

Tehran and Tegucigalpa: A tale of two capitals

Barry Grey
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In Tehran, demonstrations called by the defeated US-backed presidential candidate are given non-stop, wall-to-wall coverage by the American media. The charges of former prime minister Mir Hossein Mousavi of a stolen election and a “coup d’etat” are embraced uncritically and reported as fact by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and other “authoritative” newspapers, without any independent investigation or substantiation. A media propaganda campaign ensues aimed at isolating and destabilizing the ruling faction in Iran headed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The protests are dominated by better-off sections of the urban middle class, who largely voted for Mousavi and support his right-wing program of closer ties to American and European imperialism and a rapid introduction of pro-market policies. The working class, seeing nothing to support in the faction of “reformists” headed by Mousavi and the billionaire former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, abstains from the protests.

The media dispenses with any pretence of objectivity and proclaims the protest movement and its leaders the spearhead of a “green revolution” for democracy. Every act of repression by the Iranian regime is given headline coverage, and rumors of hundreds of deaths are reported as fact. The US media focuses its wrath in particular on the regime’s efforts to block Internet and mobile phone communication.

Two weeks later, the US-trained and equipped military of Honduras breaks into the home of the elected president, bundles him onto a plane and flies him out of the country at gunpoint. The basic crime of the deposed president, Manuel Zelaya, is aligning his government with Washington’s nemeses in Latin America, Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and Cuba’s Fidel

Castro, and carrying out modest popular reforms within Honduras, such as raising the minimum wage.

There can be no dispute that Honduras has undergone a coup. But the event is barely reported by the US press and broadcast media. Neither are the arrests and deportations of ministers of Zelaya’s government, the closures of local media outlets sympathetic to the ousted president, the arrests of foreign journalists and shutdown of US-based outlets such as CNN, and the imposition of a de facto state of siege, including a dusk-to-dawn curfew and the mobilization of thousands of Honduran troops in every major city.

The coup regime, which is backed by the Honduran business elite, the Congress, the courts and the Church, seeks to halt Internet and cell phone communication—evoking no protest from the US media.

Demonstrations in support of the coup staged by the new regime are dominated by the wealthy middle class of the capital, Tegucigalpa.

In the teeth of state repression, the Honduran teachers union launches a 60,000-strong strike that closes the schools, and thousands demonstrate in Tegucigalpa. The demonstrations are dominated by trade unionists, workers, the unemployed and the rural poor. This working class resistance to the coup barely gets a mention in the US media.

On Sunday, July 5, troops barricading the airport at Tegucigalpa fire on unarmed demonstrators who have gathered to welcome Zelaya as he attempts to land a chartered plane and resume his office. A 19-year-old youth is shot and killed. Again, barely a mention in the US news media.

One can only imagine how the US media would have responded had Ahmadinejad arrested Mousavi and thrown him out of Iran. Or the howls of indignation that would have erupted had the Iranian president blockaded

the airport to prevent him from returning.

Examples of the double standard applied to Iran and Honduras abound. Just to cite a few:

CNN made great play of the efforts of the Iranian regime to censor the news and intimidate foreign journalists. It has said nothing about the shutdown of its own broadcasts by the Honduran coup government.

On July 4, CNN.com reported that it had received a video tape showing Honduran troops shooting out the tires of buses bringing anti-coup demonstrators to Tegucigalpa from the countryside. This video has been given little, if any, airplay by the network.

Most significant is the virtual absence of coverage in the US media of the murder and wounding of anti-coup demonstrators at Tegucigalpa airport on Sunday. The *Financial Times* on Monday provided a chilling account of the atrocity which makes clear its premeditated character. Reporting that a crowd of about 1,500 had gathered at the perimeter fence of the airport to welcome Zelaya's plane, the newspaper writes:

"However, at about 3 PM on Sunday, soldiers guarding the runway to prevent the return of Mr. Zelaya launched an offensive against the unarmed crowd, according to witnesses.

"They opened fire from positions inside the airport and then sent teargas into the crowd.

"Moments later, a handful crossed the perimeter fence, which had been cut by the demonstrators, raised their automatic rifles and pointed them towards the mass of terrified men, women and children. Then they opened fire again. At least one person was killed, and as many as 30 were injured."

The Latin American press has widely published photos of the fatally wounded youth, Isis Obed Murillo, being dragged away by fellow protesters. No such photos have appeared in major US newspapers or on television news channels. Murillo remains unnamed and unmourned in the American media.

One need only compare this callous treatment to the media frenzy over the death on June 20 of Neda Agha Soltan in Tehran. The death of the 27-year-old student, who was reportedly a bystander at a pro-Mousavi protest, occurred under murky circumstances. The government denied responsibility, but the media immediately declared her a martyr of the "green revolution." Her picture was splashed across the front pages of newspapers and broadcast by every TV

channel. "Neda" was proclaimed the "Joan of Arc" of the Iranian opposition.

This tale of two capitals provides a graphic illustration of the character and role of the American media. Owned and controlled by corporate goliaths, it functions as an adjunct of the state and a propaganda machine in behalf of US imperialist interests. Its class bias—and that of the lavishly paid individuals who serve as top editors, senior reporters and TV anchormen—is underscored by the diametrically opposed responses to the protests in Tehran and Tegucigalpa.

The same role is played by the so-called "progressive" liberal media, which has uniformly lined up behind the US campaign against the ruling faction in Iran. The web site of the *Nation* magazine on Wednesday carried as its lead an article by its Iran correspondent, Robert Dreyfuss, hailing calls by pro-Mousavi forces for new demonstrations. One searches in vain for an article on the events in Honduras. (For more on Dreyfuss, see: *Nation's* man in Tehran: Who is Robert Dreyfuss?")

The American media adheres to no standards and observes no limits in carrying out its function of manipulating public opinion in accordance with the objectives, domestic and foreign, of the American ruling elite. Nothing so clearly demonstrates the decay of American democracy and the "free press" in the United States than the manner in which it lines up behind phony "color revolutions" against regimes deemed inimical to US interests and ignores flagrantly antidemocratic measures by regimes backed by the CIA, the military and the State Department.

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