

From Guatemala to Honduras, the U.S. and Canadian governments and business, and the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank are partnered with and profiting from corruption and repression

In Honduras, there is a corruption scandal at the highest levels of the government ... even as the Guatemalan President and Vice-President were forced to resign, and are in jail, on corruption charges.

- Below - Article by Alex Main: “Congressional Democrats Voice Renewed Opposition to U.S. Security Assistance to Honduras – Will Kerry Finally Listen?”

As this scandal of corruption and impunity by the Honduran regime headed by President Juan Orlando Hernandez, 21 Democratic members of congress sent a letter [copy below] to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry calling for the immediate suspension of projected U.S. aid to Honduran police. The letter addresses the fact that the Honduran government is engulfed in a corruption scheme at the highest levels, and is responsible for widespread repression and human rights violations.

Hernandez, of the National Party, supported the U.S. and Canadian-backed military coup in 2009, and became president in 2013 after undemocratic elections marred by fraud and the assassinations of members of the LIBRE party (that had widely been expected to win). As part of the corruption investigations, it has been found that the previous regime, headed by another 2009 military coup supporter, Porfirio Lobo, also stole funds intended for the public health care system, and used them to illegally support Hernandez' election.

- What to do: See below

Congressional Democrats Voice Renewed Opposition to U.S. Security Assistance to Honduras – Will Kerry Finally Listen?

by Alexander Main, 24 August 2015

<http://www.cepr.net/blogs/the-americas-blog/congressional-democrats-voice-renewed-opposition-to-u-s-security-assistance-to-honduras-will-kerry-finally-listen>

Members of Congress have once again called on the Obama administration to stop funding Honduras' security forces. Alarmed at the rampant militarization of policing activities throughout the country and a rash of recent reports of human rights abuses involving Honduran security forces, 21 House Democrats sent a letter to Secretary of State Kerry on August 19

expressing their concern and making a series of specific requests, including “the suspension and re-evaluation of further training and support for Honduran police and military units until the Honduran government adequately addresses human rights abuses.”

For several years now U.S. legislators have been urging the administration to either suspend or overhaul its security assistance programs in Honduras.

Back in March of 2012, 94 Democrats [asked then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton](#) to suspend military and police assistance, noting “credible allegations of widespread, serious allegations of human rights abuses attributed to [Honduran] security forces” and the impunity surrounding targeted attacks against “human rights defenders, journalists, community leaders and opposition activists.”

Two years later, 108 House Democrats [sent a letter to Kerry](#) expressing concern over the accelerated militarization of domestic law enforcement under current president Juan Orlando Hernández and calling for the State Department to review its security programs in Honduras.

Similar letters have appeared in the U.S. Senate, with, for instance, [21 senators questioning](#) Honduran government compliance with human rights conditions attached to U.S. security assistance.

The Congressional letter of August 19 – led by Representatives Hank Johnson (a [leading opponent](#) of militarized law enforcement in the U.S.) and Jan Schakowsky (who has led several previous letters regarding Honduras’ appalling human rights situation) – describes the steady militarization of policing that has taken place in Honduras since 2010: “The massive deployment of army units to police Honduran streets, followed by the creation of a 3000-strong military police force under a military line of command and a new “super-ministry” of Security combining civilian and military security institutions under the direction of a recently retired general.”

This militarization trend is troubling enough in a country that only emerged from military rule in the 1980s and was subjected to a military coup d’état in June of 2009, but there is also abundant documented evidence of widespread abuses perpetrated by military personnel and militarized police, some of which is described in the letter:

“Over the last few months, military police agents have reportedly threatened and harassed journalists, community leaders, and members of the indigenous organization COPINH; forcibly evicted small farmers without a warrant; raided the home of a student leader involved in recent protests; and shot and killed an unarmed woman selling mangos, among other alleged crimes. As reported by Al-Jazeera, Defensores en Línea and Today Media Network, these forces have also allegedly conducted raids against the homes of opposition activists, and participated in the killing of land-rights activists and peaceful demonstrators.”

The U.S. government’s response to these alarming developments has been to request more security assistance for Honduras, in particular through an increase in funding for the opaque Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). There’s no indication that the administration is concerned about Honduras’ militarization or that it is seeking to leverage U.S.

security assistance to try to reverse the trend. On the contrary, it has been providing direct support to militarization efforts, as the Johnson/Schakowsky letter notes:

“We are concerned about Honduran media reports that in mid-May of this year, a team of 300 U.S. military and civilian personnel, including Marines and the FBI, conducted “rapid response” training with 500 [agents from] FUSINA [a militarized security task force combining personnel from police, military, intelligence and judicial agencies], using U.S. helicopters and planes, despite allegations regarding the agency’s repeated involvement in human-rights violations.”

Similarly, U.S. green beret special forces have been training a militarized Honduran police unit called the TIGRES [which stands for Intelligence Troop and Special Security Response Groups], “instilling fundamental principles of close quarters battle and knowing how to execute them amidst the chaos that is combat”, according to a [U.S. Army article](#) published in March. Though touted as an exemplary, elite force, nearly two dozen TIGRES agents, trained and vetted by the U.S. government, were [caught stealing over \\$1.3 million](#) in drug money following a counter-narcotics operation late last year.

In addition to asking for security assistance to Honduras to be put on hold, the Johnson/Schakowsky letter makes a series of detailed requests which focus on getting the State Department to genuinely implement human rights safeguards required by law and to increase transparency around security aid programs in Honduras.

The letter asks for:

- “The State Department’s strict evaluation of U.S. support and training for the Honduran police and military in accordance with human rights conditions placed in the FY2015 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Act.” [A Senate Appropriations Committee report that accompanies the FY2015 SFOPS Act [specifies](#) that 50% of security assistance allocated to Honduras under International Narcotic Control and Law Enforcement and Foreign Military Funding headings be withheld pending State Department certification of Honduran government compliance with six human rights and rule of law conditions that include the investigation and prosecution of “army and police personnel who are credibly alleged to have violated human rights.”

In the past, the State Department has generally certified the Honduran government as compliant with conditions set by the Committee, despite the [strong misgivings](#) expressed by 21 U.S. senators (i.e., 1/5th of the Senate). It’s worth noting that the Committee report attached to pending FY2016 appropriations legislation has conditioned 75% of all assistance under State and Foreign Operations appropriations to Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, and includes, among its new set of conditions, State Department certification that the governments are taking “effective steps” to “create a professional, accountable civilian police force and end the role of the military in internal policing” and to “prosecute and punish in civilian courts members of security forces who violate human rights.”]

- “Full implementation of the Leahy Law...” [which prohibits the departments of State and Defense from providing support to foreign military units that violate human rights with

impunity.]

- “A detailed description of how the Department of State is currently implementing these statutes [i.e., the conditioning of security assistance under Leahy Law and existing appropriations legislation], including what metrics the Department is using to assess whether the Honduran government has adequately addressed human rights abuses.” [The State Department hasn’t revealed the methodology it employs to enforce Leahy Law provisions or SFOPS appropriations human rights conditions on aid.]

- “Urge the Honduran government to implement serious and concrete measures to address military and police abuses, and to halt the continued involvement of the military in domestic law enforcement.” [As mentioned above, these are among the aid conditionalities that the Honduran government would need to meet under the pending FY2016 appropriations legislation. There is little indication that the Honduran government is interested in implementing these measures. In early 2014, the ruling National Party [eliminated](#) a widely respected police reform commission and ignored its recommendations for cleaning up the country’s notoriously corrupt police. Under growing pressure from Congress and human rights groups, the government recently [announced](#) a series of reforms to the police – designed in tandem with U.S. advisors – that appear to amount to little more than an administrative reorganization. Given that Honduran officials still fail to acknowledge abuses by security forces, there is deep skepticism surrounding the announcement. Not to mention that there is no sign that the government is scaling back its militarization efforts].

- “Finally, we request a full itemized report on the use of funds allocated for U.S. security assistance to Honduras in the State and Foreign Operations Appropriations law for FY2015 and for upcoming FY2106 appropriations legislation.” [Effective independent scrutiny of how U.S. security assistance is used is extremely difficult given the total lack of transparency surrounding the disbursement process. Tens of millions of dollars in security assistance have been funneled to Honduras through the State Department’s notoriously opaque Central America Regional Security Initiative. As yet there is no public record of where and how the funds have been used, nor are there any clear metrics available on what sort of impact CARSII assistance has had].

Though largely ignored by the U.S. press (with the exception of [one article](#) in an inside-the-Beltway outlet and [articles](#) in the Spanish-language press), the Johnson/Schakowsky letter has received [massive media attention](#) in Honduras. The question is, will Secretary of State John Kerry pay attention to this new appeal from Congress?

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