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**Cover Story 2 - Obama Has the Power-and Responsibility
To Help Restore Democracy in Honduras
By Roberto Lovato
Associate Editor New America Media
BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator**

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Viewed from a distance, the streets of Honduras look, smell and sound like those of Iran: Expressions of popular anger- burning vehicles, large marches and calls for justice in a non-English language- aimed at a constitutional violation of the people's will (the coup took place on the eve of a poll of voters asking if the President's term should be extended); protests repressed by a small, but powerful elite backed by military force; those holding power trying to cut off communications in and out of the country.

These and other similarities between the political situation in Iran and the situation in Honduras, where military and economic and political elites ousted democratically-elected President Manuel Zelaya in a military coup condemned around the world, are obvious.

But when viewed from the closer physical (Miami is just 800 miles from Honduras) and historical proximity of the United States, the differences between Iran and Honduras are marked and clear in important ways: the M-16's pointing at this very moment at the thousands of peaceful protesters are paid for with U.S. tax dollars and still carry a "Made in America" label; the military airplane in which they kidnapped and exiled President Zelaya was purchased with the hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. military aid the Honduran government has been the benefactor of since the Cold War military build-up that began in 1980's; the leader of the coup, General Romeo Vasquez, and many other military leaders repressing the populace received "counterinsurgency" training at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), formerly known as the infamous "School of the Americas," responsible for training those who perpetrated the greatest atrocities in the Americas.

The big difference between Iran and Honduras? President Obama and the U.S. can actually do something about a military crackdown that our tax dollars are helping pay for. That Vasquez and other coup leaders were trained at the WHINSEC, which also

trained Augusto Pinochet and other military dictators responsible for the deaths, disappearances, tortures of hundreds of thousands in Latin America, sends profound chills throughout a region still trying to overcome decades U.S.-backed militarism.

Hemispheric concerns about the coup were expressed in [the rapid, historic and almost universal condemnation of the plot by almost all Latin American governments](#). Such concerns in the region represent an opportunity for the United States. But, while the Honduran coup represents a major opportunity for Obama to make real [his recent and repeated calls for a "new" relationship to the Americas](#), failure to take actions that send a rapid and unequivocal denunciation of the coup will be devastating to the Honduran people - and to the still-fragile U.S. image in the region.

Recent declarations by the Administration - [expressions of "concern" by the President and statements by Secretary of State Clinton recognizing Zelaya as the only legitimate, elected leader of Honduras](#) - appear to indicate preliminary disapproval of the putsch. Yet, the even more unequivocal statements of condemnation from U.N. President Miguel D'Escoto, the Organization of American States, the European Union, and the Presidents of Argentina, Costa Rica and many other governments raise greatly the bar of expectation before the Obama Administration.

As a leader of the global chorus condemning the Iranian government and as one of the primary backers of the Honduran military, the Obama Administration will feel increasing pressure to do much more.

Beyond immediate calls to continue demanding that Zelaya and democratic order be reinstated, [protesters in Honduras, Latin America and across the United States will also pressure the Obama Administration to take a number of tougher measures](#) including: cutting off of U.S. military aid, demanding that Hondurans and others kidnapped, jailed and detained be released and accounted for immediately, bringing Vasquez and coup leaders to justice, investigating what U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, Hugo Llorens, did or didn't know about the coup.

With the bad taste left by the widely alleged U.S. involvement in recent coup attempts in [Venezuela \(2002\)](#) and [Bolivia \(2008\)](#), countries led by Zelaya allies Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, the Obama Administration faces a skeptical Latin American audience.

Latin American skepticism of U.S. intentions is not unfounded. Throughout his administration, Zelaya has increasingly moved left, critiquing certain U.S. actions and building stronger ties to countries like Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia, according to the Council on Hemispheric Affairs. [COHA, a non-profit research organization, wrote in 2005:](#)

While Honduras signed onto the U.S.-led Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in 2004, and the U.S. currently is Honduras' primary trading partner and the source of approximately two-thirds of the country's foreign direct investment (FDI), Zelaya has, within the past year, joined Petrocaribe, Chavez's oil-subsidy initiative, as well as the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), the Venezuelan-led trade bloc. Honduras' Congress ratified its membership in Petrocaribe on March 13, by 69 votes, and Zelaya signed ALBA membership documents on August 22.

The Honduran president has said that apathy on the part of the U.S. as well as by the international lending institutions toward rising food prices and deepening poverty in his country - one of the poorest in the Western Hemisphere, with per capita income around \$1,600 - compelled him to turn to Caracas."

[Obama's meeting with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Monday](#), whose government has been condemned by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other international organizations as one of the worst human rights violators in the hemisphere, both complicates and will be complicated by Sunday's resurgence of militarism in Honduras.

Zelaya, who continues denouncing the coup from Costa Rica, outlined the long term threat to Honduran and U.S. interests in the region, "I think this is a vicious plot planned by elites. Elite who only want to keep the country isolated and in extreme poverty," he said adding that, "A usurper government cannot be recognized by absolutely anybody."

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BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator, Roberto Lovato is a contributing Associate Editor with [New America Media](#). He is also a frequent contributor to [The Nation](#) and his work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Salon, Der Spiegel, Utne Magazine, La Opinion, and other national and international media outlets. Prior to becoming a writer, Roberto was the Executive Director of the Central American Resource Center ([CARECEN](#)), then the country's largest immigrant rights organization. [Click here](#) to contact him or via his [Of América blog](#).

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