

Democracy Under Siege

By Maxim Nikolenko.

Juan Orlando Hernández, the acting president of Honduras, is poised to serve a second term after the country held elections on November 26. To strengthen his chances of victory, democracy in Honduras was suspended. The U.S-trained security forces have enforced a curfew, and Washington remains silent.

Everything started when the main opposition figure, Salvador Nasralla, was proclaimed **leading** Mr. Hernández and taking 45.7 percent of the votes against the 40.2 percent attained by the ruling candidate. David Matamoros, president of the electoral court, made this announcement in the early hours of Monday 27 November. After counting 57 percent of the ballots, the court went silent for 36 hours. As the assessment resumed, Nasralla has suddenly started losing his edge over Hernández.

This transformation was depicted quite instructively in the **article** published by the British Broadcasting Corporation on November 30.

**Tuesday 28 November, 18:15 local time with 65.7% of votes counted:
Salvador Nasralla leads by 3.3 percentage points (72,697 votes)**

**Wednesday 29 November, 16:58 local time with 82.9% of votes counted:
Juan Orlando Hernández leads by 0.1 percentage points (2,911 votes)**

**Thursday 30 November, 05:00 local time with 88.8% of votes counted:
Juan Orlando Hernández leads by 0.8 percentage points (22,677 votes)**

Thousands of Hondurans took to the streets to protest the rigged election results. Their suspicion is indeed highly justified. Just a few days before Hondurans went to the polls, the New York Times published an **opinion piece** written by a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Jan Schakowsky. One particular paragraph in her article is very revealing.

It's possible that Mr. Nasralla would win a free and fair election, as there is plenty of opposition to Mr. Hernández's re-election - nearly two-thirds of Hondurans oppose re-election. But Mr. Hernández's and his allies control the much-protested ballot-counting process, the election oversight commission, the army - which under Honduran law moves the ballots - and all appeals processes. Given his total control over the election process, we can't expect him and his corrupt manipulators to allow a free and fair election to decide their fate.

Speaking about the opposition of Hondurans to "Mr. Hernández's re-election", Schakowsky outlines that such a process is strictly prohibited under the country's Constitution. In fact, a sitting president is required to be impeached if he attempts to run for a second term. "Just eight years ago," she writes, "former president Manuel Zelaya was ousted after planning to hold a nonbinding referendum on whether to change that article of the Constitution."

What Schakowsky did not mention, however, is that president Manuel Zelaya was ousted in an undemocratic military coup. Holding high support from his people, the left-leaning president from the Liberal Party of Honduras (LPH) was threatening the interests of local narco-bourgeoisie class and Washington. His attempts to enhance the country's bilateral relations with Venezuela and its popular leader, Hugo Chavez, was an unforgivable move.

As examines a chapter in the book called the WikiLeaks Files, when Zelaya sought to make changes in the Constitution, "what ranked the powerful about Zelaya's proposals for reform was who was behind them, and the nature of his project." Thus "what seems to have happened is that, after an evaluation of the options, and some internal arguments, the US government resolved that restoring Zelaya would be a greater evil than accepting a regime that America's partners - the Honduran elites - evidently wanted."

Indeed, the fact that Zelaya enjoyed support from his people did not matter. As democracy was overthrown, he was unceremoniously removed from the presidential

palace in the capital Tegucigalpa. Still, in his pajamas, Zelaya was transported to the airport and deported to Costa Rica.

A regime which America's partners evidently wanted to see in power comes from the National Party of Honduras (PNH), a conservative right-wing political movement, benign to the neoliberal economic doctrine and American empire. While Zelaya was in power, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has cut **funding to Honduras** from \$81 million in 2006 to \$44 million in 2009. This trend reversed dramatically under the leadership of PHN, though its election to power in 2009 was widely viewed (even in the Western press) as a move to legitimize the illegitimate. The post-coup political environment has also facilitated a surge in violence, or the War on Drugs, as it is called. To borrow the findings of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, **the murder rate in Honduras** soared from 60.8 per 100,000 people in 2008 to 81.8 in 2010, 91.4 in 2011 and 90.4 in 2012. In the meantime, the USAID has provided Honduras with generous grants topping \$127.5 million in 2016.

Juan Hernández was elected president in 2014, representing the technocratic establishment of the PNH. It is worth noting that Hernández has not burdened himself with a referendum to change the Constitutional law on re-election. In 2014, a lawmaker from the PNH **presented a petition** to the Supreme Court, an organ controlled by members of the ruling party. The petition argued that a Constitutional ban on re-election violates human rights. The issue was resolved. Thus Schakowsky was right when she argued that the Honduran president and his party retain an authoritarian grip on power. Indeed, the Constitutional law was only a challenge for a leader whose agenda conflicts with that of Honduran oligarchs and their spiritual partners from North America.

It is thus foreseeable that a popular support for Salvador Nasralla, a left-leaning candidate from the opposition which was overthrown in 2009, was to be suppressed. In the corporate Western media, his lead in the early count has been reported as a surprise. On November 27, Mr. Nasralla's lead was reported in the New York Times with the following headline: "In Honduras Election, Ex-Sportscaster Takes Lead over President." Something went utterly wrong, indeed. "Hernandez, an ally of the U.S.,

had gone into the election predicted to win,” explains the Washington Post.

An [article](#) on Reuters describes Nasralla as a ghost of Zelaya, “a traditional Latin American leftist.”

“Zelaya, widely viewed as a traditional Latin American leftist due to his previous friendship with Chavez, commands considerable concern in Washington. Many observers believe him to be the true power behind Nasralla’s coalition.”

As public discontent grew over the stolen election, the military went to suspend democracy and enforced a curfew on December 1. Their action failed as hundreds of elite police forces refused to suppress the rights of their people. Daily protests calling for the resignation of Hernández continued.

The Honduran people are fighting for their democracy.

Just recently, the Organization of American States requested the Honduran electoral commission to recount the ballots. The government agreed and the votes had been recounted. While this article is written, the electoral court emphasized that the results were “extremely consistent” with an initial outcome. In the final count, Hernández won 43 percent of the votes and Nasralla 41.4 percent. The winner, however, still hasn’t been named. Salvador Nasralla and thousands of Hondurans are refusing to accept the results.

Conspicuously, a question arises: was the recount an attempt to legitimize the illegitimate?

The court has only 30 days from the election to declare a winner, and that final decision will almost certainly be in favor of the ruling president. As it did in 2009, Washington remains silent on the matter. At least 500 American troops are stationed in the country and the empire is interested in maintaining the status quo.

An intrusion of American empire into the political processes of foreign governments is not a novelty, nor is its choice to align itself with the bourgeoisie class over people. In fact, in Latin America, the U.S. retains a particularly grotesque record of suppressing the democratic movements of its 'backyard' neighbors.

Maintaining a policy of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States has developed a variety of intricate methods to propel its interests in the region. As an example, it is worth examining one particular case from Nicaragua. There, the United States has been fighting a popularly supported socialist government of Sandinistas in the 1980s, arming and funding the Contras, whose fighters reigned terror against the defenseless peasants in the countryside, killing thousands of civilians and leaving a country devastated. Peace was only restored when the Sandinista National Liberation Front (SNLF) was no longer governing Nicaragua.

Sixteen years after the war, however, the SNLF has made a comeback, with Daniel Ortega elected president in 2006. The United States has been working overtime to prevent this from happening. Published by WikiLeaks, the cables from the U.S. embassy in Nicaragua have revealed the empire's covert action to influence the democratic process in the country. It is worth borrowing the findings of Alexander Main, Jake Johnson and Dan Beeton, who did a substantial research on the matter for a chapter about Latin America in the book [The WikiLeaks Files](#).

From all the candidates participating in 2006 election, the United States had focused on propelling Eduardo Montealegre, a candidate from the conservative Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), to power.

Six months before the election, the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua, Paul Trivelli, sent a cable to the State Department with the following updates.

The USG should encourage support of democratic candidates by encouraging funds to flow in the right direction; promoting defections of salvageable individuals from the PLC camp; granting Montealegre high-profile meeting in the United States; bringing internationally recognized

speakers to discuss successful reform campaigns; and countering direct partisan support to the FSLM from external forces (notably Venezuela and Cuba). [06MANAGUA1105]

In another cable. Trivelli pointed that the mission was to outline the crimes committed by the SNLF's Daniel Ortega and Arnaldo Alemán, a former president and a corrupt politician of the Constitutionalist Liberal Party (PLC).

In preparation for the November 2006 national elections in Nicaragua, post has developed three "rap sheets" on the records of Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista party (FSLM) and Arnaldo Aleman, highlighting their systematic crimes and abuses.

...

"Post intends to use the information from these rap sheets in discussions with domestic and international interlocutors as a means of reminding Nicaraguan voters and others of the true character of Aleman, Ortega, and the Sandinistas. [06MANAGUA1002]

Less than two months prior to the vote, Trivelli emphasized in a cable that the election of FSLM candidate could damage the country's relations with the United States. The cable also reveals the reason why the U.S. prepared "rap sheets" on the crimes and abuses of Daniel Ortega and Sandinistas.

Ambassador and other senior USG officials have made clear statements to the Nicaraguan public that, while they are of course free to chose [sic] their political leaders, their choice will have a positive or negative impact on relations with the US. Specifically, we have been clear that an administration lead [sic] by FSLM candidate Daniel Ortega could damage Nicaragua's economy if Ortega, as he has stated, attempts to manipulate the market economy, the system of remittances, and the DR-CAFTA framework. [06MANAGUA2116]

Amidst America's attempts to influence the opinion of Nicaraguan public, Eduardo Montealegre received 29 percent of the **votes** against 38.1 percent attained by Mr. Ortega. The FSLM won the election.

Hondurans have also expressed their choice at the ballot box. Making the voice of the bourgeoisie class and the geostrategic interests of American empire stand superior to the will of a majority of people, means ignoring the right of Hondurans to sovereignty and the principles of a democracy.