

Coup in Honduras: the return of the gorillas or the tactics of attrition?

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Analysis of the events in Honduras and the dilemma of the oligarchy of Honduras in the face of an unsustainable coup: whether they cling to the strategy of the Gorillas (putschists in Latin American jargon) or they use the situation created by the coup in order to wear off the reformist Zelaya, in order to re-conquest the absolute hegemony in the political arena. The dilemma facing those who opposed the coup is also put forward: whether we allow the crisis to be solved in a top-down fashion, at the level of institutions, what would leave intact the roots of the problem, or we defeat the coup through mass mobilisation of the people, what not only would be a fatal blow for the oligarchy, but would also strengthen the Honduran working class as an important political actor in its own right.

The flashing sabers have once again shown their edge in Latin America: the coups d'état and destabilization processes orchestrated from Washington have succeeded in countries where governments are implementing reform that may be uncomfortable for the digestion of the hemispheric elite-Venezuela 2002; Haiti 2004, Bolivia 2008. This time Honduras' turn has come, a country whose president Manuel Zelaya was overthrown by the military and exiled to Costa Rica. While Zelaya was kidnapped by soldiers in Congress a letter written by Zelaya was read (which turned out to be false) in which he renounced his position as president. At the same time, and while several MPs complained that the conduct of the president put at risk the "rule of law" and accused him of multiple violations of the Constitution real and imaginary, he was removed from office, which was assumed by the Congress president, Roberto Micheletti (who is also from Zelaya's Liberal Party).

The coup happened on the same day that a non-binding public consultation, called by Zelaya would have taken place regarding the need to change the Constitution, drafted in 1982, when the country was just emerging from an extremely brutal military dictatorship supported by U.S. who wielded power from 1972 to 1981. If the results were favorable to constitutional change a Constituent Assembly would be convened in November.

This proposal met fierce opposition from the most reactionary sectors of the Honduran oligarchy who control the legislature, the Supreme Court and the Army, and are gathered under the undisputed leadership of the ultra-conservative National Party of Honduras. These sectors are opposed to reforms that could produce minor questioning of their domination of Honduras. The judiciary, in coordination with its allies in the Legislature, were quick to declare the referendum unconstitutional on Thursday June 25, bringing about the scene for the coup. The tanks took to the streets Sunday, July 28, to the residence of Zelaya, and by this canceled the referendum and ended (or believed settled), by force, the push and pull between the state powers¹.

What is the strategy behind the coup?

Honduras is a country that, as mentioned, is no stranger to our shared continental history of military dictatorships, which occupied the entire period from the 60s to 70s. In the 80s this kind of history of violence and State terrorism continued under the form of a "democratic" regime under which proliferated under the paramilitaries, who killed thousands of peasants and workers from Honduras, and provided a platform for the Contra terrorism that devastated Nicaragua.

¹ On the controversial referendum to revise the following article criticadigital.com

These operations were directed by John Negroponte, U.S. ambassador in Honduras. The U.S. presence is still exists in the physical form of a U.S. military base with at least 500 U.S. troops on Honduran soil. Under this social and political dynamic there has been nurtured a strong network of domination that incorporates an absolute oligarchy and colonial army imbued with the doctrine of national security.

Zelaya is far from being a revolutionary. He is a member of the Liberal Party, in the past part of a reformist trend, a little more to the left than the bulk of his party, raising some social reforms (including the new constitution). What most worries the Honduran oligarchy is the entry of Honduras into ALBA, an initiative of Latin American integration spearheaded by Venezuela. However, as we have mentioned on other occasions, the “radicalism” of a movement or a political leader cannot be measured in absolute terms, but must be understood in context: in this case, the “radicalism” of Zelaya does not emanate from its own policies, but from the absolute opposition to any compromise or change of any kind that is presented by the oligarchy. Not that Zelaya is seen as a “radical” because he is socialist, but rather because of the completely neaderthal character of the Honduran oligarchy. This paradox is what has made the fight for lukewarm reforms in Latin America often assume the forms of revolutionary struggle.

The coup strategy, which encompasses the paradox of opposing the reforms in the Latin American context, that is, forms of “counter-insurgency” in the absence of a revolutionary movement, can be summarized as follows: **the necessity of stopping any process of social change, even the most tepid.** The big problem for the oligarchy is that the time when a military dictatorship could be accepted without complications has passed. We are not in the '70 and the U.S. is more interested in keeping up the appearance of democracy and comes out with other methods to impose its will rather than through the shortcut of coups d'etat. Therefore the strategy of a coup has the main disadvantage to the oligarchy of not being sustainable in the long term in the context of Honduras².

The complex post-coup scene

The putschists forces, like those who oppose them, have their internal contradictions. It is likely that there are elements that now fantasize about a return to the pure “gorillaism” that hit Latin America hard during the past four decades. But other elements must be well aware that it is highly unlikely that this coup adventure can continue for long. They know that after the earthquake of the coup in the Honduran political arena, you must have a plan B when it comes to re-establish constitutional order. For them, the coup would only be a deterrent within a broader strategy to regain control over political initiative and wear down their adversaries through attrition.

The coup as a masterful deterrent was applied in Haiti during the first government of the reformist priest Jean Bertrand Aristide. After being overthrown in September 1991 in a coup financed and supported by the CIA, Aristide took refuge in the U.S., where he began a long

² The only country in America where this strategy has proven to be sustainable for a considerable period of time is Haiti. But Haiti is an absolutely unique event in the Latin American context, a country highly dependent, impoverished, and delayed the oligarchy certainly more cave throughout the hemisphere. But even in Haiti, the imperialists have had a democratic facade to sustain the coup (a subsidiary of the UN force, MINUSTAH, and the role of a president elected “democratically,” Preval). For more details on this review process www.anarkismo.net

period of negotiations with the U.S. authorities (the same that were behind the coup), and after a series of concessions, he was reinstated in power three years later, with the help of 20,000 U.S. Marines who occupied Haiti and ended the Cedras dictatorship of³. During this period, the U.S. achieved “moderation” enough to allow that Aristide, at least momentarily, did not represent a “threat”⁴: *“He was basically reduced to a defensive position, trying always to appear to the eyes of the U.S. Government as a reasonable person and as harmless as possible. Thus, he was increasingly submerged in a swamp of concessions and surrenders, leaving his people to expect that the solution came from his meetings and not an offensive in the streets and the mountains”*⁵. When Aristide was restored to power, it came with a structural adjustment package to the Haitian economy that deepened the neoliberal model and with it the growing impoverishment of Haitian society.

It is likely that the coup through its strategy Honduran looks for something like the Haitian example (albeit in a rather shorter time line): gain time, wear out the “moderate” Zelaya (who in any case is a “radical”) and seek international mediation to achieve an “agreement” between the parties that will finally exorcise the specter of social reforms of any significance. Whether or not the CIA is behind the coup (if not directly-or what is likely, indirectly as all putschist generals are heirs of the School of the Americas⁶)(see other articles here from the SOAW-Molly), the U.S. does not have today, the ability to play the solo role of “softening” Zelaya. Furthermore, the current Latin American context does not allow it. Such a role would be left mainly to the OAS, but also to the larger international community: the EU and the USA.

Quickly the “international community” (including the UN⁷) has spoken out against the coup and rejected it and reiterated its support for Zelaya⁸. There has been particularly adamant rejection of the coup among Latin American countries and the ALBA. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez came out to say that his troops were on alert due to the aggression suffered by his ambassador to Honduras from putschists troops⁹. Obama held an ambiguous position, which may be understood as a way of exploring the field, asking *“all political and social actors in Honduras to respect democratic norms, rule of law and the principles of the Inter-American Democratic Charter”*¹⁰, without rejecting or supporting the coup against Zelaya. Only after accusations by Chavez and the president of the UN General Assembly, Miguel D’Escoto, about the likely U.S. involvement in the coup, did the U.S. eventually recognize via an anonymous State Department official (more to save the face than otherwise) that Zelaya is the only legitimate president of Honduras¹¹. Surely they do not think well of the diatribe by D’Escoto: *“Many are wondering whether this attempted coup is part of the new policy [of the U.S. towards Latin America] since it is known that the Honduran army has a history of total submissiveness to the United States.”*¹²

³ For more details on this process reviewed, from a social perspective, the book by Alex Dupuy “Haiti in the New World Order, Westview Press, 1997, pp.140–166. You can also review, from a revolutionary perspective, “The Unmaking of a President” Kim Ives, “The Haiti-Files” (ed. James Ridgeway), Essential Books, 1994, pp.87–103.

⁴ At least momentarily, because then again in 2004, Bush again Aristide considered persona non grata and was overthrown in another coup d’etat.

⁵ Kim Ives, op. cit., p.95

⁶ In any case, the U.S. government has admitted being in contact very recently with the army of Honduras in connection with the “crisis” espanol.news.yahoo.com/54/n-latam-ee-...html

⁷ espanol.news.yahoo.com

⁸ espanol.news.yahoo.com

⁹ Also, the ambassadors of Cuba and Nicaragua were attacked. espanol.news.yahoo.com

¹⁰ espanol.news.yahoo.com

¹¹ espanol.news.yahoo.com

¹² espanol.news.yahoo.com

Everything suggests that the oligarchs and the military can not maintain the coup and only see what they have achieved as a “political solution” that could in time take the form of a “compromise” on both sides, but leave standing its dominance in the medium term. That is the political role that the OAS can play, which, like most governments, have expressed their opposition to the coup not in concrete class terms, but from a defense of “rule of law.” Quiteley, in this way, the lines are well marked for both sides: not accepting a “overflow” of the Constitution for either the right or left, or to be precise, an overflow is rejected by the right, precisely to avoid the spillover from the left. What is advocated is the “rule of law” that, ultimately, is what specifically capitalist social order is. This cross-bourgeois democracy can be led in a masterful way by the OEA, which, in the words of the director of Human Rights Watch, Jose Miguel Vivanco, “*has a key role to play [to] quickly find a multilateral solution to this breakdown of democracy in Honduras*”¹³.

With this tactic, you are looking for a “multilateral” solution (with the coup mongers), by which the Honduran oligarchy will attempt to open a political space in institutional channels, which takes advantage of reformism, while destroying the political agenda of any major reform or any prospect of radicalization of the political process.

Down with the Coup! Strengthen Popular Mobilization!

The libertarians, along with all consistant revolutionaries position ourselves unequivocally on the side of the forces that oppose the coup. We can not allow the gorilla head to lift in any country in our region which has already suffered enough from dictatorships nor sit back and declare ourselves “neutral” even before the specter of a new one. But to put our position in a clear and categorical way.

The gorillas should be extirpated at its roots and we believe that this can not happen from above, from the bureaucratic point of the “international community”, as claimed by sections of the bourgeoisie and reformism. The only one who can remove the root of the gorillas putschist are the people mobilized in the streets, in the fields, in workplaces, schools and universities to stop this military adventure. Within the post-coup scenario is the possibility that the people can become a player that definitely alters the balance of forces in Honduran society to achieve substantive changes. This people, overcoming fear, has begun to mobilize, from one hundred demonstrators outside the government palace in the morning to several thousand at this moment, and it starts to move en masse across the capital Tegucigalpa and other places in the country.

Even when the protesters to call for little more than the defense of Zelaya, and with it, the defense of a rather lukewarm proposed reform it is in mobilizing that people learn to fight and learn to make their own project. Any mobilization contains the potential radicalization of the masses, especially when you consider that this protest was a spontaneous act of defiance to an oligarchy so stubborn and backward as to be criminal. On this mobilization depends the thwarting of the oligarchy’s plan to deter “soften” the political project of Zelaya: on whether it will radicalize the masses and thus driving the process towards the left. This is the factor with which the oligarchy(nor reformism) does not count on . And this is the factor that weighs more in the balance.

¹³ espanol.news.yahoo.com By the way, the role of containment is being sought in the OAS, is the same as the UNASUR played as in the Bolivian crisis of late 2008, when it condemned the slaughter of Pando, but stressed that the decision was from the perspective of “defending the rule of law,” looking at the same time to disband the people.

On how this conflict is resolved will depend on the future of social change in Honduras. If the crisis is solved at the top, primarily via institutional channels¹⁴, the result will be, undoubtedly, the commitment and cooperation of the parties with the consequent return to the *status quo*. If, however, the crisis, however, is solved from the bottom, and the coup is slowed primarily by mobilizing the people in the streets there is the possibility that the people will move towards a more radical end and achieve the crushing of the resistance of the oligarchy to change. Even when the outcome is far from the social revolution there will be a foundation for the people who undertake such a long path and leave a people that has gained in experience and confidence in their abilities. And that possibility will shake the oligarchy.

¹⁴ I say “primarily” because there is no one single factor to resolve the crisis: institutional action (the international community, for example), nor action popular with the factors (those that are popular on the street). Neither tactic can be excluded, all are necessary, but the reformist strategy prioritizes the institutional factor (on the ground which gives the advantage to the oligarchy), while the revolutionary strategy must factor favoring the popular (but not excluding pressure on the institutional).

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