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HONDURAN RIOTS REFLECT FAR DEEPER AND MORE PERVASIVE RESENTMENT OF U.S. INFLUENCE THAN TRANSFER OF DRUG LORD TO U.S. AUTHORITIES SHOULD HAVE PRODUCED

- Anti-U.S. riots at U.S. embassy in Tegucigalpa should not have surprised U.S. officials. Growing number of Hondurans harbor simmering anger over their nation's subservience to United States, as exhibited in the massive U.S. military buildup and the government's acquiescence to the contra presence
- Honduran farmers ousted from prime coffee growing land to make room for the contras
- Handing over of Juan Ramon Matta to U.S. authorities, a flagrant violation of the Honduran constitution, on top of the recent deployment of 3200 U.S. troops to country, uncorked latent nationalism
- Honduran Radio America reports that Deputy National Security Adviser John Negroponte delivered a letter, signed by Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams, offering to halt investigations of five Honduran colonels suspected of drug trafficking, if drug lord Juan Ramon Matta would be handed over to U.S. officials
- Negroponte hated in Honduras for his pro-consul role while ambassador to the country, 1981-1985
- Abrams, who shelved drug trafficking investigations against Noriega in 1986, may again be shielding his pro-contra friends, this time in the Honduran military,
- State of emergency declared April 8, resulting in government control of all radio stations, effectively silenced Radio America. No attempt made by military to refute charges of colonels' drug trafficking; instead, security forces detain and interrogate Radio America director and reporter
- Shake-up in Honduran military command coming, say Honduran civilian politicians, with possible ouster of drug-tainted officers
- In a curious coincidence, former chief of the Honduran armed forces, Gen. Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, ousted in 1984 by his senior military colleagues for being too subservient to Washington and not sharing graft, returned to Tegucigalpa on April 9, claiming to be "born again." Recently on a Pentagon contract, he will face outstanding charges against him
- Abrams' firing of Ambassador John Ferch in 1986 indicative of pro-contra role mandated for Honduras

COHA STATEMENT ON HONDURAN RIOTS AGAINST U.S. EMBASSY IN TEGUCIGALPA

Last week's rioting by Honduran students and trade unionists against the U.S. embassy should not have surprised Washington for it is one of the consequences of the unremitting pressure put on Honduras by U.S. officials to accommodate the country to the Reagan administration's contra strategy and become Washington's "unsinkable aircraft carrier" in Central America. The fact that the administration and some embassy officials in Tegucigalpa were caught completely off-guard by the violent demonstration suggests the degree to which the administration is out of touch with Honduran realities. It exaggerated

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its leverage over the nation gained from the enormous amounts of economic and military aid and the lavish CIA bribes paid to key Honduran military and civilian leaders for their cooperation. Reminiscent of the U.S. role in Cambodia and Laos during the Vietnam war era, it is yet another example of how U.S. regional policy goals can help destroy the functioning of a society and cause it to unravel.

The transfer of Matta to U.S. officials, a direct violation of the Honduran constitution, serves as a painful reminder to Honduran citizens of the satellite relationship of their country to Washington. Yet the administration's insensitivity to, or perhaps ignorance of, the deep-seated resentment felt by many Hondurans over U.S. manipulation and corruption of their country's leaders backfired when the riot erupted and Col. Leonel Riera Lunatti, chief of military security, allegedly waited for two hours before responding to U.S. embassy requests for Honduran authorities to control the riot. Riera, whose forces normally would have arrested Matta, was not informed of the operation, and has been accused by Washington of delaying sending troops to quell the disturbance as an act of revenge. It is still unclear what units actually arrested the drug lord. A number of Honduran legislators called the incident a "kidnapping," and the foreign ministry launched an investigation of the procedures that had been followed.

A controversial report broadcast by Radio America, a Tegucigalpa-based network, may have fueled the demonstrators' rage. Radio America reported on April 6 that Deputy National Security Adviser and former ambassador to Honduras John Negroponte had delivered a letter, signed by Elliot Abrams, to President Jose Azcona, which offered to not publicize evidence of drug running by five key Honduran colonels if Matta, a Honduran national, was turned over to U.S. authorities. Negroponte traveled to Honduras March 7-9. The five colonels included the Minister of Defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, commander of the navy, the Director of Intelligence, and the director of the Staff and Command school.

If such a deal was made, and is later confirmed either in congressional hearings or as a result of an investigation by the Honduran foreign ministry, it would once again illustrate that Abrams has engaged in questionable practices aimed at deflecting attention from the drug related activities of U.S.-promoted regional allies of the contras. The Reagan administration's manipulation of Honduras, a main pillar in its Central American strategy, has helped to convert the nation, the second poorest in all of Latin America, from a relatively benign society into one characterized by mounting human rights abuses, internal conflict, media restrictions, and increasingly tense political strife, all of which help to explain the causes of the anti-U.S. rioting.

COHA ANALYSIS OF HONDURAN RIOTS

Many Honduran citizens harbor growing resentment toward Washington, which, since 1980, has treated their country as its "unsinkable aircraft carrier" as the projection of U.S. military power in the region steadily expands. A 20-fold increase in U.S. military assistance between 1980 and 1986 (\$4 million to \$81.2 million) helped to secure the cooperation of the Honduran military, and many millions more in Defense Department funds have been expended to build or improve numerous airstrips, construct military bases and roads, stage at least 52 military exercises since 1980, and sustain a constant deployment of thousands of U.S. army and National Guard troops in the country. The huge U.S. presence was designed to serve the supply and training function of the contras, to pose a threat to Sandinistas and as an infrastructure to support a possible military invasion against Nicaragua, as well as to act as a warning to the Salvadoran rebels. Total 1987 military and economic aid to the Honduras was \$248.5 million.

Because few Honduran officials share the intense anti-Sandinista views held by President Reagan, administration policymakers must regularly twist arms and spread funds to extract collaboration from the country's leaders. For example, John Ferch, former U.S. ambassador to Honduras, admitted he had pressured Honduran President Jose Azcona into requesting \$20 million in "emergency" military aid to repel an insignificant Sandinista border incursion in 1986. Similar pressure was used last month when the administration sought a request from Tegucigalpa for U.S. troops to be sent in response to an "invasion" of Honduras by Nicaraguan units pursuing the contras. Abrams has been indefatigable with his pressure on the Hondurans and fired Ferch because he sought to balance the authentic development needs of the country with the dictates of U.S. policy.

INTERNAL OPPOSITION RISES TO HONDURAN SUBSERVIENCE TO U.S.

While U.S. aid to Honduras has skyrocketed, "the money . . . has favored a small political, economic and military elite," according to a European diplomat quoted in the April 13 issue of the New York Times. "The rest of the people continue to live in hunger and misery, and to them it looks as if the United States is buying their leadership."

Honduran legislators, nationalistic military officers, trade union leaders, university professors and student leaders, human rights and peasant officials all have

voiced increasing concern for the future of their nation's independence and integrity in view of the major U.S. military presence, and the government's collaboration with Washington's contra policy.

Tegucigalpa effectively has yielded sovereignty over large portions of Honduran territory to the contras, forcing the ouster of farmers from key coffee-producing areas. Miguel Antonio Erazo Olivera, president of the Local Council of Coffee Producers, claims that Honduras has effectively lost 60 towns and 450 square kilometers of its national territory in the coffee growing departments of Choluteca and El Paraiso. In a letter presented July 16, 1986 to the Honduran congress, Erazo said that the contras and Nicaraguan refugee families have forced 16,000 Hondurans -- roughly 25% of the country's coffee producers -- to abandon their homes and farms. Carlos Sosa Coella, leader of the Honduran Party of Innovation and Unity, noted that the contras "control more Honduran than Nicaraguan territory" and that they are "more a danger to Honduras than to the Sandinista government."

VIOLETION OF CONSTITUTION SPARKS RIOT

Matta's transfer to U.S. jurisdiction, which Azcona acknowledged is a violation of the constitution, served as a blatant example of U.S. manipulation of the Honduran government. The long-existing, anti-U.S. ferment erupted on April 7 as anti-American demonstrators set fire to embassy offices, burned 30 cars, and smashed windows in shops and at the Bank of the Armed Forces. Four men and a young girl were killed, and at least ten persons injured. "There has never been a demonstration of such violence and such anti-Americanism" in the country, said a leading newspaper editor in Honduras.

The state of emergency declared the next day gave wide powers to police to prohibit demonstrations, search premises, make arrests, and hold people without charges in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, the country's second largest city, whose residents have been more vociferous in their criticism of Honduras' support of the contras than in the capital.

Early on April 8, Honduran officials forced the nation's 140 radio stations into a nationwide network controlled from the presidential press office. A government communique repeatedly was read, urging calm and initially claiming the violence was instigated by unidentified drug traffickers, and later charging communists as well.

RADIO AMERICA SILENCED; JOURNALISTS INTERROGATED

The takeover of the radio stations effectively silenced criticism by Radio America which had charged that the U.S. had threatened to publish evidence linking five Honduran colonels to drug trafficking if the Honduran government did not hand over Matta. Included among those named by Radio America as facing possible indictment were Col. Wilfredo Sanchez, Minister of Defense; Col. Roberto Martinez Avila, chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff; Col. Leonel Gutierrez Minera, commander of Naval Forces; Col. Roberto Nunez Montes, director of Intelligence; and Col. Carlos Reyes Barahona, director of the Staff and Command School.

The military made no attempt to refute the drug charges, choosing instead to arrest and detain for two hours Radio America's director, Armando Arevalo, and one of its reporters, David Romero Herles. The National Department of Investigations (DNI) demanded that the journalists reveal who leaked the information to them and pressured them not to discuss the disturbances and the drug charges on the network's call-in radio programs.

REPORTS OF UPCOMING SHAKE-UP OF THE HONDURAN MILITARY

Perhaps in response to the alleged narcotics trafficking activities of the five colonels, military leaders have told Honduran civilian politicians that changes in the military command structure are coming. Major decisions by the army, which dominates the weak civilian government in Honduras, are made in the 56-seat Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. It is unclear whether Gen. Humberto Regalado Hernandez, the present head of the Armed Forces and a contra supporter, will retain the top post, as a result of any action taken by the Supreme Council. However, Regalado, who almost certainly had to be involved in the arrest of Matta, could fall with the tainted colonels if the opposition to the action taken against the drug trafficker is widespread among members of the Supreme Council.

Perhaps no more than coincidentally, Gen. Alvarez Martinez, former head of the Armed Forces, returned to Honduras on April 9, one day after the state of emergency had been declared. Alvarez was deposed by his fellow senior officers in 1984 for his failure to share the bulk of the U.S. embassy-supplied graft with his senior colleagues, and his subordination of the Honduran military as an institution to the dictates of former ambassador Negroponte. After leaving the country, he was contracted by the Pentagon to write about low intensity conflict, reportedly receiving a fee of between \$50,000 and \$60,000. Claiming now to be a "born-again" Christian, Alvarez, with his lawyers, will

face outstanding warrants against him, apparently in connection with the assassination plot against former president Roberto Suazo Cordoba. A close aide to Alvarez, Col. Jose Abdenego Rosa, was convicted in 1986 on related conspiracy charges and is serving a 3-5 year sentence in a U.S. prison.

During the period he was commander of the Honduran army, Alvarez was, in fact, the real power in the country. The one man he answered to was not Suazo Cordoba, the weak civilian president. A November 1982 Newsweek article quoted a ranking Honduran military official as saying, "They [U.S. officials] discuss what should be done, and then Alvarez does what Negroponte tells him to do." While ambassador to Honduras from 1981 to 1985, Negroponte oversaw the contra program in Honduras "without any qualms of conscience," according to a Washington insider cited in the Newsweek story.

DRUG TRAFFICKING THREATENS U.S. INFLUENCE ON MILITARY

U.S. influence over the Honduran military may be on the decline since some of its highest officers became involved in drug trafficking with the Medellin drug cartel. The Feb. 12 issue of the New York Times reported that a senior Reagan administration official said, "We can't compete with the kind of money the Colombians are offering, and once the army is corrupted, we can't control it." U.S. officials "fear that Honduran officers profiting from drugs might be willing to make a deal to end or limit Honduran support for the American-backed contras in Nicaragua."

ABRAMS AGAIN AVERTS HIS EYES FROM DRUG TRAFFICKING BY CONTRA ALLIES

The State Department has a history of blocking investigations into narcotics trafficking by its contra-related allies in Honduras as well as elsewhere in the Caribbean basin. The New York Times article further stated that "according to two American officials, the American embassy has opposed efforts by United States drug enforcement officials to thoroughly investigate the [Honduran] army."

In testimony heard recently by the Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Communications, chaired by Sen. John Kerry (D-MA), former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, Francis J. McNeil, charged that the administration subordinated its efforts against drug trafficking to its efforts to oust the Sandinistas from power. "A decision was made to put Noriega on the shelf until Nicaragua was settled," said McNeil, referring to the embattled Panamanian strongman. The State Department chose to ignore the mounting evidence of drug trafficking by Gen. Noriega because he allowed the training of contra troops in Panama and aided the contra program in other ways. One reason why the White House is thought to have finally turned on Noriega may have been the general's eventual failure "to be helpful" with the contra program.

In addition, McNeil testified that Abrams had wanted to oust Noriega in 1986, but later changed his mind, explaining that "someone sold him [Abrams] a bill of goods that Noriega was vital to a contra victory." The persuader may have been indicted former National Security Council staffer Lt. Col. Oliver North, who had plotted with Noriega to arrange a fake shipment of East bloc arms to the Salvadoran rebels which would be "captured" and attributed to the Sandinistas.