

Ex-Clinton aides advising Honduran coup regime

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Ever since the military abducted President Manuel Zelaya at gunpoint on June 28 and expelled him from the country, the Obama administration has cast itself as a steadfast defender of “democracy” in Honduras.

The real nature of that defense has become somewhat clearer with the news that key former aides to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her husband, former President Bill Clinton, have surfaced as top advisers to the illegal regime led by Roberto Micheletti, which was installed by the coup.

Ginger Thompson of the *New York Times* reported from San Jose, Costa Rica Sunday that in organizing the first sessions of a US-brokered mediation exercise between the ousted President Zelaya and the leader of those who overthrew him, Micheletti, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias instructed both men to appear at his residence with just four advisers.

“On Thursday morning, Mr. Micheletti showed up with six, adding an American public relations specialist who has done work for former President Bill Clinton and the American’s interpreter, and an official close to the talks said the team rarely made a move without consulting him,” Thompson reported.

The PR man was identified as Bennett Ratcliff of San Diego. Thompson quoted an official close to the talks as saying that “Every proposal that Micheletti’s group presented was written or approved by the American [Ratcliff].”

Perhaps even more significantly, Lanny Davis has emerged as among Washington’s most prominent defenders and spokesmen for the Honduran coup regime, acting as a lobbyist for the Honduran branch of the extreme right-wing Latin American Business Council.

Davis has been closely tied to the Clintons since he attended Yale Law School together with them in 1970. Between 1996 and 1998, he served as President Clinton’s special counsel. And in the 2008 presidential campaign, he served as one of Hillary Clinton’s most prominent fundraisers and surrogates in attacking her principal rival,

Barack Obama.

It is inconceivable that such figures would be playing such a prominent role in advising and defending the coup regime in Honduras without receiving a green light from both Secretary of State Clinton and the Obama White House.

Davis put in an appearance at a hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee last Friday, defending the coup and insisting that “democracy and civil liberties are flourishing in Honduras.”

This is an outrageous lie. Davis’s testimony came less than a week after Honduran troops opened fire on peaceful protesters at the Tegucigalpa airport, killing 19-year-old Isis Obed Murillo. As he spoke, a curfew enforced by the military remained in effect. Hundreds remain jailed, and the regime itself admitted Monday that since the coup it had subjected 1,286 people to arbitrary arrest. Sections of the media that have opposed the coup were shut down or expelled from the country. The day after Davis appeared, Telesur and Venezuelan TV (VTV) journalists were arrested by hooded police and deported.

In an indication that repression is intensifying rather than lessening, two prominent opposition leaders were shot and killed on Saturday, the night after Davis delivered his lying testimony to Congress.

Roger Bados, a leader of the National Resistance Front and president of a cement workers union, was gunned down in the northern industrial city of San Pedro Sula. On the same day, Ramon Garcia was taken off a bus in the Callejones sector of the western province of Santa Barbara and executed. He had been a prominent figure in anti-coup demonstrations in the area.

In his appearance before the House panel, Davis acknowledged that, given “the wisdom of hindsight,” things “could have been done differently that night the army whisked him [Zelaya] out of the country.” But he urged the committee to “look forward and not argue about past history,” referring to the violent overturning of a government less than two weeks earlier.

He praised his long-time political associate, Hillary

Clinton, for engineering the mediation by Oscar Arias, while giving a strong indication of its real purpose. He stressed that this process “will take time and doesn’t involve parachuting Mr. Zelaya immediately back into Honduras.”

Davis placed emphasis on the importance of “bipartisanship” and “civility” in discussing the coup. His own remarks were largely in bipartisan unity with those of another panelist, Otto Reich, George W. Bush’s former assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs.

Reich is an anti-Castro Cuban émigré and extreme right-wing ideologue, who got his start in government as a key participant in the operation to support and fund the contra death squads attacking Nicaragua. He acted as the government protector of Cuban anticommunist terrorists Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch and, in 2002, played a prominent role in supporting the abortive coup against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

That one of the most prominent associates of Hillary Clinton finds himself in the same camp with such a figure is a far more accurate measure of the Obama administration’s real attitude to the Honduran coup than all of the platitudes about restoring democracy.

Costa Rican President Arias, meanwhile, announced Tuesday that he would resume his mediation on Saturday, calling for Zelaya and Micheletti to return to San Jose. It is widely acknowledged in Honduras by both sides that this process, proposed by Washington, is serving to legitimize the coup regime and essentially run out the clock on what remains of Zelaya’s presidency. Presidential elections are set for the end of November.

The State Department is maintaining the fiction that Arias is acting independently. Department spokesman Ian Kelly told a press conference Monday, “It’s not a process that is being led by the United States of America.” The response of the reporters was general laughter. As in earlier statements by Clinton and other spokesmen, Kelly reiterated the US “support for the restoration of democratic order in Honduras,” without either condemning the coup or calling for the restoration of Zelaya.

Zelaya himself issued an “ultimatum” to the coup regime from neighboring Nicaragua on Monday, declaring that if the upcoming session does not result in his restoration to the presidency, “the mediation will be considered failed and we will proceed with other measures.” He did not spell out any such measures, however, aside from talking about facing the regime’s “bayonets” and inviting it to shoot him.

Such dramatic rhetoric cannot conceal the fact that Zelaya, like Micheletti, is in the end appealing primarily to Washington to come to his aid. Zelaya, a product of the Honduran oligarchy, has no intention of overturning the class system and political establishment in Honduras.

A number of critics of the coup have pointed to the appointment of Fernando Joya Améndola as a government minister as an indication of the reactionary character of the regime. No doubt it is. Better known as Billy Joya, he is a former captain in the Honduran army who is credited with the creation of a unit known as Battalion 316 in the 1980s, which provided aid to the CIA-backed contras and carried out death squad killings and torture against student activists, trade unionists and leftists in Honduras itself. He himself has been charged in numerous abductions, disappearances and killings.

The only problem, however, is that he served Zelaya as well, brought into his government as a senior adviser to the secretary of security over the protests of relatives of those he killed.

In the final analysis, no section of this ruling elite has any real independence from imperialism. This is also the standpoint of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who last week put in a call to the US State Department and publicly urged Obama to “do something” about Honduras.

Chavez referred to the Honduran coup as Obama’s “moment of truth,” urging him, “Demonstrate that you are ready to confront the hawks.”

Nothing could more clearly express the bankruptcy of left bourgeois nationalism in Latin America.

Obama is not going to confront any “hawks.” The evolution of US policy in the wake of the coup has demonstrated, once again, that the military and intelligence agencies in the US are asserting their power even more directly than under the Bush administration, using Obama as their front man. This is undoubtedly the case in Honduras, where the overthrow of an elected president is inconceivable without prior approval from Washington and the US military, which continues to occupy the country.



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