

## **Honduras and the Jerusalem Embassy: How Netanyahu Backed Arms and Cocaine Deals**

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- Below: Haaretz news article

While the US government is the #1 propper-upper of repressive, exploitative, open-for-global-business regimes in Honduras (and elsewhere in Latin America), other governments and economic actors in the self-annointed “international community” participate in and benefit from the propping up the same corrupt and repressive, anti-democratic regimes.

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## **Honduras and the Jerusalem Embassy: How Netanyahu Backed Arms and Cocaine Deals**

**Despite very serious allegations against the then-Honduran president, Israeli governments continued to supply him with arms that were used to suppress his opponents and traffic drugs to the United States**

By Eitay Mack, May 1, 2022

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At around 2:30 P.M. on Thursday April 21, an airplane belonging to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration took off from the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa, carrying former President Juan Orlando Hernández to face trial in Manhattan on drug trafficking and firearms charges.

This marked the end of the political career of Hernández, who was first elected president in a shady election in 2013 after a military coup in which the previous president was arrested and exiled to Costa Rica while still wearing pajamas.

According to a statement [from the U.S. Department of Justice](#), Hernández is charged with participating “in a corrupt and violent drug-trafficking conspiracy to

facilitate the importation of hundreds of thousands of kilograms of cocaine into the United States. Hernández allegedly received millions of dollars to use his public office, law enforcement, and the military to support drug-trafficking organizations in Honduras, Mexico, and elsewhere.”

Attorney General Merrick Garland stated: “Hernández is alleged to have used his vast political powers to protect and assist drug traffickers and cartel leaders by alerting them to possible interdictions, and sanctioning heavily armed violence to support their drug trade.”



Honduras former President Juan Orlando Hernandez, second left, meets Israel's then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then-Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, during his 2016 visit to Israel. Credit: Amos Ben Gershom / GPO

Hernández is charged with having used money from the drug trade to fund his political campaign and, after he was elected, allegedly exploiting the Honduran government’s money, along with law enforcement and military resources, to advance his drug-dealing plans.

### **Drug money to steal elections**

Regarding the 2013 and 2017 elections, Hernández is accused of having instructed his co-conspirators to bribe politicians and election officials using income from the drug trade to ensure he won. During legal proceedings in the United States, an accountant testified that he heard Hernández say: “We’re going to shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos and they’ll never know it.”

If there was any justice in the world, the DEA plane should have made a stop at Ben Gurion Airport to pick up former Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#), and his government ministers and officials from the foreign and defense ministries who helped Hernández survive in power as long as he did.

If not for Hernández's close ties with Netanyahu, and the bargaining that Israel engaged in surrounding the moving of the Honduran Embassy to Jerusalem, Hernández's political career would probably have ended some years ago.

The indictment against Hernández does not mention Israel, but it does indicate that while Israel assisted in the U.S.' war on drugs, it simultaneously helped to distribute them.

From 2015 to 2017 at least, when the Israeli foreign and defense ministries allegedly gave the [NSO Group](#) permission to sell its Pegasus spyware to the Mexican authorities, to be used in their antidrug efforts and to catch the head of the Sinaloa international drug cartel, Joaquín Guzman Loera (aka El Chapo), the Netanyahu governments and the two ministries were also directly helping Hernández – who was a coconspirator with El Chapo and the Sinaloa cartel – transfer tons of cocaine to the United States.

According to the charges, Honduran police and armed forces, which received shipments of arms and military supplies from Israel, also guarded the drug shipments under Hernández's orders.

### **'Active friend of Israel'**

By the end of 2014, Netanyahu and the foreign and defense ministries had identified the corrupt Hernández as the weakest and most malleable link among the Latin American leaders – and therefore the one who could be the first to agree to move his country's embassy to Jerusalem in exchange for various personal benefits.

On September 21, 2020, the [Foreign Ministry issued a statement](#) that said Hernández “has for many years been an active friend of Israel. Under his leadership, Honduras became one of the two countries in Latin America, and one of the five in the world, to most often abstain from resolutions opposed by Israel.

On December 2017, Honduras was one of the small number of countries that joined Israel in voting against the UN resolution that opposed the U.S. moving its embassy to Jerusalem.”



Then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu shaking hands with then-Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández in Jerusalem in 2015. Credit: GPO / Kobi Gideon

In late October 2015, Hernández visited Israel together with the Honduran defense minister and army chief of staff. In an official statement to the media coinciding with the visit, Israel praised the security ties with Honduras and touted the two countries’ shared values based on democracy, human rights, respect for the rule of law, passion for development and growth, and aspirations for peace.

Yet just two months before that, 21 members of Congress asked U.S. Secretary of State [John Kerry](#) to reconsider whether military aid to Honduras was permissible under U.S. law, in light of the Honduran security forces’ involvement in the harassment, torture, rape, death threats, kidnappings and killings of journalists, students, opposition activists, proponents of equitable land distribution and activists on behalf of farmers’ rights, homeless rights, and indigenous communities’ rights.

Following Hernández’s visit to Israel, a memorandum of security understandings (February 2016) and a major security agreement (December 2016) were signed by the two countries, under then-Defense Minister [Avigdor Lieberman](#).

Between the signings of these two agreements, environmental and Native rights' activist Berta Cáceres was murdered by the security forces in Honduras on March 2.

Later that month, 60 members of Congress wrote to Secretary of State Kerry again, demanding the immediate suspension of all U.S. security aid to Honduras until it was ascertained that the country's security forces were not involved in grave human rights violations, and assurances were obtained that past crimes would be investigated and the culprits put on trial.

### **Quid pro quo**

In return for Hernández's support for Israel in international forums, the Netanyahu governments armed the president's corrupt and violent security forces and aided his reelection in November 2017. Hernández's campaign focused on the claim that he was "Mr. Security," who would finally bring relief for Hondurans who were suffering because of the organized crime gangs. And how would he do this? Using the Israeli security aid that was obtained thanks to him.

In the year preceding the election, Hernández repeatedly issued statements to the public describing the Israeli military aid as "a major leap" for his country's security forces, claiming that Honduras had never before received such extensive military aid and that the historic agreement would strengthen the Honduran security forces and shape them for the next 20 years.

Although Israel customarily maintains that it does not get involved in other countries' internal affairs, a month before the Honduran election, in October 2017, the Israeli ambassador in Honduras, Matanya Cohen, met with the Honduran defense minister. After the meeting, the Honduran Defense Ministry issued an official statement that was meant to serve Hernández's election campaign, saying that ambassador Cohen said at the meeting that since the two countries signed the agreement, they have been working to strengthen the Honduran navy, air force and ground forces, and he was very proud of the security relations between Israel and Honduras.

While details of the security agreement were classified in Israel, the Netanyahu government did not utter a word of protest about Hernández declaring for

campaign purposes that it involved an upgrade of the air force's planes and helicopters, the acquisition of a patrol ship with a helicopter landing pad, communications systems for infantry, drones and monitoring devices for the secret service, weapons systems for the new patrol ship and other ships in the Honduran Navy, and construction of a center for coordination of security operations. Part of this agreement included equipment that could also be used for the suppression of domestic opponents.

In addition, the Netanyahu governments – and the foreign and defense ministries in particular – approved shipments of Galil ACE and Tavor assault rifles to the armed forces, police and commando units founded by Hernández, which used violent measures against civilians. The rifles can be seen being held by Honduran soldiers and policemen in numerous stills and videos published on the official Instagram and Facebook accounts of the security forces and the Honduran government.

Because of the close ties, and in order to boost Hernández's international standing, in April 2018 he was invited to be the first-ever foreign leader to light a torch at the Independence Day ceremony on Mount Herzl, along with a representative of Mashav (the Agency for International Development Cooperation) in the Foreign Ministry, with the explanation that Hernández participated in a Mashav leadership program in 1992.

In the wake of widespread criticism over an invitation being extended to a corrupt leader and human rights violator – criticism that also included a call for human rights activists to hold a protest during the torch-lighting ceremony – a Foreign Ministry official told Kan journalist Gili Cohen that Hernández is “a Mashav alum who reached the highest position. He is the man who went the furthest. He's like a ‘poster boy’ for Mashav and what this organization – which is celebrating its 60th anniversary – does.”

As a result of the criticism in Israel and the embarrassment that the media coverage caused in Honduras and worldwide, Hernández eventually decided not to come to the torch-lighting ceremony marking Israel's 70th anniversary.

In November 2018, Hernández's brother, Juan Antonio Hernandez Alvarado, was arrested in Miami for suspected drug trafficking and weapons offenses. Also, for

several months there was a crisis between Hernández and the Trump administration due to the huge number of Honduran refugees who had fled to the United States' southern border. This led Trump to threaten Hernández that he would freeze U.S. aid to Honduras and impose additional sanctions on the country.

Netanyahu set out to defuse the tensions between the two leaders, and on January 1, 2019, Netanyahu, Hernández and the then-U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met in Brasilia, Brazil.

### **Secret mission**

Netanyahu and the foreign and defense ministries were not keen to let go of their “poster boy,” and on September 1, 2019, Hernández returned to Israel to attend the official opening of the Honduran trade office in Jerusalem. To avoid a repeat of the public protest triggered by his anticipated participation in the Mount Herzl ceremony, the Israeli authorities did not release any information about the time and place of the trade office opening.

This was very unusual. Generally, when a foreign head of state comes to Israel, the Foreign Ministry publishes a timetable of the visit and distributes it to the media, at the very least. In this case, Hernández's visit and his attendance at the ceremony were treated more like a secret mission in order to head off criticism and demonstrations against him.

It transpired that, initially at least, no trade office was opened and the ceremony, which was attended by then-Likud MK Osnat Mark and Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi David Lau, was held at the entrance to a private law firm in Jerusalem. During the ceremony, the signage at the entrance to the law firm was replaced by signage of the Honduran government, and then the original sign was reinstated afterward.

Relations between Netanyahu and Hernández were so good that Honduras did not dare protest statements from the Israeli Foreign Ministry that portrayed it as a banana republic without its own independent diplomatic interests, when it confirmed Sara Netanyahu's peculiar declaration when she was being interviewed by Miri Regev during an election campaign that the trade office was all her idea and her doing.

In June 2020, Hernández got [COVID-19](#) and the Israeli prime minister's official Twitter account posted a personal "Get well soon" message from "Sara and Benjamin Netanyahu" on behalf of the "Israeli people" (because everyone knows they are its exclusive and eternal representatives).

When the Honduran Embassy opened in Jerusalem on June 24, 2021, the now opposition leader Netanyahu tweeted that it was a "holiday for Israel" and took all the credit for it. But in a Facebook post, he also gave credit to his spouse: "I am especially proud of my wife Sara who pushed for this important move."

At the ceremony, Foreign Minister [Yair Lapid](#) and Prime Minister [Naftali Bennett](#) – who previously served as defense minister and was responsible for security ties with Hernández at a time when the latter was violently suppressing protests throughout Honduras – hastened to take credit for the embassy move.

Like Netanyahu, Bennett also sees himself as the representative of all Jewish people. He chose to ignore the investigations and the legal proceedings that had been underway against Hernández in the United States for two and a half years, and said at the ceremony: "Welcome to our eternal capital, Jerusalem. You are a true friend of Israel. The Jewish people have a long memory, and you will be inscribed in the pages of history as someone who made a brave and correct move for the State of Israel."

The only one daring to be a party pooper was journalist Amit Segal. He reported that Hernández claimed he was promised that in return for the embassy move, Israel would do all it could to prevent his extradition to the United States, and that Minister Eli Avidar also heard similar claims from Hernández about an Israeli promise made to him.

[At a news conference](#) following Hernández's extradition to the United States last month, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York said: "Honduras became one of the most violent countries in the world during the accused's presidency."





Then-Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández shaking hands with Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in Jerusalem last June. Credit: Amos Ben Gershom / GPO

While the indictment and legal proceedings in the United States have added some spicy details, it has been known for many years that Hernández is corrupt with ties to criminal organizations and drug dealers, and that the security forces he built supposedly to fight crime were in essence a criminal organization themselves.

A strong reminder of this is provided by the mass waves of Hondurans fleeing violence in their homeland and arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border. In 2021 alone, 309,000 Hondurans – equivalent to a bit more than the total population of Haifa – tried to enter the United States via its southern border.

Despite all this, nothing prompted the Netanyahu governments or foreign and defense ministry officials to halt the race to move the Honduran Embassy to Jerusalem. Not the flood of refugees fleeing Honduras Nor the debates in the U.S. Congress about the corruption and violence of the Hernández regime. Nor the U.S. indictment filed against Hernández's brother in 2019 for drug trafficking and the testimonies that were being heard in a Manhattan courthouse about the Honduran president's involvement in his actions. Nor the images of policemen in

Honduras armed with Galil ACE and Tavor assault rifles attacking citizens who demonstrated against election fraud, corruption and Hernández's involvement in drugs and crime. Nor the revelation in May 2019 that Hernández himself was under investigation by the DEA.

Rachel Chen, head of the Defense Ministry's Export Controls Agency, persistently rejected calls by human rights activists to halt the arms shipments with the same laconic response that "the Israeli government gives thorough and careful consideration to each application for an export license and the decision is made solely in accordance with the law, after an administrative review."

It's curious that even though Chen usually responds to calls to stop security exports by stating that it was a Defense Ministry decision coordinated with the Foreign Ministry, this time she took pains to emphasize that it was a decision of the Israeli government. Is this an implicit attempt to give credit to Netanyahu, or an allusion to political considerations that were involved in the matter?

The political and military support for Hernández have only ceased now that he has been extradited to the United States. All of a sudden, from the Israeli side there is only awkward silence.

The Defense Ministry did not issue a statement saying how proud it is to have helped safeguard drug shipments. Netanyahu did not seize credit for shoving cocaine up the gringos' noses – or share any of the credit with Sara, for that matter. Culture Minister Chili Tropper did not ask Hernández to light a torch in the yard of the federal prison where he will apparently be spending many years. The Foreign Ministry did not praise the "poster boy" who is the first Mashav graduate to attain the presidency and also the first to be extradited to the United States for drug trafficking. And Bennett did not announce that Hernández and El Chapo will be inscribed in the pages of Jewish history.

At the end of his philosophical masterpiece "The Kuzari," Rabbi Yehuda Halevy wrote: "Jerusalem will not be rebuilt until the Jewish people yearn for it with an utmost longing, until they cherish its very stones and dust."

In other words, the rebuilding of Jerusalem can only occur through the establishment of a society based upon morality and justice. The Netanyahu and

Bennett governments have shown that Jerusalem will be rebuilt by means of cocaine and weapons trafficking.

The writer, an attorney, worked together with human rights activists to halt Israel's arms shipments and diplomatic aid to the government of Juan Orlando Hernández.

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- US and Canadian-backed Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez used drug-trafficking money to rig elections the US and Canada called 'fair and democratic', <https://mailchi.mprightsaction.us-canadian-backed-president-juan-orlando-hernandez-used-drug-trafficking-money-to-rig-elections>
- Former Honduran President to face drug-trafficking charges in US. Will there be any accountability for 12 years, 7 months of illegal US & Canadian support for the Honduran narco-state? By Grahame Russell, <https://mailchi.mprightsaction/former-honduran-president-to-face-drug-trafficking-charges-in-us>
- JOH's luck runs out, by John Perry, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2022/april/joh-s-luck-runs-out>
- Attorney General Merrick B. Garland Delivers Remarks Announcing Charges Against Juan Orlando Hernandez, Former President of Honduras, Washington, DC, April 21, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-merrick-b-garland-delivers-remarks-announcing-charges-against-juan>
- A triumphant day. A day of many tears. End of the U.S./Canadian-backed Narco-regime in Honduras, By Grahame Russell, December 4, 2021, <https://mailchi.mprightsaction/a-triumphant-day-a-day-of-many-tears>

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#### **Other solidarity/NGO groups doing work related to Honduras**

- School of Americas Watch: [www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org)
- Honduras Solidarity Network: [www.hondurassolidarity.org](http://www.hondurassolidarity.org)
- Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective: [www.solidaritycollective.org](http://www.solidaritycollective.org)
- Friendship Office of the Americas: <https://friendshipamericas.org>
- Alliance for Global Justice: [www.afgj.org](http://www.afgj.org)
- CODEPINK: [www.codepink.org](http://www.codepink.org)

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- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

Credit-Card Donations: <http://rightsaction.org/donate/>

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