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Governments And International Institutions Dither, But End To Honduras Coup May Be In Sight

by LADB Staff

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The Honduran coup is well past its third month without resolution. It is soon to become moot, as President Manuel Zelaya's term closes in on its January 2010 end point, and the Sturm und Drang of November elections overwhelm the issue with upheaval regarding the legitimacy of the government they will produce. But before that happens, the issue continues opening rifts and presenting new contentious disputes in the wider world. These divisions include growing disagreement between the US and Brazil, for which latter country the coup offers an opportunity to challenge the globe's most powerful state and further enhance its own influence in international affairs. Even Jewish cultural and political groups have seized the issue to argue Judaism as an ethical heritage versus Zionism. A Zionist organization, the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), is lobbying the administration of US President Barack Obama to reverse its support of Zelaya's return on the grounds that Zelaya is too close to Venezuela, which is too close to Iran, which is too close, allegedly, to developing nuclear capabilities with which to challenge an already nuclear Israel. Pitted against them is the Latino and Latin American Institute of the American Jewish Committee, which contends that the administration's backing for the rule of law to restore US relationships in the hemisphere is the operative consideration. Brazil, meanwhile, has withstood threats against the integrity of its embassy by the Honduran de facto government of Roberto Micheletti in reprisal for allowing Zelaya to take refuge there after his clandestine return to his country (see NotiCen, 2009-09-24). For this act of largesse, the Brazilian government came under fire from the US, which saw the return as, in the words of Lewis Amselem, US deputy permanent representative to the Organization of American States (OAS), "irresponsible and senseless." Amselem appeared to throw the gauntlet at the feet of Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in saying, "Those who facilitated the return of President Zelaya in the present conditions have a special responsibility to prevent violence." Brazil has acknowledged its responsibility not to precipitate violence by ruling out sending troops to protect its embassy. But this dispute is likely to play out more importantly in the UN Security Council than in the OAS. An IPS story said that the imbroglio could work to Brazil's advantage in its quest for a permanent seat. In deciding to support Zelaya's return and guarantee his welfare, Brazil has "stopped being the friendly behind-the-scenes conciliator and has decidedly joined the leadership game," political scientist Clovis Brigagao told IPS writer Mario Osava. Brigagao is director of the Centro de Estudos das Americas (CEAS) at the Universidade Candido Mendes in Rio de Janeiro. He said Lula has finally shown his "leader face" and stands to win big if things turn out well in Honduras. This is a new phase in Brazil's more aggressive international presence, which includes a large increase in military spending and a new strategic alliance with France involving the purchase of a lot of military hardware (see NotiSur, 2009-09-11). For Brigagao, this is significant as a convergence of diplomacy and defense that has not previously been part of Brazilian foreign policy. He recalled Zelaya's very recent trip to Brasilia as a possible precipitant. One door opens, another closes. Opening the embassy doors to Zelaya enhances Brazil's standing in the world community because it shows the country acting on behalf of democratic principles and working to ensure regional stability. Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP) political scientist Tullo Vigevani said

that to do otherwise would set a negative precedent. Since the OAS adopted the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001, coups are not recognized on the basis of their having taken control of a nation. For all this, Brazil emerges as a fit contender for a permanent place on this small but most important of international organizations. Simultaneously with the opening of the embassy doors, Brazil closed the door to any negotiations with the de facto government, also on principle. There could be no talks, because, essentially, Micheletti's group is not a legal government. Brazil could not, therefore, respond to a ten-day ultimatum for the Ministerio das Relacoes Exteriores (MRE) to grant Zelaya asylum or face a shutdown of its diplomatic headquarters in Honduras. Zelaya has "sui generis status" in the compound. As such, explained Luciana Diniz of the Centro de Direito Internacional (CEDIN) in Belo Horizonte, Brazil has "a sovereign right" to take him or anyone else in. There is no interference in Honduran affairs either by Zelaya's presence or by that of the many journalists and supporters accompanying him. Zelaya exercised the freedom his status afforded him by addressing the UN General Assembly by phone, cell phone actually, because the regime cut the land lines along with utilities and water to the embassy. Zelaya told the body, "Those who harbored any doubt that a dictatorship has been installed here can lay those doubts to rest. This is a fascist dictatorship that has repressed the Honduran people." His phone call drew sustained applause from the assembly. The president's Minister of Foreign Affairs Patricia Rodas held the phone at the rostrum, after which she spoke for half an hour on the abuses of the Micheletti regime, commenting, "Honduras is becoming an enormous prison; it is becoming an enormous concentration camp." Extreme decrees The Micheletti forces have done much to reinforce Rodas' view. In the week past, they shut down radio stations and issued a decree outlawing unauthorized meetings of more than 20 people. The media shutdown included Radio Globo, the station that seemingly had reporters and commentators everywhere in Honduras and that has kept the world informed at ground level through its Web site. The other was TV Channel 36, also critical of the regime. Of necessity, the stations stayed off the air, but opposition leaders are ignoring the prohibition on free association. Spurred on by Zelaya from inside the embassy, protesters organized by the Frente Nacional de Resistencia contra el Golpe de Estado continued to agitate at the Universidad Pedagogica Francisco Morazan despite being surrounded by soldiers and police who have so far demonstrated some restraint. Frente leader Obdulio Fuentes said the media shutdowns have severely hampered their ability to organize. "We are looking for new strategies of struggle because this decree robs us of opportunity, cutting communication with others," he told the international press. The regime has seemed impervious to any international criticism or call for resumption of civil liberties but most recently has hinted at a disposition to relent. It wasn't the abusiveness that concerned them. Micheletti told the local media that he was prepared to rescind the decree because, "We're worried that this decree could affect the elections. If it's necessary, we'll revoke it." After hammering away at the fracture lines within the OAS, Micheletti has again invited a delegation to Honduras; arrival date, subject to change, is Oct. 7. The regime just finished slapping the OAS in the face with a similar invitation, only to turn four diplomats back at the airport when they arrived on the weekend. The passivity with which the organization has accepted the de facto regime's arbitrariness regarding these visits has only deepened the rifts. Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Venezuela have been most outspoken on OAS timidity. Venezuelan Ambassador to the organization Roy Chaderton has singled out the threats against the Brazilian embassy as something to be "condemned, not lamented." Nicaragua's Ambassador to the OAS Dennis Moncada charged the US with "duplicitous diplomacy" for calling Zelaya and company irresponsible, while he chided Micheletti for insulting the international community. It was, apparently, all OAS Permanent Council president Pedro Oyarce could do to keep the members on track, stressing the importance of not missing the political

moment in the search for a position that would not sunder organizational unity. His efforts were not entirely successful. A meeting on the question of accepting the results of the pending election went ten hours without resolution. The meeting was originally called to discuss what to do about the rejection of the envoys at the Honduras airport. The failure is one more in a string of missteps leading to the conclusion that the OAS does not know what to do and, even if it did, lacks the power to do it. Reports say that the US, Canada, The Bahamas, Costa Rica, and Peru blocked the move to make a formal and decisive OAS statement on the recognition of the election results, while many of the 33 member states have already said they would not recognize any government elected under the aegis of the regime. Brazil's representative was livid, insisting that the organization must respond to the threat to international peace that the regime poses "in an unequivocal absolutely categorical manner." Ambassador Rui Casares e Silva used the opportunity to tie the matter to the UN Security Council, urging the OAS to refer it there. But OAS Secretary-General Jose Miguel Insulza rejected the proposal, claiming that this is a question of reestablishing democracy, and the OAS is the only organization with the mechanisms to deal with it. It could end where it started. The experience of the last three months casts the blackest of clouds over Insulza's assertions. Before the OAS finds the handles on its mechanisms, the latest news suggests the problem might end where it began, with the power elites in the Honduran private sector. Adolfo Facusse, president of the Asociacion Nacional de Industriales (ANDI), has signaled that he has had enough of the present experiment and has proposed a solution wherein Zelaya would return to office under limited circumstances and a multinational force of some 3,000 soldiers, either UN peacekeepers or a force made up of troops from conservative nations, would enter the country to ensure that the president does not overstep his limitations. Facusse was inconvenienced when the US turned him back to Honduras from the Miami International Airport on Sept. 13 and is said to believe Micheletti went too far with his decrees. Micheletti, who depends wholly on the backing of the elites, said he is considering the terms, some of which he called impossible, but others of which have merit in his estimation. The proposal also has the backing of right-wing presidential candidate Porfirio Lobo Sosa, who has told the media the Congress would not be a problem in the solution. "If we have to reform some laws, I don't think Congress is going to be an obstacle," he said. His Partido Nacional (PN) has 55 seats in the legislature, and there is little chance of dissent from Micheletti's Partido Liberal (PL).

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