

## US Conservatives Support Ouster of Honduran President

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The Organization of American States and most governments in the world have condemned the ouster of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya by the military last Sunday as a coup d'etat. But the people who currently hold power in Honduras say they followed legal procedures outlined in their nation's constitution and their position is backed by many conservatives in the United States.

The crisis in Honduras has become a hot topic for conservative pundits in the past several days. President Obama, along with other world leaders, the Organization of American States and some human rights groups, have condemned the military's removal of President Zelaya in Honduras last Sunday.

**Ousted Honduran president Manuel Zelaya speaks during a news conference after a meeting of the OAS in Washington, 01 Jul 2009**

But many conservatives say the officials who carried out the ouster of the president did the right thing. They argue that Zelaya violated the Honduran constitution by planning to hold an illegal referendum that was aimed at continuing his time in office indefinitely. Commentators like the *Wall Street Journal's* Mary

Anastasia O'Grady say Hondurans were defending their democracy by throwing out a president who was aligned with Cuba's communist regime and Venezuela's leftist leader Hugo Chavez.

Even critics of President Zelaya, however, say legal means should have been used against him rather than a nighttime raid on his home by heavily armed soldiers. But Hans Bader, a legal expert with the conservative Competitive Enterprise Institute, says the Honduran Supreme Court and Congress believed Zelaya had put their country in immediate peril.

"I don't think they needed to wait until he actually made himself into a dictator," he said. "I think they were entitled to take action against a budding dictator. But even if they weren't, it seems to me that it is not so clear that he is in the right that the United States should be meddling in Honduras' affairs."

That view is challenged by Georgia State University professor Jennifer McCoy, who also serves as director of the Americas Program at the Carter Center in Atlanta. She says Honduran concerns about possible illegal actions by their president may be valid, but they do not justify the way Zelaya's removal was carried out.

"Even if the military was acting to carry out a police action, I think the questions coming from the international community are why would the military act instead of the police? And why would they take him out of the country instead of following a procedure inside the country?," she said.

McCoy says she believes it may be possible to broker a solution to what she regards as a constitutional crisis in Honduras, but she says both pro- and anti-Zelaya factions will need to recognize what brought it about.

"That is the conflict between the powers in Honduras and the defiance of the president of rulings by the Supreme Court and rulings by the Congress and those do need to be dealt with," said McCoy. "But, the point of the international community is that those are not to be dealt with at the end of the barrel of a gun, but, instead, through legal proceedings."

Hans Bader and other conservative commentators accuse President Obama of siding with the anti-democratic forces in the region against people in Honduras who were trying to protect their republic and its constitution. He is concerned that President Obama might join the European Union and many Latin American nations in suspending aid and trade with Honduras.

"It is a very poor country," said Bader. "If we were to essentially close our markets to their products we could cause a great deal of hardship in the country and cause thousands of Hondurans to lose their jobs. That would only compound the suffering of the Honduran people."

But the Obama administration has not taken any action so far against Honduras other than suspending some joint military programs. Many other nations have pulled their ambassadors from Tegucigalpa, but the U.S. ambassador remains in place.

Trade between the United States and Honduras amounts to over \$7 billion a year. In addition, Hondurans living in the United States send home around \$2.5 billion in remittances, which represent around one fifth of the Central American nation's total Gross National Product. Most observers think it is unlikely that the United States will impose harsh penalties on Honduras, but much will depend on what happens in the days ahead.

Even some conservatives are concerned about what the people currently in power in Honduras are doing in the face of protests by Zelaya supporters. The CATO Institute's Juan Carlos Hidalgo, who supported the removal of Zelaya, has called on authorities in Tegucigalpa to respect human rights and avoid repression of legitimate, peaceful dissent.

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