

“He may be an S.O.B., but he’s our S.O.B.” ... (34 Hondurans killed, so far)

- <http://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/34-hondurans-killed-so-far>

Below:

“America’s Blind Eye to Honduras’s Tyrant”, by Silvio Carrillo, New York Times, Dec. 19, 2017



America’s Blind Eye to Honduras’s Tyrant

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<https://nyti.ms/2CZuAT9>

“He may be an S.O.B., but he’s our S.O.B.”

That quip — of uncertain origin, but often traced to Franklin D. Roosevelt about Nicaragua’s ruthless dictator Anastasio Somoza — became a shorthand excuse for dubious American foreign policies during the 1930s and the Cold War. It touched policy in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and particularly Latin America. It backfired often — notably in Central America, Cuba, Vietnam and Iran — but was never fully abandoned.

Now it appears that the State Department has given the strategy new life. In Honduras, President Juan Orlando Hernández, having twisted his country's laws to allow himself to seek re-election and having presided over a vote count so suspicious that his opponents and international observers called for a new election, has now officially been pronounced the winner by the country's discredited electoral commission.

That allows him to achieve his second, unlawful, term after all. To all of which, the administration in Washington has turned a blind eye.

Why? Perhaps the Trump administration, like the Obama administration before it, believes Mr. Hernández to be good for Honduras and American interests there. A Honduran military base houses hundreds of United States military personnel. Maybe that outweighs a list of authoritarian actions that Mr. Hernández and his government minister, Arturo Corrales, have committed for years to keep themselves in power.

The list is long: widely documented corruption, illegal changes to the Constitution, documented ties to drug traffickers, attacks on a free press, criminalization of peaceful protests, repeated violations of human rights by security forces, one of the highest crime rates in the world, manipulation of homicide statistics that affect Honduras's access to United States aid and a permissive attitude toward political assassinations.

Full disclosure here: That last outrage — assassination — is a very personal matter for me. Its best-known victim was my aunt, Berta Cáceres. She had become a thorn in the side of Honduras's business elite as she helped organize an indigenous population to oppose a government-sanctioned appropriation of their land to build a dam without the indigenous group's agreement. That appropriation violated a treaty signed by the Honduran government in 2011, as well as a United Nations treaty that protects the right of consultation for indigenous peoples.

Two years ago, my aunt was murdered for her efforts. President Hernández's administration has yet to punish the top conspirators who ordered the killing,

although they have been identified in part by a group of international legal experts carrying out an independent investigation on behalf of my family.

And now he clings to power when he should be stepping down. At one point on election night, Mr. Hernández was losing by 5 percent of the vote with almost 60 percent of the total polling places counted, and Honduras's electoral commission declared the lead mathematically insurmountable. In a festival-like atmosphere, thousands of people filled streets all over Honduras to celebrate.

It seemed that for once, a small Central American nation would manage to dismiss an authoritarian leader in a peaceful election.

Then reality kicked in. The electoral commission, composed predominantly of supporters of Mr. Hernández, suspended announcements about the count for several hours. When its updates resumed, the president was in the lead, setting off deep suspicions of electoral fraud.

Confusion reigned; President Hernández told CNN that the count hadn't stopped, that it had only slowed down. But the commission's president himself said the updates had stopped — because “the server was overloaded.”

At that point, it was clear something was amiss. Statements came flooding in from governments around the world, and some members of the United States Congress expressed outrage at the irregularities. Even some staunch American allies of Mr. Hernández who had helped support his government with millions of dollars in American foreign aid — Representative Norma Torres, a California Democrat, and Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Florida Republican, among them — called for unequivocal transparency from the election commission.

The American Embassy, on the other hand, kept fairly quiet. Heide B. Fulton, the *chargé d'affaires*, currently the highest-ranking American diplomat in Honduras, asked the Honduran people to be calm. This played right into Mr. Hernández's hands; he declared a state of emergency and imposed martial law, securing for himself a wide berth to use Honduras's American-trained security forces to repress opposition.

With help from Mr. Corrales, and from the Washington-based public relations company Keybridge Communications, Mr. Hernández blamed ensuing violence on the opposition, even though the security forces had fired live rounds and killed more than a dozen people taking part in peaceful demonstrations.

Indeed, the protests were peaceful enough to inspire a backlash among some members of the security apparatus; in an elite unit known as the Cobras, some refused to repress protesters and ultimately joined in the demonstrations. Mr. Hernández and his security minister, Julian Pacheco, who reportedly has strong ties to drug trafficking, quickly fired those who rebelled and gave the rest raises. They are now on the job, repressing Hondurans.

On Nov. 28, two days after the election became enmeshed in confusion, the State Department certified that Honduras had made progress in protecting human rights and attacking corruption. This allows for the release of millions of dollars in United States assistance to the Hernández government. Again there were eruptions from some members of Congress, calling out the State Department for appearing to provide Mr. Hernández with a blank check.

Since then, Ms. Fulton has assisted Mr. Hernández by appearing with David Matamoros, the election commission's leader and a confidant of Mr. Hernández, at a commission facility — seemingly legitimizing the problem-plagued process as it continued its slow count for another three weeks until Sunday, when it announced the inevitable: victory for Mr. Hernández.

The story here isn't the machinations President Hernández and his henchmen have used in this election. It's the acceptance of those machinations by the State Department and the American Embassy in enabling Mr. Hernández to stay in power.

This is the tyrannical regime that killed my aunt because she stood up for the rights of Honduran people — rights that include the most fundamental one we in the United States enjoy, the right to choose our elected leaders and hold them accountable.

That is what voters in Honduras were trying to do on Nov. 26. They voted and rejected Mr. Hernández, his cronies and some 80 years of destructive United

States policy: the policy that arms and trains Honduran security forces who commit human rights abuses against their own people; the policy that accepts knowingly flawed crime statistics to help Honduras secure American assistance; and the policy that allows corrupt strongmen to enrich themselves and those around them.

The Trump administration has focused on how to stop refugees from Central America from becoming immigrants to the United States. Indeed, a recent Pew Research report shows that the number of Hondurans fleeing their country each year to the north is rising. So Americans need to ask ourselves: Isn't it time to stop enabling dictators like Juan Orlando Hernández? It's clear that his misrule is what Hondurans have been running from.

(Silvio Carrillo (Silvio.carrillo@gmail.com) is a freelance film and news producer based in California whose work has included coverage for CNN, Al Jazeera English and The South China Morning Post.)

What to do

U.S. and Canadian governments –staunch allies and supporters of Honduran regime since 2009 military coup- must publicly support OAS call for internationally organized and monitored elections.

Please do not write your letters of protest to the Honduran government. Through our denunciations and activism, we have to hold the “international community” – particularly the U.S. and Canada– accountable for their complicity with Honduras' now endemic repression, fraud, corruption and impunity. If political and legal accountability is not brought to bear on the military, economic and political backers of the Honduran regime, the repression, corruption and impunity – and suffering of the Honduran people - will not stop.

- **U.S.:** Call the Capital Switchboard to get contact information for your Senators and Representatives: (202) 224-3121. Get their phone numbers and email addresses. Send them copies of this and other information. Insist that they agree to the demands below. Share your efforts with the media, family, friends and networks.

- **Canada:** Find your MP contact information by entering your postal code here: <http://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>. Get their phone numbers and email addresses. Send them copies of this and other information. Insist that they agree to the demands below. Share your efforts with the media, family, friends and networks.

Demands - short term

U.S. and Canadian governments and elected politicians must:

- support the OAS call for new elections;
- condemn the multiple acts of electoral fraud carried out by government of Juan Orlando Hernandez;
- condemn the repression against anti-electoral fraud protesters and other citizens;
- state that the regime will be held accountable for all electoral fraud and repression taking place;
- suspend all economic, military and police related relations with the corrupt government in power;

Demands - medium and longer term

There must be legislative inquiries in the U.S. and Canada into the causes of Honduras' endemic repression and exploitation, corruption and impunity, with specific focus on the role played by the U.S. and Canadian governments:

- supporting the 2009 military coup;
- supporting and legitimizing fraudulent and violent elections in 2009, 2013 and 2017 (though the 2017 elections remain unresolved);
- supporting the expansion of corporate interests in Honduras (sectors of mining, garment "sweatshop" industry, bananas, hydro-electric dams, tourism, etc.), while turning a blind eye to and – in effect – benefitting from repression, fraud, corruption and impunity.

More information / Get involved

- Rights Action: info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org, www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org, <https://twitter.com/RightsAction>
- Honduras Solidarity Network: <http://www.hondurassolidarity.org/>, <https://www.facebook.com/HondurasSolidarityNetwork>, <https://twitter.com/hondurassol>

- Witness for Peace: www.witnessforpeace.org,
<https://twitter.com/WitnessforPeace>,
- School of Americas Watch: www.soaw.org, <https://twitter.com/SOAWatch>
- La Voz de los de Abajo: <https://www.facebook.com/lavozchicago/>,
[@lavozchicago](https://twitter.com/lavozchicago)

Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.)

- Matching donor: Two anonymous donors will match donations, up to a total of \$35,000, made by December 31, 2017.

Rights Action is sending relief funds to our long-term partner groups in Honduras and other community groups for their community development, environmental and human rights defense work, and their emergency work in response to electoral fraud and repression. Make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- U.S.: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

Credit-Card Donations: <http://rightsaction.org/donate/>

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