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Hounding Honduras

By **Doug Bandow** on 9.8.09 @ 6:07AM

Honduras will be holding an election in a couple of months. Washington is threatening not to recognize the result. Would the Obama administration prefer a full-blown military dictatorship take power?

The saga of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya has entered its third month. On June 28 the Honduras military, in response to an arrest warrant from the nation's Supreme Court, roused Zelaya from his bed and deported him. Since then the U.S., Organization of American States, and most of Honduras' neighbors have pressed for his return.

The controversy can best be described as a muddled mess. Zelaya's term was set to expire in January; elections, in which the candidates already had been chosen, were scheduled for November. Zelaya, who moved sharply left after his victory and allied himself with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, proposed a National Constituent Assembly to amend the Honduran constitution.

The subject to be addressed was not specified, but Zelaya was suspected of wanting to follow Chavez's example of using a national plebiscite to drop term limits, which are enshrined in the Honduran constitution. Indeed, the constitution specified that to even propose their elimination is grounds for immediate removal from office.

Presuming that this was his intent, the Honduran high court voided the poll. Zelaya attempted to hold the vote anyway, causing the Supreme Court to issue the warrant. After his ouster the National Congress name legislative head Roberto Micheletti interim president.

The result is a perfect legal imbroglio. Zelaya claimed the military mounted an illegal coup. The Micheletti government says the military never took power and acted at the behest of the Court and Congress (the constitution does not provide for legislative impeachment). There was no legal authority for exiling Zelaya, but the Honduran authorities claimed exigent circumstances. Much depends on an assessment of his intentions, and whether those assumptions should be treated as facts.

Was Zelaya a dedicated populist or putative dictator? There are grounds for suspicion, yet his popularity had dropped sharply before his ouster and he was opposed even by many in his own party. Polls show Hondurans to be sharply divided, agreeing that there were legal grounds for the military's action but opposing Zelaya's ouster.

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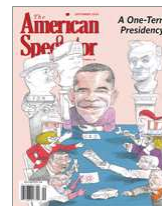
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The best position for the U.S. would have been to stay out of the controversy. Let the Hondurans work it out themselves. The Micheletti government has been heavy-handed in breaking up demonstrations. But this is not North Korea, Burma, or Cuba, in which liberty has been extirpated and regime critics face prison or worse. Nothing required Washington to do anything.

However, Zelaya immediately became the latest *cause célèbre* of the Left in America. Activists who earlier demonstrated denouncing U.S. intervention suddenly began churning out blog posts demanding that Washington "restore democracy" in Tegucigalpa. The means: obnoxious and officious U.S. meddling.

The Obama administration, OAS, and neighboring countries all have insisted that Zelaya be returned to power. Costa Rica's Oscar Arias, among others, has proposed a compromise recalling Zelaya while restricting his authority. But the bottom line is the claim that Zelaya remains Honduras' rightful president.

The Micheletti government, backed by most of the nation's traditional power centers, including the Catholic Church, has refused to consider any Zelaya restoration. Roberto Micheletti has offered to step down, but those backing him believe Zelaya's presidency was legitimately ended by an authoritative decision of the Honduran Supreme Court.

The OAS is essentially powerless -- it suspended Honduras's membership, but can do little more. Honduras' neighbors are unlikely to do anything other than lecture. The European Union suspended some foreign assistance, but can do no more. Thus, if anyone can force Tegucigalpa into line, it is the U.S. In fact, Zelaya contended that Washington needs "only tighten its fist" to restore him. However, other than mounting a military invasion or imposing a trade embargo, America's power, too, is limited.

The administration initially suspended \$22 million in aid, mostly for the military, and invalidated visas for officials in the interim regime. Moreover, last week Obama officials said they're reconsidering the status of America's four-year \$215 million aid program. So far the Micheletti government has refused to bend.

Thus, the administration is ratcheting up the pressure. The State Department froze all non-immigrant visas. Roughly 30,000 visas are granted for business and tourist purposes every year, which means about 2,500 people a month are being inconvenienced by the U.S. action. State explained that it was "conducting a full review of our visa policy."

No one explained exactly how preventing a Honduran businessman from traveling to America to complete a deal will help Zelaya's quest. Perhaps President Obama expects frustrated children hoping to go to Disney World to rise up and overthrow the Micheletti administration. In fact, outside sanctions typically encourage people to rally around their governments rather than back the interfering outsiders.

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Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. A former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is the author of *Beyond Good Intentions: A Biblical View of Politics* (Crossway).

COMMENTS

Pingback | 9.8.09 @ 7:01AM

Doug Bandow » Blog Archive » Hands off Honduras! links to this page. Here's an excerpt:

...threatening to refuse to recognize the upcoming election—the regularly scheduled ballot which was set to replace ousted Manuel Zelaya even before he was sent into exile. [I argue on American Spectator online that this is a foolish policy.](#) Post a Comment Name (required) E-mail (will not be published) (required) Website Doug Bandow is Vice President of Policy for Citizen Outreach, a Washington-based grassroots...

S.L. Toddard | 9.8.09 @ 7:39AM

"The best position for the U.S. would have been to stay out of the controversy. Let the Hondurans work it out themselves."

Precisely. This should be the default position for the U.S. vis a vis all foreign policy issues in which vital U.S. interests are not at stake - Honduras, the Russia/Georgia conflict, Israel/Arab conflict, the Iranian protests, the Balkans in the 90s etc. It is not the responsibility of the United States to poke its nose in every time some group of pygmies has a squabble.

Bram | 9.8.09 @ 9:23AM

I assume the big press is on now to restore the aspiring dictator because after November the argument will be too ridiculous for even our State Department to pursue.

I hope the Hondurans are strong and can resist the nonsense for another 2 months.

Pingback | 9.8.09 @ 9:47AM

Something or Nothing | Reading between the lines of today's news. links to this page. Here's an excerpt:

...York Post US-HONDURAS: State Dept Condemns "Coup d'Etat", Curtails Aid – IPS News Why I Came to Honduras – Real Clear Politics Counting the Costs of the Honduran Coup – Americas Society [Hounding Honduras](#) – The American Spectator Obama, Chavez and the Honduras takeover – Morning Star Comments: No comments yet Name (required) Mail (will not be published) (required) Website You need to enable javascript in

Michael Tomlinson | 9.8.09 @ 11:13AM

What's new that's what he's doing in this country too -- trying to destroy it to produce a Hugo Chavez type "democracy" north.

BD57 | 9.8.09 @ 11:22AM

Anyone believe we'd have the same policy if Zelaya was hostile to Chavez?

Russell Morgan | 9.8.09 @ 4:14PM

Why are you saying Zelaya's National Assembly had nothing to do with his Re-election???

"The subject to be addressed was not specified, but Zelaya was suspected of wanting to follow Chavez's example of using a national plebiscite to drop term limits, which are enshrined in the Honduran constitution. Indeed, the constitution specified that to even propose their elimination is grounds for immediate removal from office. "

You want to see ZELAYA SPECIFY IT? Go here and watch starting at 5:29 mark!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Rlqv-4t-L4>

Susana | 9.8.09 @ 4:23PM

Nations aren't usually put to the fearsome test to "live free or die." But we Hondurans are accepting it as the world pressures us to reseal a potential dictator in office.

I feel proud of my people , my congress , our armed forces, especially our National Heroe General Romeo Vazques that did not sold himself to Dictador Hugo Chavez like militar in Venezuela has done. And our Constitutional President Michelletti that have done till now a great job!

We prefer died on our feet

with our head held high;

than live the rest of our lifes on our knees

without freedoom in hands of this dictator wannabe ZELAYA.

We want for our kids the same Honduras

we know a poor country ? yes, maybe ;but beutiful and peaceful country ;

we have freedoom

and liberty of expresion.

we have the right to fail or succeed.

We won't fall, captive of any dictator and we won't violate our laws and constitution just to make Obama or Chavez happy.

Honduras is the free land of the brave indians.

Now I feel even more proud of being part of this tiny country that is so brave and defends democracy like we do.

Russell Morgan | 9.8.09 @ 4:41PM

Zelaya NOT only violated Honduran Constitution but also DISOBEYED a Honduran Supreme Court ORDER issued on 5/27/09 SUSPENDING his referendum because ONLY Congress with the TSE can do this! What happens to you if you disobey a court order in the USA? WHT IF you disobey a USA Supreme Court Order?

Go here to see Supreme Court order..

<http://www.poderjudicial.gob.h....pecial.htm>

Go to bottom and click on pdfs to see all their rulings in this matter!

NOW YOU NO WHY THE HONDURAN SUPREME COURT DID NOT ACCEPT ARIAS PROPOSAL, and I wish the Press would STOP calling that the San Jose Accord since the Honduran government HAS NEVER ACCEPTED IT! Are these people running the USA so stupid that they call a proposal an accord now a days?

Pingback | 9.8.09 @ 5:53PM

The American Spectator : Hounding Honduras | Honduras today links to this page. Here's an excerpt:

...which means about 2500 people a month are being inconvenienced by the U.S. action. State explained that it was "conducting a full review of our visa policy. ... Continued here: [The American Spectator : Hounding Honduras](#) Tags: a-full-review, a-policy--, purposes-every, which-means World Business Leave a Reply Name (required) Mail (will

not be published) (required) Website Business Today : Recent Comments...

JorgeFromHonduras | 9.8.09 @ 5:56PM

I totally agree with Russell. What San jose Accord ? Who is in this "accord" ? I am sure 90% of the Honduras people who do NOT want Zelaya back are not in this "accord"!

Furthermore, why are leftists marxist coming up from under the rocks? Simply because the USA has tolerated thugs like Hugo Chavez for too long.

Hey, I have something to tell all of you lefties ... the problem with socialism is quite simple ... ITS TOO LATE, THINGS ALREADY HAVE AN OWNER! You cant go around creating your dark empire expropriating things in the name of the poor and expect NOT to become a future USSR/Cuba fiasco!.

What the USA needs to do is be ware of these thugs. Eventually, when all else fails (aka all socialist agendas fail), they will start blaming the US, getting their hands on Nukes, and then well see how a Nuke in Honduras sounds like! (Remember, Honduras is only 2 hours from Florida). No one should tolerate this any longer.

HONDURAS, LIVE FREE OR DIE!

BuddyOne | 9.8.09 @ 8:29PM

Susana, I am proud of your country, too. Like many US citizens, I pray for the strength of your people. We are proud to call you our neighbors. By the way, I am counting on the high quality of your health care system, so it is doubly important that you prevail.

supra shoes | 9.8.09 @ 9:25PM

Your article is very interesting, I have introduced a lot of friends look at this article, the content of the articles there will be a lot of attractive people to appreciate, I have to thank you such an article.

air_jordan 1 | 9.8.09 @ 9:26PM

Nice work guys!
this is just Amazing!
Thanks

Ke Ja | 9.8.09 @ 11:01PM

Hi,
If you want a good chronology of what happened over many months, please read this:

<http://www.hondurasthisweek.co....ras-crisis>

There are some other editorials there too.

Enjoy my videos from Honduras, by Hondurans

<http://youtube.com/SupportHonduras>

Mel didn't only violate order of the Supreme Court, he publicly declared that he would not obey the orders of the Supreme Court (self-acknowledgement!) He admitted he participated in fraud in his own election, and the new government has evidence that the referendum and the 4th ballot would have been total frauds. He usurped the authority of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal by ordering the referendum by decree for which he was not Constitutional authorized to do.

He didn't abide by his Constitutional duties by vetoing or ratifying 96 bills from the National Congress. It's quite easy for a rogue president to render his legislature branch impotent if this is tolerated. He was already basically ruling by decree, and he refused to submit budget according to law.

Mel Zelaya was the sole authority of law and of government and of elections- a dictator- by his own views and actions.

Anybody who supports his return, support dictators: Plain and Simple.

Why does US support dictator? Clearly the Obama Left wanted a Chavez-written constitution installed, with power consolidated forever as a Socialist satellite state of Chavez. They believe in Marxism, with the will and liberty of the people of Honduras be damned.

Wedding Dresses | 9.9.09 @ 2:27AM

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Wedding Dresses | 9.9.09 @ 3:13AM

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Ryan Wilson | 9.9.09 @ 3:24AM

The subject to be addressed was not specified, but Zelaya was suspected of wanting to follow Chavez's example of using a national plebiscite to drop term limits, which are enshrined in the Honduran constitution.

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Waldemar Frank | 9.9.09 @ 3:25AM

The American Spectator Obama, Chavez and the Honduras takeover – Morning Star Comments: No comments yet Name (required) Mail (will not be published) (required) Website You need to enable javascript .

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[Obama Supports Communists \(and Narcoterrorists\) Abroad, Too](#) « *NewsReal Blog* links to this page. Here's an excerpt:

...week, SSINO (Secretary of State In Name Only) Hillary Clinton met with ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya and cut off all remaining funds for Honduras' government: \$30 million now, and [\\$215 million over four years](#). Leftists are pushing for the IMF to follow suit. In addition to being part of the Castro-Chavez axis, Zelaya sought to subvert the constitution — and he stands accused of running drugs....

clayton | 9.9.09 @ 7:05AM

Obama wants to be just like Hugo Chavez. He wants to go the socialist way, like Europe, Asia and now most of South America. He will have more friends in his Socialist/Communist world, and he will get to wear a Military Uniform or a crown if he wants to. Then, when he dies, his brother, who is in Africa now can become king.

Sensible people, though, wish to see him ousted ASAP. God bless those people in Hondrous for doing the right thing.

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