

Rights Action

Day 131 of HONDURAS COUP RESISTANCE

(November 5, 2009, Honduras Coup Alert#85)

"And now the U.S. government says we can have free elections in less than three weeks," said Oliva. "That is a sick joke." (Berta Oliva, COFADEH)

BELOW: articles about the so-called negotiated agreement, between President Zelaya's government and the regime headed by Roberto Micheletti, that ends the 'crisis' and enables the return of President Zelaya to power:

Articles

- By CEPR: "Prominent Honduran human rights expert calls on Obama administration to denounce "grave human rights violations" - too late to have free elections this month, she says from Washington"
- by Eva Gollinger, "Honduras: a victory for "smart power""
- by Robert White, "My thoughts on Honduras"

Even as we send this information, the illegal oligarchic-military regime, headed by Roberto Micheletti and General Romeo Vasquez, is manipulating the so-called agreement and delaying the return to power of President Zelaya and his government.

WE STAY WITH THE PEOPLE'S RESISTANCE MOVEMENT. Given the on-going, intentional delays and manipulations of the regime, we fear there is more repression to come against the Honduran people and the National Front Against the Coup.

While it is extremely unlikely the crisis of this illegal regime (its repression, abuse of the legal system, etc) will get resolved before the clearly undemocratic presidential elections set for November 29, that should not be held at this time, there is one thing we can count on: We will continue to support and work with the courageous, visionary and peaceful pro-democracy/ anti-coup movement of the Honduran people.

Even as the so-called "international community" dithers and waffles, the Honduran people know what they deserve, and what they will continue to struggle to attain: a complete return of their democracy, free and fair elections, justice and reparations for the crimes of the oligarchic-military regime, reparations for the victims of the crimes of the regime, and the establishment of a national constituent assembly.

TO DONATE FUNDS – SEE AT BOTTOM. Please stay tuned ... and please continue to financially support the resistance to the coup regime.

HUMAN RIGHTS DELEGATION TO HONDURAS, November 24–December 1, 2009: Consider joining a Rights Action delegation to Honduras. For information: Grahame Russell, info@rightsaction.org, 1-860-352-2448.

Please re-distribute this information. To get on/off Rights Action's email list: <http://www.rightsaction.org/lists/?p=subscribe&id=3/>

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PROMINENT HONDURAN HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERT CALLS ON OBAMA ADMINISTRATION TO DENOUNCE "GRAVE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS" - TOO LATE TO HAVE FREE ELECTIONS THIS MONTH, SHE SAYS FROM WASHINGTON

(November 5, 2009, CEPR, Center for Economic and Policy Research, 1611 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20009, (202) 293-5380)

Washington, D.C.- Bertha Oliva, the head of Honduras' most well-known and respected human rights organization, called on the Obama administration to denounce the "grave human right violations" in Honduras. "How can it be that the United States government is silent while Hondurans are subjected to arbitrary arrest, the closure of independent media, police beatings, torture and even killings by security forces?" asked Oliva.

Oliva is the General Coordinator of COFADEH, the Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained in Honduras. She is currently in Washington, D.C., to brief Members of Congress, their staff, and other policy makers on the situation in Honduras. Oliva's grim assessment of human rights and civil liberties under the more than four months of coup government is shared by major international human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and others.

"And now the U.S. government says we can have free elections in less than three weeks," said Oliva.

"That is a sick joke." On Tuesday, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon announced that the United States would recognize the November 29 elections even if President Zelaya, who was overthrown in a coup d'etat on June 28, had not first been restored to office. The vast majority of other countries in the hemisphere, including South American nations and Mexico, have stated that they will not recognize the November 29 elections unless Zelaya is back in the presidency.

Oliva noted that Honduran law provides for a three-month election campaign period, but that more than two thirds of it was gone. "People cannot have an electoral campaign when they don't even have the right to freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, or freedom of the press," she said.

"It's too late to have elections on November 29," said Oliva. "If the coup government goes ahead with this, these elections will have no credibility."

Oliva recommended that the elections be postponed until at least three months after civil liberties and democracy - including the elected president - had been restored.

COFADEH and the Washington based Center for Justice and International Law have presented the following documented cases to the IACHR: nine deaths of demonstrators at the hands of police or military; 1228 arrests in just the last 45 days under the suspension of civil liberties; 546 cases of degrading and inhumane torture and cruel treatment.

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HONDURAS: A VICTORY FOR “SMART POWER”, By Eva Golinger,
<http://www.chavezcode.com/2009/11/honduras-victory-for-smart-power.html>

Henry Kissinger said that diplomacy is the “art of restraining power”. Obviously, the most influential ideologue on US foreign policy of the twenty first century was referring to the necessity to “restrain the power” of other countries and governments in order to maintain the dominant world power of the United States.

Presidents in the style of George W. Bush employed “Hard Power” to achieve this goal: weapons, bombs, threats and military invasions. Others, like Bill Clinton, used “Soft Power”: cultural warfare, Hollywood, ideals, diplomacy, moral authority and campaigns to “win the hearts and minds” of those in enemy nations.

The Obama administration has opted for a mutation of these two concepts, fusing military power with diplomacy, political and economic influence with cultural penetration and legal maneuvering. They call this “Smart Power”. It's first application is the coup d'etat in Honduras, and as of today, it's worked to perfection.

During her confirmation hearing before the Senate, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton remarked that “we should use what has been called “smart power”, the complete range of tools that are at our disposal – diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal and cultural – choosing the correct tool, or combination of tools, for each situation. With “smart power”, diplomacy will be the vanguard of our foreign policy.” Clinton later reinforced this concept affirming that the “wisest path will be to first use persuasion.”

So, what is intelligent about this concept? It's a form of politics that is difficult to classify, difficult to detect and difficult to deconstruct. Honduras is a clear example. On one hand, President Obama condemned the coup against

President Zelaya while his ambassador in Tegucigalpa held regular meetings with the coup leaders.

Secretary of State Clinton repeated over and over again during the past four months that Washington didn't want to "influence" the situation in Honduras – that Hondurans needed to resolve their crisis, without outside interference. But it was Washington that imposed the mediation process "led" by President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, and Washington that kept funding the coup regime and its supporters via USAID, and Washington that controlled and commanded the Honduran armed forces, involved in repressing the people and imposing a brutal regime, through its massive military presence in the Soto Cano military base.

Washington lobbyists also wrote the San José "agreement", and in the end, it was the high level State Department and White House delegation that "persuaded" the Hondurans to accept the agreement.

Despite the constant US interference in the coup d'état in Honduras – funding, design, and political and military support – Washington's "smart power" approach was able to distort public opinion and make the Obama administration come out as the grand victor of "multilateralism".

What "smart power" achieved was a way to disguise Washington's unilateralism as multilateralism. From day one, Washington imposed its agenda. On July 1st, spokespeople for the Department of State admitted in a press briefing that they had prior knowledge of the coup in Honduras. They also admitted that two high level State Department officials, Thomas Shannon and James Steinberg, were in Honduras the week before the coup meeting with the civil and military groups involved. They said their purpose was to "impede the coup", but how, therefore, can they explain that the airplane that forcefully exiled President Zelaya left from the Soto Cano military base in the presence of US military officers?

The facts demonstrate the truth about Washington and the coup in Honduras, and the subsequent successful experiment with "smart power". Washington knew about the coup before it happened, yet continued to fund those involved via USAID and NED

The Pentagon aided in the illegal forced exile of President Zelaya, and later, the Obama administration used the Organization of American States (OAS) – during a moment at which it was on the border of extinction – as a façade to impose its agenda. The discourse of the Department of State always legitimated the coup leaders, calling on "both parts...to resolve the political dispute in a peaceful way through dialogue."

Since when is an illegal usurper of power considered a "legitimate part" capable of dialogue? Obviously, a criminal actor who takes power by force is not interested in dialoguing.

Based on this Washington logic, the world should call on the Obama administration to “resolve its political dispute with Al Qaeda in a peaceful way through dialogue, and not war”.

The Obama/Clinton “smart power” achieved its first victory during the initial days of the coup, persuading the member states of the OAS to accept a 72-hour wait period to allow the coup regime in Honduras to “think through its actions”. Soon after, Secretary of State Clinton imposed the mediation efforts, led by Arias, and by then, so much space had been ceded to Washington, that the US just stepped in and took the reigns.

When President Zelaya went to Washington and met with Clinton, it was obvious who was in control. And that’s how they played it out, buying more and more time up until the last minute, so that even if Zelaya returns to power now he will have no space or time to govern.

The people were left out, excluded. Months of repression, violence, persecution, human rights violations, curfews, media closures, tortures and political assassinations have been forgotten. What a relief, as Subsecretary of State Thomas Shannon remarked upon achieving the signature of Micheletti and Zelaya on the final “agreement”, that the situation in Honduras was resolved “without violence”.

Upon signature of the “agreement” this past October 30th, Washington immediately lifted the few restrictions it had imposed on the coup regime as a pressure tactic. Now they can get visas again and travel north, they don’t have to worry about the millions of dollars from USAID, which hadn’t even been suspended in the first place. The US military in presence in Soto Cano can reinstate all their activities – oh wait, they never stopped in the first place. The Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) of the Pentagon affirmed just days after the coup that “everything is normal with our armed forces in Honduras, they are engaging in their usual activities with their Honduran counterparts.” And Washington is already preparing its delegation of election observers for the November 29th presidential elections – they are already on their way.

Forget about Cold War torturer Billy Joya who was scheming with the coup regime against the resistance; or the Colombian paramilitary forces sent in to help the coup regime “control” the population. Don’t worry anymore about the sonic warfare LRAD weapon used to torture those inside the Brazilian embassy in an attempt to oust Zelaya from the building.

Nothing happened.

As Thomas Shannon said, “we congratulate two great men for reaching this historic agreement”. And Secretary of State Clinton commented that “this agreement is a tremendous achievement for the Hondurans.”

Wait, for who?

In the end, the celebrated “agreement” imposed by Washington only calls upon the Honduran Congress – the same Congress that falsified Zelaya’s resignation letter in order to justify the coup, and the same Congress that supported the illegal installation of Micheletti in the presidency – to determine whether or not it wants to reinstate Zelaya as president.

And only after receiving a legal opinion from the Honduran Supreme Court – the same one that said Zelaya was a traitor for calling for a non-binding poll vote on potential future constitutional reform, and the same one that ordered his violent capture.

Even if the Congress’ answer is positive, Zelaya would not have any power. The “agreement” stipulates that the members of his cabinet will be imposed by those political parties involved in the coup, the armed forces will be under the control of the Supreme Court that supported the coup, and Zelaya could be tried for his alleged “crime” of “treason” because he wanted to have a non-binding poll on constitutional reform.

Per the “agreement” a truth commission would supervise its implementation. Today, Ricardo Lagos, ex president of Chile and staunch Washington ally, was announced as the leader of the Honduran Truth Commission. Lagos is co-director of the Board of Directors of the Inter-American Dialogue, a right wing think tank that influences Washington’s policies on Latin America. Lagos also was charged with creating a Chilean version of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), la Fundación Democracia y Desarrollo, to “promote democracy” in Latin America, US-style.

Upon leaving the presidency in 2006, Lagos was named President of the Club of Madrid – an exclusive club of ex presidents dedicated to “promoting democracy” around the world. Several key figures involved in currently destabilizing left-leaning Latin American governments are members of this “club”, including Jorge Quiroga and Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (ex presidents of Bolivia), Felipe González (ex prime minister of Spain), Václav Havel (ex president of the Czech Republic) and José María Aznar (ex prime minister of Spain), amongst many others.

In the end, “smart power” was sufficiently intelligent to deceive those who today celebrate an “end to the crisis” in Honduras. But for a majority of people in Latin America, the victory of Obama’s “smart power” in Honduras is a dark and dangerous shadow closing in on us.

Initiatives such as ALBA have just begun to achieve a level of Latin American independence from the dominant northern power. For the first time in history, the nations and peoples of Latin America have been collectively standing strong with

dignity and sovereignty, building their futures. And then along came Obama with his “smart power”, and ALBA was hit by the coup in Honduras, Latin American integration has been weakened by the US military expansion in Colombia, and the struggle for independence and sovereignty in Washington’s backyard is being squashed by a sinister smile and insincere handshake.

Bowing before Washington, the crisis in Honduras “was resolved”. Ironically, the same crisis was fomented by the US in the first place. There is talk of similar coups in Paraguay, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Venezuela, where subversion, counterinsurgency and destabilization increase daily.

The people of Honduras remain in resistance, despite the “agreement” reached by those in power. Their determined insurrection and commitment to justice is a symbol of dignity. The only way to defeat imperialist aggression – soft, hard or smart - is through the union and integration of the people.

“The illegal we do immediately. The unconstitutional takes longer.” – Henry Kissinger

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(Rights Action does not agree with former US ambassador to El Salvador that the “crisis in Honduras” is coming to anything close to a “satisfactory conclusion”. However, his article makes interesting comparisons between this coup, and a previous one in 1963)

MY THOUGHTS ON HONDURAS, by Robert White | November 3, 2009

It appears that the crisis in Honduras is coming to a satisfactory conclusion. It is possible that things could still go badly wrong, but Assistant Secretary of State Tom Shannon has made it clear that unless Mel Zelaya sits in the presidential chair prior to the November 29 election neither the United States nor any other government of the hemisphere will recognize the election results. While we can expect some face-saving maneuvers and delays, it is reasonable to conclude that the coup is over and that it has failed.

I am worried by one statement that appeared in the Honduran press today attributed to Shannon in which he seems to say that regardless of how the congressional vote comes out the U.S. government would accept the result. If this is an accurate quote it could be asking for trouble.

As I looked back at the rationale for the present coup, I was struck by the many similarities between the coup of 1963 and the overthrow of the constitutional government in 2009.

In 1963, toward the end of his term of office, President Villeda Morales could look back with some satisfaction on his record. His reform program had included social security, welfare payments to the poor, and a labor code.

Fearful that Villeda's likely successor, Modesto Rodas, would continue his program of moderate change, those who held the reins of economic power convinced the nation's military leaders that it was their patriotic duty to protect democracy by overthrowing President Villeda Morales and sending him into exile.

In 2009, toward the end of his term of office, President Mel Zelaya could look back with some satisfaction on his accomplishments. He had pushed through legislation to preserve the country's plundered forests, blocked efforts to privatize the national telecommunications company, revoked concessions to mining companies that harmed the environment, and raised the minimum wage. Encouraged by the broad appeal of his populist agenda, Zelaya scheduled a straw poll to determine public support for a constitutional convention to reform the constitution.

Fearful that the Honduran people might approve the reform referendum, and with it, the possibility of a second term in office - not for Zelaya, but for future presidents - those who hold the reins of economic power convinced congressional and military leaders that it was their patriotic duty to protect democracy by overthrowing President Zelaya.

In 1963, those who provoked the coup used their dominance of the press and radio to falsely accuse Villeda Morales of acting as a tool of Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

In 2009, those who provoked the coup used their dominance of the press and TV to falsely accuse President Zelaya of acting as a tool of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

In 1963, the successful coup ushered in a series of military dominated-governments that set limits on the exercise of civil liberties, including restrictions on free speech and assembly. Then, during the 1980s the Honduran military, with U.S. help and encouragement, established the infamous Battalion 316 that tortured and killed citizens whose only crime was to oppose the use of Honduran territory as a launching pad to attack Nicaragua and destabilize the Sandinista government.

In 2009, the coup not only failed, it damaged, perhaps fatally, the cohesion of the Liberal party, and succeeded in creating a new sense of empowerment among the leadership of the poor.

For decades, most poor Hondurans have viewed politicians with indifference and contempt. Bishop Luis Santos Villeda spoke for them when he said "There has

never been a real democracy in Honduras. All we have is an electoral system where the people get to choose candidates imposed from above." He accused the wealthy elites of overthrowing Mel Zelaya because "he defended the poor."

It was true that the genuine concern Mel Zelaya had displayed for the poor had to some extent shaken people out of their political lethargy and suddenly large numbers of poor Hondurans had a cause. Guided by leaders of labor union and campesino organizations, protest marches broke out across the country. One young woman, a teacher, told an onlooker: "I am not marching for Mel Zelaya, I am marching to demand the return of constitutional government."

During the past four months of sporadic repression and declarations of martial law, that young teacher and many thousands like her have experienced a political awakening. They have discovered that in a democracy, peaceful change is possible and that corrupt leaders may eventually fall to concerted action.

These newly-minted democratic activists are also political realists. They understand that they are citizens of a small impoverished nation and require the support of the international community to achieve practical progress and to promote economic justice. They feel a justifiable pride that with the eyes of the world upon them, they have, with help from their hemispheric partners, gone a long way toward abolishing the stock description of Honduras as "the quintessential banana republic."

At the Summit of the Americas, President Obama promised a new vision for the Americas, a democratic Western Hemisphere composed of equal partners engaged with one another on a basis of common interest and shared values. When the Honduran military seized President Zelaya at gunpoint and forced him into exile, Obama immediately declared the overthrow "illegal" and said "we don't want to go back to a dark past."

While U.S. diplomats occasionally wavered in carrying out the presidential guidance, Assistant Secretary Thomas Shannon did not. He told those responsible for the results of this month's coup that elections would not be recognized by the Obama administration unless constitutional order was restored. Secretary Clinton talked to coup leader Roberto Micheletti who accused her of having a vocabulary limited to the one word: "restitution."

Those who argued that to bring back President Zelaya would only serve to extend the influence of President Chavez have it precisely wrong. Had President Obama failed to play a leading role in restoring constitutional government, he would have fulfilled the dreams of every anti-American demagogue who accuses the United States of talking democracy but practicing expediency.

By refusing to be separated from our hemispheric partners, by working through the Organization of American States, President Obama and Secretary of State

Clinton have played a key role in achieving a victory for democracy in the Western Hemisphere. The Organization of American States made an important contribution to the successful outcome by keeping pressure on the coup government and by reminding the lead actors, including the United States, of their duty and responsibilities under the charter.

Honduras is notorious for its economic inequality. The wealthy few who hold the means of power are literally above the law. These oligarchs have learned an expensive lesson. More than that, the coup they sponsored may have awakened the Honduran people from their long Rip Van Winkle sleep of political indifference.

It would not surprise me if Mel Zelaya did not fade into the role of Olancho cattle baron, but instead emerged as the symbolic leader and unifier of a new populist movement whose first objective would be the calling of a constitutional convention to draft a new governing document that would give elected leaders more power to curb the excesses of the Honduran economic elite.

(Robert White is a former United States ambassador to Paraguay and El Salvador (1980-1981), where he was instrumental in the investigation of the rape and murder of four U.S. churchwomen by Salvadorean death squads. He is currently the president of the Center for International Policy.

Recommended citation: Web location: <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/6544>)

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FUNDS NEEDED to support organizations and people working on human rights issues and with the National Front Against the Coup. Make your tax-deductible check to “rights action” and mail to:

- UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- CANADA: 552-351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8
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For foundations and institutional donors, Rights Action can (upon request) provide a full proposal of which organizations and people we are channeling funds to and supporting.

WATCH A 2-PART “FAULT LINES” NEWS REPORT ABOUT HONDURAS:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYY4vj9ROC0&feature=player_embedded

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upMu_oR2YUU&NR=1

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