

Latin America: The United States is Sticking with the Monroe Doctrine

By [Karine Walsh](#)

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Interview with Arnold August at Le monde cette semaine (The World this Week), a francophone radio program hosted by André Pesant, aired on CIBL Radio-Montréal on November 22, 2009

While the U.S. government is amplifying its hostile interventions in the south, André Pesant recalled the ideological origins of U.S. foreign policy in a radio episode entitled Honduras, Colombia, Cuba - the United States is Pursuing the Monroe Doctrine: All of America to the North-Americans. It is during a speech to Europeans delivered on December 2, 1823, that the Republican U.S. President James Monroe would set guidelines to be adopted by United States diplomacy in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In the same vein, Pesant evoked the concept of an African proverb used by Roosevelt in 1901: "Speak softly and carry a big stick." Roosevelt used this expression for the first time at the Minnesota State Fair, on September 2, 1901, twelve days before the assassination of President William McKinley which propelled him into the presidency of United States. This "big stick" policy led the United States to assume a role of international police, protecting its interests in Latin America, mainly in the Caribbean region, through the use of military reprisals if deemed necessary.

The radio host considered that a century after this statement, the same "big stick" policy still seems to be enforced, a week away from the presidential election boycotted by the vast majority in Honduras: "While U.S. imperialism was suggesting an excessively publicised no-win deal to President Zelaya, it also took military control of Colombia." Contrasting with the complicit silence of the mainstream media linked to the so-called international community, Pesant mentioned "the very lively voice of Fidel Castro", referring to his recent reflections on the matter, published in several websites: "The Annexation of Colombia to the United States" on November 6 and "The Bolivarian Revolution and Peace" on November 18.

Pesant's guest on this radio show was Arnold August, a journalist, lecturer, author of several articles on the coup in Honduras published in some prestigious alternative websites, and specialist in participatory democracy in Cuba. In his view, it is still the same aggressive U.S. policy towards Latin America that has prevailed for two centuries: "This policy of domination over Latin America began immediately after the United States war of Independence in 1787. Even before the speech by James Monroe in 1823, which would define the principles of the country's foreign policy towards Latin America, in 1807 Thomas Jefferson declared that he saw in Cuba the most interesting acquisition for the United States. This policy of control applies to all of Latin America; the outward appearances and political parties taking power in the White House change from time to time, but the policy has remained the same."

Pesant reminded listeners about the harsh reality of American history, the historical inheritance of the US ruling class; a slave-owning class that acquired its wealth through the shameless importation and exploitation of African slaves. "The history of the United States consists of the looting of natural resources both outside and inside the US, including the extermination of the aboriginal peoples," he pointed out. Concerning Honduras, Pesant placed the issue in the context of the aggressive U.S. policy of domination over the continent enforced during two centuries and also in the light of current events, with on one hand, the negotiation of a bad deal imposed on Zelaya, and on the other hand the installation of 7 U.S. military bases in Colombia.

August recalled that one of the factors leading to the military coup on June 28 was Zelaya's decision, with the support of the Honduran people, to join the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA, its Spanish acronym). According to August, this important decision is directly linked to the coup in Honduras and to the recent public announcement of the installation of military bases in Colombia, even though the latter was decided upon a long time ago. "ALBA was established 5 years ago, first by Venezuela and Cuba. This has resulted in the movement's wave effect, other countries becoming members: Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Honduras, and soon possibly Paraguay, which will bring the current membership to 10 countries, something that is not negligible. The fact that Honduras has taken the decision to join ALBA, whose members reject the political, economic and military domination of the United States, was an affront to the United States which they have not accepted. The coup against Zelaya was not only an assault against Honduras, but upon all countries of ALBA and even against all the countries of South America."

Pesant asked his guest about the term military which government officials and the press in general have carefully refrained to associate with the June 28 coup. August, who has written several articles on this particular issue, namely one entitled "Honduras: Consistent Positions by both Sides Elevate the Constituent Assembly as the Solution", explains the important significance in avoiding the term military:

"There is a law in the United States, specifically Section 7008 of the 2009 Appropriations Act, clearly entitled military coups, which states that none of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available shall be obligated or expended to finance directly any assistance to the government of any country whose duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup or decree. By refraining to officially classify the coup as a military one, Washington keeps the door open for the November 29 elections, even if Zelaya had not been returned to power. The White House also gives itself the luxury of cultivating doubts hovering over Zelaya's head regarding the legal framework of his activities that led to the coup. Nevertheless, the electoral process is bound to be a disaster for both the coup perpetrators and the U.S. government."

Referring to an article published recently by August, Pesant mentioned a press release dated November 17, issued by Harris Corporation, which confirms that Washington is far from reducing its efforts of control and repression against the Honduran resistance. August said that in fact this international communications and information technology company was awarded the U.S. Southern Command (SouthCom) Command, Control, Communications and Computer Systems operations and maintenance program for Joint Task Force (JTF) Bravo at Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras.

August concluded the interview by stressing the correlation between recent events in Latin

America, including the establishment of Yankee military bases in Colombia: “We must firstly take note of the fact that Colombia shares its border with Venezuela and Ecuador, two countries that are building an alternative social system and that are strongly rejecting neo-liberalism. Rafael Correa, as promised prior to his election, has recently announced the closure of the only U.S. military base on the territory of Ecuador, an initiative that Zelaya also intended for the base in Honduras. Not far away, in Bolivia, Evo Morales is also the advocate of well thought-out and strong views against American domination over the continent. We cannot separate these events: the military coup in Honduras and the establishment of 7 U.S. military bases in Colombia. I learned this morning that yesterday Micheletti clearly said that anyone calling for a boycott of elections in Honduras is likely to end up in jail; the Honduran people are undergoing increasing repression.” On the balance sheet of the full account of aggressive acts against other nations, August recalled the upholding of the U.S. blockade against Cuba, which has resulted in over 50 years of suffering for the Cuban people, in spite of its UN condemnation by an overwhelming majority of member-states. The naval base on the island’s territory of Guantanamo has been occupied by U.S. forces in complete illegality for over a century at a time when Cuba was on top of the list on US annexation policy.

***Karine Walsh** is a social justice activist. She hosts a francophone radio program called Dimension Cubaine (hosted by the Table de concertation de solidarité Québec-Cuba) at a Montreal Community channel, Radio Centre-Ville.*

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