

## Paraguay: US Sponsored “Soft Coup”

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Cartoon by Latuff.

*Whether Paraguay’s infamously right-wing local oligarchy and its parties that seized an opportunity to bring left-leaning President Fernando Lugo down by itself, or whether the push came from the United States government, is yet to be confirmed.*

*The US was involved in the overthrow of many governments in Latin America in 20th century in a bid to sure up its domination of the region.*

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The US also supported a 2009 coup that overthrew elected Honduran president Manuel Zelaya, who had raised the minimum wage paid by US corporations in the textile industry and blocked privatisations. In the past decade, it has also been implicated in failed coup attempts against elected governments in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador.

However, whether the key movers were the Paraguayan oligarchs or US forces is a secondary consideration. The US state and US corporations operate through local intermediaries — the Paraguayan oligarchy — and have made no effort to conceal their intentions to use the recent coup to advance their agenda.

The coup has provided the US with a golden opportunity to work to reverse its declining influence in the region — and send a clear message to those willing to challenge its interests.

Paraguay is nestled between South America’s two largest economies — Argentina and Brazil — and its membership of regional integration bodies such as the Union of South American Nations (Unasur) and the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) gives it strategic importance for US interests.

By removing Lugo via an illegitimate coup only nine months out from elections, the US and its allies sent a message that, having lost the ability to keep control through formal democratic means, they are willing to use others.

The coup also gave the US an opportunity to escalate its military presence in the region.

The same day Lugo was impeached by Congress, a delegation of Paraguayan politicians, led

by the head of the parliamentary defence committee and opposition member Jose Lopez Chavez, met with US military chiefs to negotiate the establishment of a US military base in the Chaco region.

Lopez Chavez said another topic of discussions was restarting US military “humanitarian assistance” programs in Paraguay, which had been halted by Lugo in 2009.

The Paraguayan oligarchy has made clear its intentions of allowing the US to turn the country into a base for military operations, with its sights set on Latin America’s radical governments.

As Lopez Chavez explained after a meeting in August last year with 21 US generals, the hope was that a US base would help Paraguay “liberate itself from the pressures, the threats from Bolivia, and even more so the threats that are constantly emerging from the Bolivarianism of Hugo Chavez.”

In June, US General Douglas M Fraser, head of the US Southern Command, also singled out Venezuela and Bolivia as potential hotspots for “geopolitical turbulence” that could affect US interests in the region.

Those that have been campaigning in support of Latin America’s turbulent process of transition face the urgent task of exposing the role of US imperialism, its corporations and its allies in Paraguay’s, and their bid to stop the process of regional integration across Latin America.

There is also a need to support the Paraguayan resistance to the coup and redoubling our solidarity with the anti-imperialist Bolivarian Alliance of the People’s of Our America (ALBA) led by Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador.

*Read more articles by [Federico Fuentes](#). With Michael Fox and Roger Burbach, Fuentes is the co-author of the forthcoming book Latin America Turbulent Transitions: The Future of Twenty-First Century Socialism. It will be released in January next year by Zed Books. He also co-authored with Marta Harnecker a book in Spanish on the Paraguayan Left, focusing on the Movement Towards Socialism Party (P-MAS).]*

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