camp, another passenger, and both pilots. The Accident Investigation Committee of the Ecuadorian Air Force, with admirable speed, attributed the crash to pilot error.

image: [https://substackcdn.com/image/fetch/\\$s_!AJu3!,f_auto,g_auto:good,fl_progressive:steep/https%3A%2F%2Fsubstack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com%2Fpublic%2Fimages%2F5ff4ab5e-4742-43d3-b46c-aec3bf576d79_1168x784.jpeg](https://substackcdn.com/image/fetch/$s_!AJu3!,f_auto,g_auto:good,fl_progressive:steep/https%3A%2F%2Fsubstack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com%2Fpublic%2Fimages%2F5ff4ab5e-4742-43d3-b46c-aec3bf576d79_1168x784.jpeg)

Two months and a week later, on July 31, 1981, Omar Torrijos of Panama died in a similar way. His Twin Otter, the presidential plane, came apart over the mountains. All seven people aboard were killed. The cause remains disputed, which is the diplomatic shorthand for: the investigation files vanished during the 1989 American invasion of Panama and were never recovered.

Witnesses inside Panama at the time reported that a tape recorder had been handed to Torrijos before takeoff, and that the tape recorder was a bomb, and that the South American investigators who later worked the case considered this an open secret. The American press did not. The story hardly made the American papers at all.

A 2014 CIA document release revealing Ecuador's involvement in Operation Condor prompted Ecuador's then-attorney general Galo Chiriboga to reopen the investigation into Roldós's death, though no official disclosure

about a possible US role has followed. Chiriboga's investigation has now run for more than a decade and produced, predictably, nothing.

Torrijos had been a particular problem because he had refused the deal to the operative's face. The meeting took place at a small bungalow outside Panama City. He had laid the entire game out, item by item, the way a man does when he wants the other man to know he is not negotiating from a position of ignorance.

I know what you are doing, he had said. I know you will inflate the forecasts. I know you will saddle my country with debt to give me and a few of my wealthy friends a system you can use to bend us. I know what you want is the canal. I will not let this happen. Instead, do honest work here, help the poorest of the poor, and I will see to it that your company gets more projects, more business, more of everything you came here for, but you will earn it like a real consultant.

The bargain was accepted. The firm welcomed the business. And Torrijos became, for the system, the most dangerous kind of head of state, because a leader who turns down the bribe and prospers anyway is a proof of concept that the bribe was never necessary. He died eight months after that meeting.

Operation Condor, the coordinated effort that ran through Latin America in the 1970s and into the 1980s, has been documented in declassified American government records. Salvador Allende of Chile, a democratically elected socialist, taken down in a CIA-backed coup on September 11, 1973, a date the American press has been at pains to associate with other things.

Operation Condor was the brand name, and it included Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia, with the United States providing intelligence support, training, and the comfortable diplomatic silence that allowed roughly thirty thousand people to be disappeared over the course of a decade while the State Department maintained that it was studying the situation.

Researchers tallying CIA-sponsored coups between 1963 and 1981 have arrived at figures in the high twenties, and those are only the ones that succeeded, the ones we know about, the ones for which the relevant cable traffic survived the shredder.

You will notice the absence of a Pearl Harbor, of an invasion, of a tank column on a third-world border. That is the genius. The arrangement is the largest empire in the history of the world and has been built primarily without military force. The Romans needed legions. The British needed gunboats. The United States needs only a forecast, a loan officer, and a man willing to call himself a consultant. When the consultant fails, the gunboats are available, but the gunboats are the exception. The rule is paper. The rule is interest. The rule is a billion dollars on a ledger and a country on its knees for three generations.

The mechanism by which the local officials are bribed, and by which the bribery is laundered into legality, is worth pausing over, because this is the part everyone instinctively assumes must be illegal and discovers, on closer reading, is not.

Direct bribery of a foreign official by an American firm is a federal crime. The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, on the books since 1977, makes this explicit. American firms therefore pride themselves on their integrity, and the integrity is real in the narrowest possible sense. They do not hand the president a briefcase. They negotiate, instead, with the president's brother. The brother, it happens, owns the John Deere franchise in the country in question. The American firm needs heavy equipment for its infrastructure project. The brother rents the firm six hundred thousand dollars' worth of equipment for one million dollars. The American firm shrugs at the bad deal and writes the loss off as the cost of doing business. The extra four hundred thousand dollars finds its way, by routes that need not be tracked because the paperwork never connects them, to the president. The president signs off on the next loan. Everyone is, technically, in compliance. The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, like most American anti-corruption law, was drafted by people who knew exactly which routes the money would have to take to avoid it.

The accurate name for the whole arrangement is the corporatocracy, one of those compressed words that does not quite roll off the tongue but at least names the thing, and the thing is the interlocking of large American corporations, large American banks, and the American government in a single managerial apparatus whose interests are coextensive.

The lobbyists are part of it. The retired CIA officers who consult for Saudi-aligned firms are part of it. The congressmen who take the meetings are part of it. The Pentagon officials who, on retirement, slide into seven-

figure positions at defense contractors are part of it. *US News and World Report* once ran a deep investigation of the Saudi relationship with the American government, finding that billions of dollars had moved from Saudi Arabia to American lobbyists, former CIA personnel, government officials, congressmen, and Pentagon staff.

Inside any one of these consulting firms, only one person on a team of eleven understands the operation in full. The other ten are engineers. They design the power plants and the transmission lines and the ports and the highways. They are not, in their own minds, doing anything wrong. They are drawing up infrastructure. Wires, concrete, pipe diameters. The technical men of the world mostly do not know what the system they participate in is actually doing, because the system does not need them to know. It needs one person at the top of each firm to know. Everyone else stays in the dark with their drafting tables and their reasonable salaries and their consciences mercifully unburdened.

The same architecture applies at the World Bank, the IMF, the regional development banks, the State Department, and the embassies on the ground. The engineer designs. The loan officer approves. The diplomat smiles. The country is hollowed out. Nobody who participates is, in the strict legal sense, guilty of anything.

The math, eventually, becomes the only honest part. Five percent of the world's population, the United States, consumes roughly twenty-five percent of the world's resources. The figure is old and still essentially correct in spirit, even if the precise allocation has shifted somewhat as China and India have gotten in on the action. The relevant disparity is the disparity within the five.

Of that American five percent, less than one percent owns more of the country's wealth than the bottom ninety. So when we say that the United States consumes twenty-five percent of the planet's output to serve five percent of its population, what we are really describing is twenty-five percent of the planet's output being funneled toward, ultimately, one-twentieth of the American population, which is to say one four-hundredth of the human species. This is not a pyramid. A pyramid would imply a broad base of beneficiaries. The structure is a needle. A vanishingly thin column of wealth tapering up to a point on which a few hundred families sit, balanced, surveying the territory.

The cost of this arrangement is paid, as such costs are always paid, in bodies. The figures that circulated in the 1990s development-economics literature put daily starvation deaths at roughly twenty-four thousand and daily preventable child deaths at roughly thirty thousand. The current numbers are different, technically lower, technically better, technically progress. In 2024, roughly 13,300 children under five died every day, the great majority from preventable causes. Four point nine million children, total, died before reaching their fifth birthday in 2024.

Progress in reducing these deaths has slowed dramatically since 2015, with the annual rate of reduction falling from 3.9 percent in the 2000-2015 period to 1.5 percent in the years since. The improvements are real. They are also, when you back out the population growth, less impressive than the press releases suggest. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for sixty percent of these deaths. South Asia accounts for another twenty-five. The geography is the geography of the resource extraction.

The CIA did sponsor coups in Latin America. Operation Condor did happen. The World Bank did extend loans on terms that proved unrepayable to countries whose elites were complicit in the borrowing. American infrastructure contractors did do the bulk of the work and did take the bulk of the money. The presidents who refused did die in mysterious airplane crashes within months of one another. Even if you grant that some of these accidents were genuine accidents, the base rate of suspicious aviation incidents involving inconvenient Latin American leaders during this window is not what you would expect from random chance. The defenders of the system have spent four decades arguing that this is all coincidence and bad luck, and the defenders have not been particularly persuasive.

There is a feature of the modern American information environment that makes all of this difficult to discuss, which is that the same media ecosystem that should be telling these stories is owned by, or supported by advertising from, or staffed by the children of, the firms that benefit from the arrangement. Everything written by these publications produces no consequences. The producers of consequences are not the journalists. They are the prosecutors.

The prosecutors work for the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice answers to an executive branch staffed, in significant part, by veterans of the firms and the agencies that would be on the receiving end of any meaningful prosecution. The fix is, by the design of the people who built the fix, self-licking. There is no exit door from the inside of the apparatus, because the apparatus owns the doors.

You can connect a dotted line from any of this to whatever you happen to be reading in the news this week and you will probably not be wrong. The asset managers buying water utilities and power plants in distressed American counties, marketing the purchases as long-term infrastructure investment for retirees, are not doing fundamentally different work from what the World Bank financed in Ecuador. The asset class is the same. The mark is different. Wherever a population needs a thing it cannot live without, someone is figuring out how to own the thing and charge them for it, and the figuring out is being done by people whose grandparents did the figuring out in Indonesia and Iran and Panama. The skill set is heritable. The targets shift. The needle remains a needle.

There is a temptation, inside accounts of this kind, to treat the apparatus as subtler than it is. The apparatus is not subtle. It is exactly as subtle as it needs to be to keep paying the participants. The engineer drawing up the transmission line knows, at some level, that the transmission line will not serve the village. The loan officer knows, at some level, that the loan will not be repaid. The forecaster knows, more than at some level, what the forecast is for. The conscience is a thing that gets put aside for promotion, and then put further aside for partnership, and then put further aside for the second house, and then put aside permanently, because by the time you would have to face it you have a family and a mortgage and an expense account and a story you have been telling yourself for forty years.

Confessions have been published. Books have been written, suppressed, threatened, postponed, finally released, sold by the million. The system did not collapse. The system was not built to collapse on the strength of any one man's confession. It was built, very carefully and over a long time, to absorb confessions, to monetize them, to assimilate them into the same media bloodstream that runs ads for the firms it indicts.

The question, supposedly, is what you are going to do with the information now that you have it. The question is unanswerable, and also beside the point. You are not going to do anything with it, in the sense the question implies. You are going to read about it, you are going to feel briefly worse, you are going to close the browser tab, and your life will go on. The system depends on this. It depends, much more than it depends on secrecy, on the manageable size of the response when secrecy fails. The needle still tapers up to its point, and there are still people sitting on the point, and they sleep, by all accounts, perfectly well.

The conventional moral lesson at this point is that the most powerful force in the system is silence. The conventional moral lesson is half right. The most powerful force in the system is the careful arrangement by which the loudest possible truths can be told in the open and produce, by the time the news cycle has finished metabolizing them, nothing at all.

That arrangement is the empire. The empire is not hiding. It is humming along in plain view, and it does not need your consent. It only needs your distraction, and on that front it has been, for the entirety of the postwar era, very well served.

Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.