

1 of 2 DOCUMENTS

Providence Journal-Bulletin (Rhode Island)

November 21, 2009 Saturday

A crisis in Honduras? That s their problem

BYLINE: DOUG BANDOW**SECTION:** NEWS; Commentary; Pg. 6**LENGTH:** 845 words

WASHINGTON

The Honduran constitutional crisis has been resolved. Maybe. But why should the U.S. government care?

More than four months ago, Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was ousted. Backed by the Obama administration and most governments in Latin America, Zelaya demanded reinstatement. He and the interim Honduran government recently reached an agreement which was or maybe was not supposed to bring him back to serve out the rest of his term, which expires in January.

The controversy is legally complex and politically charged. Zelaya s critics contend that he intended to violate the constitution, and his behavior warranted suspicion.

Zelaya argued in turn that the case against him was unproved and that being tossed out of the country at gunpoint by the military was a de-facto coup. The interim government admitted that exiling him may have been improper, but argued that his ouster was valid. Although the constitution is ambiguous, the military s action came at the behest of a warrant issued by the Honduran supreme court and was endorsed by the Honduran congress.

Oddly, the issue became one of great partisan contention in Washington. But why should U.S. officials care?

The political confrontation has been quite unsettling for Honduras, which only recently recovered from the effect of past authoritarian rule. Even before his ouster, Zelaya s actions triggered political strife.

However, instability in Honduras has little impact on the U.S. Had not the Obama administration chosen to champion Zelaya s cause, virtually no one in America would even have noticed the controversy.

Nor is the issue one of human rights. Zelaya has fomented demonstrations and threatened to launch an insurrection. The interim government responded in a heavy-handed fashion. But the resulting abuses are not characteristic of a genuine military dictatorship and the elections scheduled for Nov. 29 are proceeding freely.

What other reason could there be for the U.S. to interfere with Honduras political crisis?

Certainly not because Washington politicians are so good at interpreting constitutions and exercising political restraint. And if the average Honduran was going to ask foreigners to help resolve a messy political squabble, would he choose meddling interventionists in Washington? In fact, the majority of Hondurans have not welcomed Washington s not-so-kind attention.

Obviously, that hasn t stopped the administration from acting as the worst sort of Yanqui imperialist. First, it pulled aid to the Honduran military.

Actually, it made sense to cut off U.S. aid, but Washington did so for the wrong reason. The U.S. never should have been subsidizing Honduras.

So-called development assistance just doesn't work, and why has the U.S. been underwriting the Honduran military? American aid turned out to be just another interventionist tool for Washington to manipulate when convenient, as in this case.

The administration also canceled most visas for Hondurans to visit America. The State Department did not simply penalize those Hondurans directly involved in removing Zelaya from office. Washington imposed collective punishment against all Hondurans, presumably hoping that they would march on Tegucigalpa and demand Zelaya's return. That didn't happen, but some business leaders, disproportionately affected by the administration's attempt to isolate Honduras, eventually advocated yielding to U.S. blackmail.

Still, the Honduran authorities said no. The frustrated Obama administration then threatened not to recognize the outcome of the upcoming presidential election. The candidates were chosen before Zelaya's ouster, but President Obama was ready to destroy Honduran democracy in the name of saving it.

The Obama administration continued to insist on a compromise, meaning conceding Washington's demands. Interim Honduran President Roberto Micheletti said that Secretary Clinton had emphasized her impatience, as if Honduras owed obedience to American politicians.

Finally, under the recent accord, Zelaya claimed that he was to be reinstated, but his return required a vote of the Honduran congress, which had approved his ouster. U.S. officials apparently threatened legislators to do Washington's bidding, to little effect. Faced with an impasse, the administration appears to have backed away, expressing its disappointment but explaining that in any case it intends to recognize the results of the upcoming election.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the so-called compromise a historic agreement. This is really just a cheap attempt to save face: The accord wasn't even a U.S. responsibility. Contrary to the common assumption in Washington, most people around the world are not waiting for the U.S. to show them the way to the future.

Americans always have been willing to help other peoples. But that doesn't mean Washington should make every other nation's problems America's problems. To the contrary, only Hondurans can resolve their own political crisis. The U.S. government should learn when to mind its own business. As in Honduras today.

LOAD-DATE: November 21, 2009

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

NOTES: Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. A former special assistant to President Reagan, he is the author of several books, including *Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire* (Xulon). Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. A former special assistant to President Reagan, he is the author of several books, including *Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire* (Xulon).

GRAPHIC: Former Honduran president Manuel Zelaya at Brazilian Embassy, where he has been offered sanctuary

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

Copyright 2009 Providence Publications, LLC
All Rights Reserved