

# Honduran military ousts president in coup

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The Honduran military ousted President Manuel Zelaya on Sunday morning, just before a planned national referendum. It was the first coup in Latin America since the end of the Cold War. As the *World Socialist Web Site* goes to press, the situation in Honduras remains fluid and the outcome uncertain.

After arresting Zelaya at his home, the military transferred him to Costa Rica. The Honduran Congress quickly installed its speaker, Roberto Micheletti, as “interim president.”

Zelaya had scheduled a national non-binding referendum on Sunday on whether a ballot should be held in November on the holding of a constitutional convention. Zelaya’s opponents claimed that the president was seeking to find a way to stay in power by changing a constitutional provision that limits the president to one four-year term. However, the referendum that had been slated for Sunday proposed that a ballot on a constitutional convention be held at the same time as the November election to choose Zelaya’s successor.

The Honduran Supreme Court declared that the referendum was unconstitutional, and the military refused to take measures to hold it, setting off a political crisis. Last week, Zelaya dismissed the army chief, General Romeo Vasquez, but the Supreme Court intervened to declare the move unconstitutional. The military stepped in and ousted Zelaya after the president sought to go ahead with the poll.

On Sunday, Zelaya called the intervention of the military a “coup d’etat.” He said he was awakened by soldiers who arrested him in his pajamas Sunday morning.

Manuel Zelaya came to office in January 2006, following a highly contested election in November 2005. He is a long-time member of the Liberal Party, one of the main establishment parties of Honduras. He

ran on the basis of a law-and-order program, narrowly defeating the equally right-wing candidate of the National Party of Honduras, Porfirio Pepe Lobo.

After coming to power, however, Zelaya initiated populist measures and developed a close relationship with Venezuela’s president, Hugo Chavez. This policy alienated the country’s wealthy elite and political establishment, including leading figures in Zelaya’s own party. Since he was elected, Zelaya has come into periodic conflict with the corporate elite, which is the principal social force behind the military.

In January, Zelaya increased the country’s minimum wage from 157 to 280 dollars, excluding special export zones. Corporations responded angrily and initiated mass layoffs. Honduras is an impoverished country, with a poverty rate of about 70 percent.

The United States, the European Union, the Organization of American States and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon declared their opposition to the coup. President Barack Obama said the US government did not recognize Micheletti and called for Zelaya to be returned to Honduras.

The United States has a long history of involvement in Central and South America, including support for a series of military coups. The US has traditionally had close ties with Honduras, but these ties have become strained under Zelaya.

Venezuelan president Chavez has called for an investigation into possible US involvement in the coup. Chavez put the Venezuelan military on alert and warned that if the new military-dominated government of Honduras entered the Venezuelan embassy, the action would constitute “a de facto state of war.”

Chavez said that the Honduran military had arrested the Cuban ambassador to Honduras and had beaten up the Venezuelan ambassador, leaving him by a road in the capital of the country, Tegucigalpa. Chavez called a special summit Sunday of the “Bolivarian Alternative

for the Americas”—an economic and political bloc that includes Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, and Honduras—to discuss the crisis in Honduras.

There are reports of pro-Zelaya forces setting up barricades in the Honduran capital.



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