

Stay out of Honduran crisis

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As foreign dramas go, the so-called coup in Honduras is one mind-twisting ordeal. The military removed President Manuel Zelaya from the presidency after he mandated a national referendum that would, ultimately, allow him to stay in office beyond the constitutionally prescribed term.

Mr. Zelaya was elected as a moderate-conservative but lately has become a close ally of Venezuela's leftist strongman, Hugo Chávez, who has portrayed himself and Mr. Zelaya as the defenders of democracy. President Barack Obama, who refused to be too condemnatory toward the Iranian dictatorship's violent reaction against pro-democracy demonstrators, has been vocal in his condemnation of the Honduran military's removal of a president.

Are you following yet? We like the way scholar Tom Palmer at the libertarian Cato Institute explained it: "Imagine that George Bush, Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan or some other American president had decided to overturn the Constitution so that he could stay in power beyond the constitutionally limited time. To do that, he orders a nationwide referendum that is not constitutionally authorized and blatantly illegal. The Federal Election Commission rules that it is illegal. The Supreme Court rules that it is illegal. The Congress votes to strip the president of his powers and, as members of Congress are not that good at overcoming the president's personally loyal and handpicked bodyguards, they send police and military to arrest the president. Now, which party is guilty of leading a coup?"

That's not to offer support for the military action, which seems to be counterproductive at best. Another libertarian scholar, Alvaro Vargas Llosa of the Independent Institute, pointed out in a New York Times column that the apparent winner of the ongoing crisis is none other than the anti-American socialist Hugo Chávez. As Mr. Vargas Llosa sees it, Mr. Zelaya set a trap for the military, which "fell for it, turning an unpopular president who was nearing the end of his term into an international cause célèbre."

"America cannot and should not seek to impose any system of government on any other country, nor would we presume to choose which party or individual should run a country," President Obama said, even as his administration was dictating just who should be running that country (Mr. Zelaya).

The United States should wish the Honduran people the best and live by Mr. Obama's words, not by his actions. Hondurans need to decide who should lead Honduras.