US pushes for readmission of Honduras to Organization of American States

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On Monday, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called for the speedy readmission of Honduras to the Organization of American States. Her call was directed to the 40th General Assembly Meeting of the OAS, which took place June 6-8 in Lima, Peru.

The OAS suspended Honduras following a military coup that overthrew President Manuel Zelaya nearly one year ago, on June 28, 2009. Zelaya was kidnapped in the early hours of the morning by armed soldiers and forcibly expelled from the country.

The Organization of American States reacted to this—the first coup in Latin America since the end of the Cold War—by suspending Honduras and demanding that the elected president, Zelaya, be returned to power.

The Obama administration publicly condemned the ouster of Zelaya, a wealthy representative of the Honduran elite who had, after coming to office, adopted a populist posture and implemented certain social reforms, while shifting in his foreign policy toward the left nationalist regime of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela.

The US voted for Honduras's suspension from the OAS, but in practice the Obama administration and Clinton worked to block Zelaya's return and to prop up the coup regime.

At the Lima conference, Clinton justified the call for the Honduran suspension to he lifted on the specious grounds that the present regime of President Porfirio Lobo, which replaced the coup regime after the November 2009 election, was democratically elected and is restoring civil liberties in the country.

"We saw the free and fair election of President Lobo," Clinton told the conference, "and we have watched President Lobo fulfill his obligations under the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord—including forming a government of national reconciliation and a truth commission. This has demonstrated a strong and consistent commitment to democratic governance and constitutional order."

This is a tissue of lies. Lobo's election was held under conditions of pervasive repression by the coup regime and the military against all opponents of the military takeover. Opposition newspapers, radio and TV outlets had been closed and numerous leaders of anti-coup demonstrations had been arrested.

Zelaya and every OAS member country with the exception of the US, Canada and Panama denounced the election as a fraud, but Washington hailed it and gave its support to Lobo, a representative of the Honduran elite backed by the military.

Lobo's so-called government of national reconciliation did not include any members of the opposition. A one-sided blanket amnesty protects the coup leaders, many of whom continue to occupy positions of power.

Under Lobo, the repression continues in Honduras. So far this year, 12 trade union militants have been killed at the hands of death squads, the third highest number in Latin America after Colombia and Guatemala. Seven journalists have been killed. Recently, the Supreme Court sacked four sitting judges who had opposed the coup.

The Lobo administration is ratcheting up repression in Honduras to levels unknown since the 1980s, when Washington, which maintains a military based in Honduras, used the country as a staging ground for its Contra war against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

Grahame Russell of the US-based organization Rights Action, which maintains a team of international observers in Honduras, was quoted in a May 26 *Huffington Post* article as saying: "The situation of repression—violations of political and civil rights—is

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very bad. The regime has implemented a policy of state repression, including the activation of paramilitary death squads to threaten, intimidate, terrorize and kill members of the pro-democracy, anti-coup movement."

The "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" touted by Clinton is a transparent whitewash of the military and its co-conspirators in the coup. Among its provisions is the labeling of sensitive evidence as "top secret" and a ban on its public release for 10 years. Former Guatemalan Vice President Eduardo Stein, who heads the commission, has declared that its task is to support "Honduran society in finding ways to strengthen reconciliation," rather than determining culpability. Stein refuses to call the events of June 28, 2009 a coup.

The commission is so transparently biased that even conservative business leaders have criticized it and expressed fears that it will only fuel internal opposition. Adofo Facuse, the president of the National Association of Industrialists, said the findings will "be geared to what the world wants to hear, and not to what really happened in Honduras. I don't have high expectations regarding this question. It won't contribute to reconciliation. On the contrary it will create greater division."

Though Clinton had the support of Colombia, Peru and most Central American countries at the OAS meeting, she did not press for a vote, since it was clear the proposal would have been voted down. Clinton was the only delegate to speak in favor of readmitting Honduras.

Nicaragua, which along with Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina and Ecuador opposed the proposal, unsuccessfully attempted to bring the matter up for a vote at the beginning and conclusion of the summit.

The OAS did make a concession to Washington, agreeing to a Peruvian proposal to send a "high-level" fact-finding commission to "study the political process" in Honduras. Only Venezuela opposed the Peruvian proposal. The commission is to present a report on July 30.

In reality, the opposition to the readmission of Honduras among most OAS member states is half-hearted. The Brazilian delegate, Antonio Aguilar Patriota, spoke for most of those opposed to Clinton's proposal, asking her not to hurry matters and stipulating as Brazil's major demand that Zelaya be allowed to resume political activities in Honduras. This position was seconded by OAS General Secretary José Miguel Inzulza of Chile.

Last year's coup took place as Hondurans were about to vote on a referendum on whether to hold a constitutional convention coinciding with the presidential elections set for November 2009. The president of the Senate, Roberto Micheletti, took over as interim president.

A wave of brutality and repression followed, as thousands of workers, students and peasants took to the streets in Tegucigalpa and other Honduran cities demanding Zelaya's restoration.

The Obama administration not only maintained its military base in the country, it refused to legally define Zelaya's ouster as a coup d'etat, so as to evade US laws that would have required it to sever its military and economic aid to the coup regime.

Zelaya and his supporters in the OAS, including Chavez, Ortega in Nicaragua and Morales in Bolivia, worked to contain the anti-coup movement in Honduras and subordinate it Zelaya, while impotently appealing to Washington to intervene against the coup regime.

There can be little doubt that the US had foreknowledge of the coup plans and gave the go-ahead for the Honduran military to oust Zelaya. In any event, the role of the Obama administration was to legitimize the coup regime and pave the way for the election in November of a pro-US government effectively run by the US-trained and financed military.

Clinton's campaign at this week's OAS summit for Honduras's readmission underscores the role of Washington in the ouster of Zelaya and the installation of a regime more directly subservient to US imperialism.

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