

Amid mass protests, Honduran government and Trump administration seek to impose fraudulent re-election

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A full week after the Honduran general elections were held on Sunday, November 26, the country's electoral tribunal (TSE) has announced that the current president, Juan Orlando Hernández, has been re-elected.

The ham-fisted electoral fraud, marked by the protracted delay in the vote count, a sudden shift in the electoral results and other inconsistencies, has fueled widespread indignation. This latest vote fraud follows the US-backed military coup in 2009 and a 2015 Supreme Court ruling, also supported by Washington, approving Hernández's unconstitutional run for re-election.

After initial results showed the Opposition Alliance against Dictatorship candidate, Salvador Nasralla, with a consistent five-point lead—even with 71.4 percent of the voting centers computed—a 36-hour suspension of the vote count, and a subsequent system shut-down in the TSE building, the results shifted dramatically to eventually give Hernández a victory of 42.98 percent against 41.39 percent, supposedly including 99.96 percent of voting centers.

Even one of the TSE magistrates, Marco Ramiro Lobo, declared last Sunday, “Everything has to be checked, the system failed for 10 hours and damaged one of the servers, everything has to be investigated and the company that was hired needs to be questioned.”

Moreover, the day before the vote, the *Economist* reported on a two-hour-long audio of a National Party training session for representatives in the polling stations, in which the participants get instructed on “Plan B”: five methods to rig the election, including permitting multiple votes, spoiling ballots and tally sheets favorable to the opposition, and most importantly, inscribing themselves as representatives of smaller parties.

Once the results began to shift in favor of Hernández on Wednesday, the popular distrust and anger seething beneath the surface began to overflow. Marches, roadblocks and other protests against the ongoing electoral fraud have taken place across the entire country, with tens of thousands marching peacefully last Sunday in the largest cities of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa.

On Friday, the government imposed a state of emergency and a 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew for 10 days, granting special powers to the military to arrest protesters, even during the day. Over 600 people have already been detained.

While the repression is expected to escalate after yesterday's

announcement of the final results, on Sunday, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights announced that preliminary reports indicate that 11 people have already been killed in demonstrations. According to the Honduran press, more than 40 have been injured, many of them shot by the security forces.

One of the most egregious killings was that of 19-year-old Kimberly Dayana, whose sister described her death Saturday as follows: “Some military police officials came out of the bushes firing erratically and killed her with a shot to the head.” In Pedregal, a Tegucigalpa suburb, a video shows military personnel shooting live rounds at protesters, leaving six injured, including a minor.

In response, Nasralla and Manuel Zelaya, the ex-president overthrown in 2009 and now a leader of the Alliance, have split their week between offering reassurances to US imperialism, the Honduran military and the business elite, and trying to keep the social anger channeled behind their electoral aims.

Last week, in a demonstration of complete subservience to Washington and Wall Street, Nasralla promised to deepen military ties and judicial cooperation with the Trump administration. Moreover, in an interview by the Chilean *La Tercera*, Nasralla, who studied in Chile between 1970 and 1976, was asked whether he admired any regional leaders. He answered: “Since I had the opportunity to be in Chile right when Mr. Pinochet came in, I saw the situation of the country, it was bad and I saw how economists in his government rescued the country economically... turning it into a Latin American power.”

These extraordinary statements—evidence of the undemocratic basis of neocolonial rule in the country regardless of which bourgeois faction is in power—are a of piece with Nasralla's delight that business associations congratulated him on his initial apparent victory and his appeals to the military to “save the Honduran people from the violence of the electoral tribunal.”

At the same time, the Alliance coalition has been calling for protests, and Zelaya's LIBRE party even called to set up a “paro” or roadblocks across the country for the rest of the week. They are calling for either another round of elections or a “special scrutiny” of the 5,174 tally sheets computed after the results started shifting.

For their part, the TSE, the corporate press, and the Trump administration, which favors continuation of Hernández's rule,

have been putting the pieces together to impose the official results and legitimize a massive crackdown against the protests.

Despite the millions of dollars spent to prepare these efforts, however, the regime is facing serious problems. This includes the fact that most of the military and police forces come from the rural and urban poor. An initial reflection of this was seen yesterday, when a group of the US-funded and SWAT-trained special forces, “Los Cobras,” declared themselves on strike, refusing to obey orders to carry out repression. “We are part of the people and can’t kill our own people, we have family,” said a spokesperson for those in rebellion.

As part of the efforts to back the re-election of Hernandez, according to a document obtained by Reuters Monday, the Trump administration has certified that Honduras has fulfilled human rights and anti-corruption requirements to receive its share of the \$655 million in US funds as part of the Obama-era Alliance for Prosperity plan. The program is aimed at further militarizing the region and preventing migrants from escaping the violence and extreme poverty gripping the Northern Triangle, which also includes El Salvador and Guatemala.

John Kelly, who was promoted from secretary of Homeland Security to become Trump’s chief of staff, is now in charge of overseeing the implementation of what constitutes a tightening of the control of Washington, and particularly the US military, over Honduran and regional politics.

In a 2015 interview, General Kelly, then head of the US Southern Command, shed some light on his approach. “The only functioning institutions that exist today are the militaries,” he stated, boasting that he had the power to call upon any president to step down.

In Honduras, the last two years have seen a massive drop in foreign direct investment, exports and capital formation, paired with a jump in unemployment, inequality and multidimensional poverty, calculated at 74.3 percent by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC).

Moreover, the Hernández administration has imposed draconian IMF austerity diktats since 2014 that have gravely eroded the thin social provisions to the 18 percent of Honduran workers that benefit from the pensions and healthcare offered by the Social Security Institute (IHSS). At the same time, Honduran dollar bonds have turned into some of the most profitable for Wall Street.

As a result of the state of continuous war and the legacy of US-backed military dictatorships and counterinsurgency operations in Central America during the 1970s and 1980s—based primarily in Honduras—today, both the US and Honduran military brass occupy leading political and executive positions in their respective financial and corporate elites. This has been reflected in the fact the two axes of the anti-immigrant Alliance for Prosperity plan are a buildup of security forces and measures to “open their economies to more investment,” as Kelly himself announced earlier this year.

After the three decades of military dictatorships and US client regimes, under the Liberal or National parties, Honduras and other war-torn Central American countries underwent a “democratic” transition in the 1990s, during which a veneer of “civilian” rule and miserable increases in social spending was placed on the still-

dominant, US-backed military apparatuses.

A particularly pernicious expression of the essential continuity of the old regimes has been in the form of death squads composed largely of state forces, whose killings of activists and local leaders have spiked in recent years.

During the second half of the Liberal government of Manuel Zelaya, the “civilian” trappings assumed characteristics that Washington and the Honduran oligarchy considered unacceptable, particularly in the form of deals to get cheap oil from the Chavez government in Venezuela. Thus, Zelaya was removed in a 2009 military coup supported by the Obama administration, which installed a military-led regime initially under the Liberal Roberto Micheletti and then under the National Party President Porfirio Lobo.

Today, most of the support behind the Opposition Alliance is based on two illusions: that a removal of Hernández will lead to a strengthening of democratic institutions, including a curtailment of corruption, and that a Nasralla administration will bring back the minor initiatives in terms of social assistance and contributory programs that were seen during the second half of Zelaya’s presidency.

However, to slow down the austerity measures demanded by the US and international bondholders—not to speak of expanding social programs—would require a frontal challenge to the fundamental interests and repressive apparatus of the Honduran oligarchy and its imperialist bosses in Washington and Wall Street.

Neither Zelaya, Nasralla nor any section of the country’s neocolonial bourgeoisie intends to or is capable of pursuing this necessary road to lift the desperate economic and social conditions of the Honduran masses.

The working class in Honduras needs to organize independently of all parties and the trade-unions that not only serve the ruling elite and imperialism, but were set up by its agencies, including the AFL-CIO and the CIA. However, it cannot confront such forces alone, especially since they have grown even more belligerent as warnings of financial bubbles mount, social opposition grows and tensions between major powers worsen.

Honduran workers, leading all the oppressed layers behind them, can only advance their interests by uniting with their class brothers who face the same corporate and financial elites in the United States, the rest of Latin America and internationally, in a common struggle against the source of economic inequality, war, corruption and dictatorship: the capitalist system.



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