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## A Fractured Honduras Celebrates Its Independence

by LADB Staff

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In Honduras on Sept. 16, Independence Day came to a country divided between a proletariat hungering for the return of the president it elected and the national elite the military, private business sector, and de facto government that now claims to legitimately head the state. Legitimacy has become the watchword as the forces of the Roberto Micheletti government seek the international recognition that has entirely eluded them, candidates for upcoming presidential elections seek recognition for the government they hope to lead beginning in January 2010, and the US seeks to legitimize Honduran participation in forthcoming military exercises after having announced a cutoff of the relationship. Regime rights representative removed The de facto regime took delivery on an inescapably clear message that the world intends to keep thwarting its sovereignty claim with the ouster of the Honduran representative from a UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) meeting in Geneva. The expulsion of diplomat Delmer Urbizo came after Latin American countries complained he was representing an illegal regime. On his way out, he shouted in two languages, "We will be back!" They will not be back; their self-bestowed mandate ends with 2009. Besides, Honduras enjoys only observer status at the UNHRC. Council President Alex Van Meuwen later issued a statement that, aside from the clamor for ouster by Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Cuba, he had been informed that representatives of the Honduran government of elected President Manuel Zelaya had told the UN Urbizo did not represent the constitutionally formed government. The UN recognizes only the Zelaya government. Military back in the game On the military front in Honduras, isolation is not all it is cracked up to be. The US, which has espoused some but not all of the global sanctions against the country, has frozen a reported US\$16.5 million military-aid package but has not decisively curtailed the relationship with the military or taken any steps to change its significant military presence in the country. According to reports, the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) has invited the Honduras armed forces to participate in maneuvers that began Sept. 11, the annual Panamax maneuvers, which simulate defense against an attack on the Panama Canal. The event ranks among the largest multinational training exercises in the world. Earlier reports, sourced to SOUTHCOM, had it that Honduras had withdrawn from the war games Aug. 10. Another group seeking global approval is the aggregation of persons standing for the November presidential elections. In many cases through no fault of their own, these people, as of the moment, are running for an office that the world has pledged to shun. The grounds for branding them so lie in the contention that any government elected under the authority of an illegal government is also illegal. Candidates disappoint Six contestants currently vie for Honduras' highest office. In the hope of improving their standing, five of them met with Costa Rican President Oscar Arias in his role as the international community's chief mediator of the political crisis. Included are front-runners Elvin Santos of the Partido Liberal (PL) and Porfirio Lobo of the Partido Nacional (PN). The others are Bernard Martinez of the Partido Inovacion y Unidad (PINU), Felicito Avila of the Partido Democrata Cristiano de Honduras (PDCH), and Cesar Ham of the Partido Unificacion Democratica (PUD). Martinez is noteworthy as Honduras' first black presidential candidate. He is a Garifuna, a special group of early arrivals to the Caribbean coast who have their own language and culture. Arias set the tone a couple of days before the meeting by stressing, "The situation will be precarious for the winner of the elections if the San Jose Agreement is not signed. It's in their interest that

the situation returns to normal." Arias was joined in the statement by the US State Department's Craig Kelly, acting assistant secretary of state, who added his support. Arias explained, "The idea is to speak with them frankly. What good is there for a presidential hopeful in Honduras to win the elections if his future government will not be recognized by the international community and the sanctions will continue or even increase?" Early reports on the meeting indicate the candidates found Arias unpersuasive. Costa Rica's daily La Nacion reported four of them praised the accord but would not press the regime to honor it. They signed a declaration in the end, saying essentially they would go on with the elections as a way to "find the path of reconciliation." Ham, a leftist, declined to sign, flogging his opponents for their refusal to support the accord in word and deed. It is unclear what sway these candidates might have had with the Micheletti regime anyway. So far the de facto leader has resisted enormous pressure including financial and political sanctions that promise to precipitate state failure. Micheletti has categorically rejected the central tenet of the San Jose Accord, the return to office of Manuel Zelaya. Independence from each other The celebration of Honduras' independence from Spanish rule in 1821 did not bridge the rift within even for a day. Separate commemorations were held. Micheletti returned to his theme that nothing short of armed intervention would move him, and, on the other side, thousands marched in the capital to demand their president's return. International messages of congratulation were strained. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told the media, since she had no politically correct address to send her remarks, "I remain hopeful that the spirit of Francisco Morazan, a founder and visionary leader of Honduras, will help return your nation to a democratic path that will unite and inspire, rather than divide and discourage." EU foreign ministers were rather more abrupt, sending a simple warning that they "stand ready to take further restrictive measures against the regime," measures whose consequences will fall, of course, upon the people. Micheletti had his supporters dress in white to mark the occasion of their sovereignty and treated them to a "civic-military parade" within the confines of a half-filled soccer stadium. The Air Force flew its A-37 Dragonflies, T- 27 Tucanos, and F-5 fighters overhead. The Army trotted out all its hardware for review. The police passed in review on motorcycles and on horseback. Micheletti said of the display, "We showed the world that we are together, and most of the people want peace. We want the whole world to listen: this country is independent, it will not be dominated by anyone." On the Zelaya side, first lady Xiomara Castro led the people's protests in the streets of Tegucigalpa, as she has done since the beginning of her husband's exile. Many in the crowd waved the PL's red and white colors, although Micheletti is a PL member, and PL candidate Santos is no great supporter of the president. The explanation is that the party is deeply riven; the most progressive faction belongs to Zelaya. For his part, from exile in Nicaragua, President Zelaya urged supporters to boycott the elections.

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