

Honduran “leftist” president-elect bows to Washington over Taiwan

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One week after her landslide victory at the polls, Honduran president-elect Xiomara Castro, universally described by both the corporate media and the pseudo-left as a “leftist” and “socialist,” has passed a litmus test imposed by Yankee imperialism with flying colors.

Top officials in her incoming government, including vice president-elect Salvador Nasralla, have declared that the new administration has no intention of delivering on Castro’s campaign pledge to cut Tegucigalpa’s ties to Taiwan and “immediately open diplomatic and commercial relations” with the Chinese government in Beijing.

The Biden administration, which has publicly embraced Castro’s election, brought strong pressure to bear upon her and her Liberty and Refoundation (Libre) Party to halt any move to join the vast majority of the governments of the world in acknowledging the obvious: that the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which rules over 1.4 billion people, and not the regime on Taiwan, an island with the population of 23.5 million, is the government of China.

Brian Nichols, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, made a peculiarly timed visit to Tegucigalpa on the eve of the election with the twin aims of dissuading Washington’s longtime client, the corrupt, right-wing narco regime of President Juan Orlando Hernández, from stealing the election, and convincing Castro to drop her China policy.

Beijing charged Washington with “bullying” Honduras over the issue, accusing Washington of continuing its long history of “hegemonic behavior” in the region.

Honduras is one of just 15 countries, most of them in Central America and on small islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific, that still recognize Taiwan as a sovereign nation. With a population of just under 10 million, Honduras is, after Guatemala, the second-largest of these countries.

Washington itself recognized the PRC as China’s legitimate government in 1979. Adopting a “One China” policy, it closed down its embassy in Taipei and opened a new one in Beijing as a precondition for exploiting the opening up of China for lucrative capitalist investment. It has been half a century since the United Nations adopted a resolution recognizing Beijing as the legitimate representative of China and ending the claim by

the dictatorship of the Kuomintang (KMT), which seized control of Taiwan after its defeat in the 1949 revolution, to China’s UN seat.

Yet US imperialism has maintained and escalated a rearguard campaign to prevent the handful of countries that still recognize Taiwan from following the action taken by Washington itself more than four decades ago. Nowhere has this been more intense than in Central America.

Costa Rica, Panama and El Salvador, as well as the Caribbean nation of the Dominican Republic, have all shifted recognition from Taipei to Beijing in recent years, while Honduras and Guatemala have maintained their diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

The Sandinista government that came to power in 1979 moved Nicaragua’s embassy to Beijing. When the right won the 1990 election under Violeta Chamorro, it went back to Taipei. In 2007, Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega returned to power as a born-again Christian, leaving the Taiwan relation alone in an attempt to placate Washington.

While Taiwan has offered aid and Washington has exerted pressure for continued recognition of the regime in Taipei, the opening of diplomatic relations with Beijing has offered Central American countries far more in terms of trade and investment. The call for establishing normal relations with China is not so much an act of self-determination by the servile Central American oligarchies as an expression of the venal self interest of those layers of the national bourgeoisie that believe it will prove more profitable. Other sections fear that any advantage will be offset by punitive US sanctions.

For Washington, Central America is a battlefield in its preparations for global war with a rising China. It is determined to counter Beijing’s growing influence in what US imperialism regarded for more than a century as its “own backyard,” and is prepared to use every means at its disposal—economic, political and military—to keep Honduras in line.

Taiwan is the most dangerous flashpoint in the US war preparations with China, with revelations of US military units operating on the island and continuous provocative US naval maneuvers in the Taiwan Strait. This has been combined with open discussions within Washington’s military and intelligence apparatus over the prospects of a military confrontation with

China over Taiwan, and moves by the US Congress to roll back the four-decade-old “One China” policy.

For Honduras, maintaining the anachronistic recognition of the regime on Taiwan as the legitimate government of China is not only a humiliating expression of the country’s continued abject subjugation to US imperialism. It is also bound up with the bitter history of coups, savage military dictatorships and near-genocidal dirty wars used to enforce this subjugation and facilitate the plundering of Central America and the super-exploitation of its impoverished masses.

The bonds between the region and Taiwan were forged under the tutelage of Washington in the aftermath of the 1949 Chinese Revolution and the Korean War. In return for falling into line with US imperialism against the People’s Republic of China, the Kuomintang (KMT) regime consolidated by Chiang Kai-shek through a reign of terror on Taiwan offered the Central American regimes aid in carrying out similar operations on the isthmus.

Much of this was done through the World Anti-Communist League (WACL), created by the KMT regime, South Korea’s military dictatorship and the CIA in 1966. It counted among its foremost members dictators ranging from Paraguay’s Alfredo Stroessner to Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua and Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, along with a collection of ex-Nazis, war criminals, death squad leaders, anti-Semites and white supremacists.

In Honduras, its leading members included the rabidly anti-communist Gen. Gustavo Álvarez Martínez, responsible for founding the CIA and Argentine-trained Batallón 3-16 death squad and for granting the US military a permanent military base on Honduran soil.

In Guatemala, Mario Sandoval Alarcón was a leading figure in WACL. One of the leaders of the CIA-orchestrated 1954 coup, he has been described as the “godfather” of Central American death squads, having created the infamous Mano Blanco (White Hand) responsible for murdering tens of thousands in his own country before becoming vice president.

In El Salvador, Roberto D’Aubuisson (known as “Major Blowtorch” for his favorite torture instrument), was a member of the WACL and, like many other Central American military officers involved in mass killings, attended training courses at the Political Warfare Cadres Academy in Peitou, Taiwan.

In the 1980s, the WACL and Taiwan played a central role in the illegal funding operation for the Nicaraguan Contra terrorists run out of the White House basement by Col. Oliver North, in collaboration with Gen. John Singlaub (ret.), the head of the WACL’s US chapter.

As recently as 2015, the government of Taiwan re-gifted five US Blackhawk helicopters to the Honduran military so that they could be used in repressing opposition to the regime that came to power with the US-backed coup of 2009.

The capitulation of Xiomara Castro to Washington’s pressure campaign to continue Honduran recognition of the regime on

Taiwan is the clearest indication that her government will represent no break from the century-old subordination of Honduras to US imperialism.

It is likewise a damning refutation of pseudo-left elements attempting to cast her election as a victory for the workers and oppressed of Honduras, chief among them *Jacobin* magazine, the semi-official organ of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

In a December 3 article, *Jacobin* proclaimed the Honduran election “a defeat for the US.” Describing Castro as a “socialist,” it declared her win part of a “dramatic change currently sweeping Latin America,” citing the recent election of Pedro Castillo in Peru.

This is a deliberate falsification. Castro’s victory was no “defeat” for the US. Washington directly intervened to prevent the rightist Hernández regime stealing the election as it did four years ago. Hernández, whose brother was sentenced to life in prison in the US for drug trafficking, had become a serious liability for US interests.

Castro’s campaign was centered on anti-corruption, the cynical banner employed by Washington itself to tighten its control over the region’s governments and enforce its policies of repressing immigrants and assuring the best conditions for exploitation of cheap Central American labor.

As a faction of the Democratic Party, the interventions of the DSA and *Jacobin* in Latin America are those of “State Department socialists,” conducted in the interests of US imperialism. They are directed at promoting illusions in bourgeois governments which, whatever the populist rhetoric of their leaders, are committed to defending the interests of the national oligarchies and foreign capital.

The bitter lessons of Latin American history have demonstrated the dead end represented by all pro-capitalist nationalist tendencies, long promoted as alternatives to the fight for a genuinely Marxist leadership in the working class. These lessons must be assimilated by workers and youth coming into struggle in Honduras, Peru and across the region. The only way forward lies in the independent struggles of the working class and the building of a new revolutionary leadership, sections of the world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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