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US Sponsored "Institutional Coup" in Paraguay: Back to the CIA's "Good Old Days"

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The recent "institutional coup" against President Fernando Lugo of Paraguay reflects a long-standing desire by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to prevent any candidate not reflecting the policies of Paraguay's entrenched oligarchy from ever attaining the presidency of that nation.

According to a formerly SECRET CIA Directorate of Intelligence's Office of African and Latin American Analysis research paper, uncovered from the U.S. National Archives and dated August 1985, the CIA never planned for a non-member of the conservative Colorado Party from ever succeeding long-time Paraguayan dictator General Alfredo Stroessner.

The Paraguayan dictator, who ruled Paraguay from 1954 to 1989 with the backing of the CIA and the Pentagon, was one of America's staunchest Latin American allies. Stroessner, a Colorado Party stalwart, supported the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 and sent Paraguayan military officer to the infamous School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia for training. Stroessner also participated in Operation CONDOR, Henry Kissinger's brainchild that saw Paraguay, along with six other Latin American nations – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay — coordinate cross-border state terror and assassination operations against leftist officials and labor and student leaders, and even offered to send Paraguayan troops to fight with the United States in South Vietnam.

After Stroessner was ousted in a bloody military coup in 1989 over fears he was grooming one of his two sons as his successor. Stroessner was ousted by Colorado Party member General Andres Rodriqguez, who ruled until 1993. Rodriguez was succeeded by a series of Colorado Party politicians – Juan Carlos Wasmosy, Raul Cubas, Luis Gonzalez, and Nicanor Duarte, until Lugo, the Marxist «liberation theology» former Roman Catholic bishop, was elected president in 2008. The leader of the Patriotic Alliance for Change, Lugo was the first non-Colorado Party member to serve as president since 1948.

Lugo was ousted in a politicized impeachment process engineered by the Colorado Party and supported by Vice President Federico Franco of the very much misnamed Authentic Radical Liberal Party, which is neither «radical» nor «liberal» but represents Paraguay's business elite and is a member of Liberal International, which includes other pro-business «liberals» such as British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg's Liberal Democrats, in coalition with Tory Prime Minister David Cameron, and German Free Democratic Party of Guido Westerwelle, who serves in right-wing Chancellor Angela Merkel's cabinet as foreign minister

The CIA research paper, titled «Paraguay: Potential Successors to Stoessner,»states that in 1985, «the 72-year-old President Alfred [sic] Stroessner is not expected to leave office anytime soon». In fact, Stroessner was ousted in a coup some three and a half years after the CIA's faulty prognostication. However, the CIA did anticipate that Stroessner's eventual successors would only come from the ranks of the corrupt Colorado Party.

The CIA document states «leading contenders, in our judgment, include Supreme Court Chief Justice and traditionalist Colorado politician Luis Argana; veteran traditionalist Colorado leaders Edgar Insfran and Juan Manuel Frutos; the Defense Minister, Maj. Gen. Gaspar Martinez; and a respected senior military officer, Gen. Gerardo Johannsen».

The CIA gave all these Colorado politicians a clean bill of health by stating, «any of these men would be likely to maintain Paraguay's pro-West foreign policy». In the CIA's world, any leader, no matter how blood thirsty and dictatorial, was fine as long as they remained pro-Western. It is the same construct that was used by the Obama administration to drive from power Manuel Zelaya of Honduras and Lugo and be replaced by more pro-Western leaders. And the same «institutional coup» template is being used to stage a constitutional crisis in El Salvador between the ARENA right-wing opposition-dominated Supreme Court and the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation (FMLN) party of President Mauricio Funes.

And the CIA's document predicted to ascension to power post-Stroessner of General Rodriguez, who ousted Stroessner in 1989. The document states: «A likely key power broker during a transition would be Maj. Gen. Andres Rodriguez, an Army corps commander whose power is second only to Stroessner's». That sentence is followed by a redaction, sometimes an indicator that a named individual has an intelligence asset relationship with the CIA. The paragraph continues, «Because of his notoriety, we believe he [Rodriguez] would operate behind the scenes in a transition, rather than seek the presidency». The document iterates that if Rodriguez were to assume power in a political vacuum situation it «might lead Rodriguez to seize power and impose a tough authoritarian government» and that «relations between such a regime and the United States would probably be subject to strains over human rights and drug trafficking». In fact, after Rodriguez seized power in 1989 from Stroessner in a textbook Latin American coup, bereft of a succession struggle, Washington maintained good relations with Paraguay.

The CIA clearly favored Chief Justice Argana as an eventual successor to Stroessner based solely on «his ability to avoid antagonizing military leaders as he has risen in the [Colorado] party ranks». The CIA analysts pointed out that Argana, according to U.S. embassy officials in Asuncion, the Paraguayan capital, was not considered «honest,» pointing to his past links with General Rodriguez.

The CIA also appeared to favor the chief of the powerful Rural Welfare Institute [the former Land Reform Agency], Senator Juan Manuel Frutos, the son of a former president. He was described as «tenaciously anti-Communist,» a pre-requisite for American support. It was the controversial issue of land reform and providing arable land to Paraguay's poor campesinos that sparked the institutional coup against Lugo. Paraguay's wealthy landowners, most Colorado Party supporters, are averse to any kind of land reform that would see the nation's landless peasants provided with useful acreage for growing crops and thus competing with the monopolistic landowners.

The CIA sounded a discordant note on Defense Minister Gaspar Martinez, reporting that the

U.S. embassy had reported in 1983 that Martinez had «amassed large sums of money». The remainder of the paragraph on Martinez's money is redacted.

However, a clue to what was redacted may be found in a letter, dated March 5, 1985, from the chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, Charles Rangel of New York, to CIA director William J. Casey. The letter states: «The Washington Post of February 27, 1985, reports that your agency has provided Senators Alphonse M. D'Amato and Arlen Specter with a report alleging the involvement of the notorious Nazi war criminal, Josef Mengele, in the narcotics traffic in Paraguay around 1970. Would you kindly provide this Committee with that report?»

The CIA paid little heed to the Paraguayan opposition parties, including the Liberal Party and the Radical Liberal Party, authorized «opposition» parties with little organization, manpower, or finances. The illegal National Accord of four opposition parties – the Christian Democrats, Authentic Radical Liberals, the Popular Colorado Movement, and the Revolutionary Febrerista Party – were also seen as weak and suffering from years in exile, mainly in Argentina. In hindsight, weakness by the exiled opposition, including current President Franco's Authentic Radical Liberals, made them ripe for co-option by agencies like the CIA.

A 1983 Spanish-language broadcast by Radio Moscow, translated into English by the CIA's Foreign Broadcast Information Service, appears to provide more realistic intelligence about the situation in Paraguay than can be found in the CIA's own intelligence report on the country. The Radio Moscow report was on the following issue: «Director of Paraguayan Communist Party's bulletin Adelante, on torture carried out by Stroessner regime. Says that CIA agents are training Paraguayan police personnel on various methods of torture».

Considering today's penchant of the United States for torture, it can also be assumed that the clock will soon be set back in Paraguay to the CIA's «good old days».

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