

Coup d'Etat Underway in Honduras: OBAMA'S FIRST COUP D'ETAT

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Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Global Research, June 29, 2009

chavezcode.com 29 June 2009

President Zelaya of Honduras has just been kidnapped

[Note: As of 11:15am, Caracas time, President Zelaya is speaking live on Telesur from San Jose, Costa Rica. He has verified the soldiers entered his residence in the early morning hours, firing guns and threatening to kill him and his family if he resisted the coup. He was forced to go with the soldiers who took him to the air base and flew him to Costa Rica. He has requested the U.S. Government make a public statement condemning the coup, otherwise, it will indicate their compliance.]

Caracas, Venezuela - The text message that beeped on my cell phone this morning read "Alert, Zelaya has been kidnapped, coup d'etat underway in Honduras, spread the word." It's a rude awakening for a Sunday morning, especially for the millions of Hondurans that were preparing to exercise their sacred right to vote today for the first time on a consultative referendum concerning the future convening of a constitutional assembly to reform the constitution. Supposedly at the center of the controversy is today's scheduled referendum, which is not a binding vote but merely an opinion poll to determine whether or not a majority of Hondurans desire to eventually enter into a process to modify their constitution.

Such an initiative has never taken place in the Central American nation, which has a very limited constitution that allows minimal participation by the people of Honduras in their political processes. The current constitution, written in 1982 during the height of the Reagan Administration's dirty war in Central America, was designed to ensure those in power, both economic and political, would retain it with little interference from the people. Zelaya, elected in November 2005 on the platform of Honduras' Liberal Party, had proposed the opinion poll be conducted to determine if a majority of citizens agreed that constitutional reform was necessary. He was backed by a majority of labor unions and social movements in the country. If the poll had occurred, depending on the results, a referendum would have been conducted during the upcoming elections in November to vote on convening a constitutional assembly. Nevertheless, today's scheduled poll was not binding by law.

In fact, several days before the poll was to occur, Honduras' Supreme Court ruled it illegal, upon request by the Congress, both of which are led by anti-Zelaya majorities and members of the ultra-conservative party, National Party of Honduras (PNH). This move led to massive protests in the streets in favor of President Zelaya. On June 24, the president fired the head of the high military command, General Romeo Vásquez, after he refused to allow the military to distribute the electoral material for Sunday's elections. General Romeo Vásquez held the material under tight military control, refusing to release it even to the president's

followers, stating that the scheduled referendum had been determined illegal by the Supreme Court and therefore he could not comply with the president's order. As in the United States, the president of Honduras is Commander in Chief and has the final say on the military's actions, and so he ordered the General's removal. The Minister of Defense, Angel Edmundo Orellana, also resigned in response to this increasingly tense situation.

But the following day, Honduras' Supreme Court reinstated General Romeo Vásquez to the high military command, ruling his firing as "unconstitutional". Thousands poured into the streets of Honduras' capital, Tegucigalpa, showing support for President Zelaya and evidencing their determination to ensure Sunday's non-binding referendum would take place. On Friday, the president and a group of hundreds of supporters, marched to the nearby air base to collect the electoral material that had been previously held by the military. That evening, Zelaya gave a national press conference along with a group of politicians from different political parties and social movements, calling for unity and peace in the country.

As of Saturday, the situation in Honduras was reported as calm. But early Sunday morning, a group of approximately 60 armed soldiers entered the presidential residence and took Zelaya hostage. After several hours of confusion, reports surfaced claiming the president had been taken to a nearby air force base and flown to neighboring Costa Rica. No images have been seen of the president so far and it is unknown whether or not his life is still endangered.

President Zelaya's wife, Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, speaking live on Telesur at approximately 10:00am Caracas time, denounced that in early hours of Sunday morning, the soldiers stormed their residence, firing shots throughout the house, beating and then taking the president. "It was an act of cowardness", said the first lady, referring to the illegal kidnapping occurring during a time when no one would know or react until it was all over. Casto de Zelaya also called for the "preservation" of her husband's life, indicating that she herself is unaware of his whereabouts. She claimed their lives are all still in "serious danger" and made a call for the international community to denounce this illegal coup d'etat and to act rapidly to reinstate constitutional order in the country, which includes the rescue and return of the democratically elected Zelaya.

Presidents Evo Morales of Bolivia and Hugo Chávez of Venezuela have both made public statements on Sunday morning condemning the coup d'etat in Honduras and calling on the international community to react to ensure democracy is restored and the constitutional president is reinstated. Last Wednesday, June 24, an extraordinary meeting of the member nations of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), of which Honduras is a member, was convened in Venezuela to welcome Ecuador, Antigua & Barbados and St. Vincent to its ranks. During the meeting, which was attended by Honduras' Foreign Minister, Patricia Rodas, a statement was read supporting President Zelaya and condemning any attempts to undermine his mandate and Honduras' democratic processes.

Reports coming out of Honduras have informed that the public television channel, Canal 8, has been shut down by the coup forces. Just minutes ago, Telesur announced that the military in Honduras is shutting down all electricity throughout the country. Those television and radio stations still transmitting are not reporting the coup d'etat or the kidnapping of President Zelaya, according to Foreign Minister Patricia Rodas. "Telephones and electricity are being cut off", confirmed Rodas just minutes ago via Telesur. "The media are showing

cartoons and soap operas and are not informing the people of Honduras about what is happening". The situation is eerily reminiscent of the April 2002 coup d'état against President Chávez in Venezuela, when the media played a key role by first manipulating information to support the coup and then later blacking out all information when the people began protesting and eventually overcame and defeated the coup forces, rescuing Chávez (who had also been kidnapped by the military) and restoring constitutional order.

Honduras is a nation that has been the victim of dictatorships and massive U.S. intervention during the past century, including several military invasions. The last major U.S. government intervention in Honduras occurred during the 1980s, when the Reagan Administration funded death squads and paramilitaries to eliminate any potential "communist threats" in Central America. At the time, John Negroponte, was the U.S. Ambassador in Honduras and was responsible for directly funding and training Honduran death squads that were responsible for thousands of disappeared and assassinated throughout the region.

On Friday, the Organization of American States (OAS), convened a special meeting to discuss the crisis in Honduras, later issuing a statement condemning the threats to democracy and authorizing a convoy of representatives to travel to OAS to investigate further. Nevertheless, on Friday, Assistant Secretary of State of the United States, Phillip J. Crowley, refused to clarify the U.S. government's position in reference to the potential coup against President Zelaya, and instead issued a more ambiguous statement that implied Washington's support for the opposition to the Honduran president. While most other Latin American governments had clearly indicated their adamant condemnation of the coup plans underway in Honduras and their solid support for Honduras' constitutionally elected president, Manuel Zelaya, the U.S. spokesman stated the following, "We are concerned about the breakdown in the political dialogue among Honduran politicians over the proposed June 28 poll on constitutional reform. We urge all sides to seek a consensual democratic resolution in the current political impasse that adheres to the Honduran constitution and to Honduran laws consistent with the principles of the Inter-American Democratic Charter."

As of 10:30am, Sunday morning, no further statements have been issued by the Washington concerning the military coup in Honduras. The Central American nation is highly dependent on the U.S. economy, which ensures one of its top sources of income, the monies sent from Hondurans working in the U.S. under the "temporary protected status" program that was implemented during Washington's dirty war in the 1980s as a result of massive immigration to U.S. territory to escape the war zone. Another major source of funding in Honduras is USAID, providing over US\$ 50 million annually for "democracy promotion" programs, which generally supports NGOs and political parties favorable to U.S. interests, as has been the case in Venezuela, Bolivia and other nations in the region. The Pentagon also maintains a military base in Honduras in Soto Cano, equipped with approximately 500 troops and numerous air force combat planes and helicopters.

Foreign Minister Rodas has stated that she has repeatedly tried to make contact with the U.S. Ambassador in Honduras, Hugo Llorens, who has not responded to any of her calls thus far. The modus operandi of the coup makes clear that Washington is involved. Neither the Honduran military, which is majority trained by U.S. forces, nor the political and economic elite, would act to oust a democratically elected president without the backing and support of the U.S. government. President Zelaya has increasingly come under attack by the conservative forces in Honduras for his growing relationship with the ALBA countries, and particularly Venezuela and President Chávez. Many believe the coup has been executed as a method of ensuring Honduras does not continue to unify with the more leftist and socialist

countries in Latin America.

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