



The silent cry of Honduras

By Patricio Zamorano, Senior Analyst at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs

Translated into English by Frederick Mills, Professor of Philosophy, Bowie State University

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On Sunday December 17th, the electoral authority of Honduras, in an act of desperation, sought to legitimize the fraud perpetrated in November's presidential election. The OAS now calls for a repeat of the elections.

The crisis in Honduras is not just a matter of the serious misdeeds of the past weeks or even decade. The really dramatic problem of Honduras is the terrible communication void in which this nation has fallen for the rest of the planet. The country with the highest number of violent deaths per 100,000 in the world; a major hub of drug trafficking under the noses of one of the largest U.S. military bases in Central America; the only country in this new century that has suffered a coup in the traditional style of the 70's; and the nation that has been hit by systematic electoral fraud in the last two elections, seems to be drowning in the indifference of the entire international community.

It seems that Honduras is totally set adrift, without any concrete gesture of real, constructive, institutional reform by its imposed godfather, the United States.

The OAS admits the existence of electoral irregularities

Honduras has the word “scandal” in every corner of its battered institutions. In a chain of events that would take hundreds of pages, everything begins with the recent elections on November 26th, for which organizations such as the OAS have enumerated an enormous amount of irregularities in the electoral context.

First, the candidate of the progressive Opposition Alliance Against the Dictatorship (Alianza de Oposición Contra la Dictadura), Salvador Nasralla, was winning by 5 points, but later, after a suspicious “computer glitch” was restored, the electoral count showed the incumbent president Juan Orlando Hernández

ahead by 40,000 votes. The case of Hernández borders on the comical: on the heels of the great scandal in which his presidency has now fallen, he appeared before the cameras announcing his triumph and emphasizing the “impeccable” nature of the process. In truth, it was indeed an impressive manipulation of the facts.

It is common to hear the usual Honduran political actors opine about how the results of the previous election were directly manipulated; assuming all of these denunciations were certain, the election was won by Xiomara Castro. They spoke this way, casually and openly, of course, without a concrete legal basis. These are, after all, rumors. But now in the recent election the so called rumors have returned with so much more force that they have become concrete facts that even the OAS cannot ignore. This time things proceeded by a similar *modus operandi* before the eyes and patience of the significant presence of election observers. The chronic delays in the count, the surprise outage of the computer system, the subsequent change in what the partial count had been showing. The same scenario obtains: thousands of suspicious votes cast, just as in 2013, and once again the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), declines to audit the ballot forms sent from thousands of polling stations. For example, more than 5,000 forms that the OAS reported were not transmitted by the TSE the night of the elections, a serious act that is impossible to conceal.

Last Sunday evening, December 17, the TSE moved hurriedly in a desperate move to ratify the corrupted results that give the electoral victory to Juan Orlando Hernández, despite an urgent tweet sent by OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro just minutes before TSE's pronouncement. For sure, Almagro was aware of what Hernández had in mind. The Secretary General said: "A lack of certainty brings me to urge [you] not to make irresponsible pronouncements until definitive information of the OAS Observer Mission in Honduras [is made available]."

The government of Hernández ignored the pressure. Afterwards, with the fraud having been consolidated after the announcement of the TSE, Almagro asked with good reason for the elections to be repeated. Here is the relevant tweet: "General Secretariat of the @OEA_ official proposes new elections to guarantee peace and harmony in #Honduras in the face of the impossibility of determining the certainty of the results of the election." It was also announced that the candidate Salvador Nasralla is traveling to Washington to meet with the OAS, the State Department, and human rights organizations, with solid evidence of electoral fraud.

Honduras and Venezuela: different criteria

The case of the OAS is *sui generis*. Notice the great personal energy of its Secretary General Luis Almagro when it comes to his special campaign against the government of Venezuela. Yet in the case of the clear cut scandal of Honduras, Almagro had remained silent until the 6th of December, when in a

communiqué he had to formally denounce the electoral fraud, a move which suggested the possibility of urging new elections. In the face of this absurd and evident electoral fraud, a historic deed, the Electoral Observer Mission (EOM) of the OAS had recognized days before that on account of the fraudulent vote it was unable to ratify winners. But the words of the Mission and the OAS had little echo in the news media throughout the region.

The OAS ought to exercise, by means of an extraordinary effort, every pressure that it can bring to bear and of which it has already given great demonstrations in the extremely personal campaign of Almagro against the government of Venezuela. But the fraud in Honduras is so scandalous, that Almagro would have absolutely no problem with regard to moral legitimacy should he exercise even a small iota of the energy in the case of Honduras as he has wasted against the democratically elected President of Venezuela.

The same argument applies to the agencies of international cooperation. It is their moral and professional obligation to exercise every pressure of which they are capable, considering all the money they have sent to Honduras, to see to it that the fraudulent election of November be annulled and that new elections be called. This time there ought to be an iron grip control over the process to avoid a new fraud. It does not matter who wins in Honduras, the candidate of the left or of the right. But the will of the electorate ought to be respected as sacred.

Face to face with corruption.

If one scratches the surface just a little bit one discovers, in the political and institutional classes in Honduras (over informal conversation at the table, a working dinner, or an academic interview), the immediate emanation of the acidic smell of corruption. One knows everything; everyone knows. The information is so concrete, so openly obvious, that the international observer feels a strange taste on the palate, thinking about the officers of the Embassy of the United States, the functionaries of the OAS, the experts of the agencies of international cooperation, privy, on a daily basis, to the same conversations, to the same scandalous revelations. Why the inaction?

Here are some clues. Months before, interviewing ex president Manuel Zelaya, I asked him: "We all analyze the causes of the coup against your government, but, what do you yourself think, President, led to your ouster?"

Zelaya responded firmly, quickly. "It was on account of Cuba and Venezuela." He was indicating that they did not oust him by force from elected office on account of the issue he advanced before the Constituent Assembly or the struggle to reform the Constitution so that the president could be re-elected. This is the official version of those who backed the coup. Zelaya hit the nail on the head when he indicated that the political and financial class of Honduras, its power intact after two centuries, would never allow a reformist government (either of the left or the right, but principally progressive, as we can glean from recent

events) to survive in Honduras. Even less would these elites allow a government inspired by Chavista or Castrista Bolivarianism, which they identify as the enemy of the socio-economic and political model that guarantees their situation of privilege. The political structure of Honduras, entrenched in the corporate power of the country, is a rigid construct that has never been reformed by a popular revolution, civil war, or process of independence and colonial reform as has the rest of the Americas. In this sense, the social structure of Honduras is much like a neo-feudalism that denies the democratization of access to power and that remains rabidly opposed to the integration of new social and political groups.

Irony: President Hernández was re-elected without a coup

Zelaya has good reason to think this way. He comes from an area of large landowners of Honduras; he was a man of the traditional elite, to the great surprise of the sector to which he had belonged. Just a few years after having ousted him, the same right wing group around the National Party of Juan Orlando Hernández proceeded, once again in full view and scrutiny of the OAS, of the U.S. and of the international aid community, to authorize his own re-election by means of a Supreme Court selected by the President himself.

Without constitutional reform. Without a plebiscite. Without a coup. Without a world scandal. In truth: the silence of the international community is difficult to comprehend.

All of the national and international actors that condemned the consultative plebiscite of Zelaya to ask the Honduran people about reforming the Constitution to permit re-election in 2009 maintained an iron silence when president Hernández did the same thing in 2015. There was no condemnation from the OAS. There were no threats of applying the Democratic Charter and no call for the suspension on Honduras from the Permanent Council. The U.S. did not punish the members of the golpista regime and their functionaries with economic sanctions nor suspend their travel visas. Not one notable effect.

One irregular act among many

This is not the first time the battered Constitution of Honduras has been tarnished by machinations perpetrated by the will of the elite who are in power. The country goes through an enormous institutional scandal each year, authorizing, for example, golpista Roberto Micheletti to be a potential candidate in the presidential election despite being clearly and literally disqualified (presidents of Congress are not able to be candidates for president). But the Constitutional Court of the Supreme Court in 2008 simply ignored the same Constitution and authorized Micheletti to be a potential candidate. Reform by decree.

There are deeds of the past decade that border on the absurd. The same Constitutional Court, in 2008, prevented then Vice President Elvin Santos from

being a potential presidential candidate, because he had been an interim president when Manuel Zelaya left the country. In the primary campaign, Santos found an incredibly ridiculous solution. He named Mauricio Villeda as his candidate-representative, while disseminating in the media that by voting for Villeda, electors would actually be voting for him (Santos) under the banner of the Liberal Party. If Villeda won, Santos would be the candidate. Amazing.

U.S.: A billion dollars, into the void.

The subject of the U.S. is separate chapter. The country to the North has spent an impressive sum of \$1.2 billion on Honduras between 2005 and 2016 (source: USAID). It is on Honduran territory that the United States has one of the largest military bases of Central America, Palmerola. This was the same base where the plane carrying Zelaya had stopped during the 2009 coup in route to expel him from the country. Generous amounts of security related funding flows from the U.S. to the Honduran armed forces and police. And despite this flow of international aid, Honduras is sunk (an irony of the meaning of its name in Spanish: “depths”) in a critical security situation that in some ways constitutes a humanitarian crisis. Thousands of Hondurans are assassinated every year (60 to 88 murders per 100 thousand inhabitants, according to sources, one of the highest rates on the planet). The drug mafia is mixed up with the State and its institutions in a form more profound than Mexico. The police are feared by the prosecutors and ministers, and the gangs terrorize the population in every corner of the country. I have witnessed how lawyers who work for the Judiciary, do not identify themselves to agents of security in the streets in order not to fall victim to possible ambushes perpetrated by the same police.

In an act that does not have an explanation, the injection of resources of the U.S. for the police and armed forces of Honduras, the same forces that ousted Zelaya, is not conditioned with regard to results. The same drug mafias, gangs and assassinations continue without respite notwithstanding the hundreds of millions of dollars spent to no effect. And with a U.S. military base a few kilometers from the capital of the country. Another scandal that does not seem to penetrate the corridors of Washington DC.

A painful poverty

The population of Honduras is so chronically poor, that the traveler can find adults in a grave state of malnutrition, as I saw personally in the Montaña de la Flor, where the vestiges of indigenous tribes survive. In this zone, even the police eat once a day, and the population sometimes goes more than a day without food. According to the World Bank, 66% of Hondurans live in poverty. A social stain on all of the Americas. A shame for the Honduran financial elite.

This entire spectrum of social realities is a product of a political reality that is harmful and toxic to the Honduran population, a reality that emanates from the

very political class in power, supported, sometimes by mere inaction by the U.S., the OAS and the international cooperation community. It appears the experiment of the left represented by Zelaya has significantly radicalized these three establishments. These three actors had mostly decided simply to look the other way in the face of the recent electoral fraud, with the aim of maintaining the most conservative status quo. Already there are several former presidents of Central America subject to judicial processes for flagrant corruption fighting to escape jail. As the electoral irregularities denounced by a report of the Observer Mission of the OAS demonstrates, Hernández has won some years of protection in power, but if the rumors being discussed over the tables of Tegucigalpa or San Pedro Sula are certain, the days of impunity are numbered. Such is the case should an ethical and morally legitimate position somehow be taken by the international community.

By Patricio Zamorano, Senior Analyst at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs

Translated into English by Frederick Mills, Professor of Philosophy, Bowie State University

Senior editorial support by Larry Birns, Director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs

Patricio Zamorano is an academic, political scientist, journalist and television and radio comentator on United States foreign and domestic policy. He has experience as an adjunct professor, speaker, and consultant at various universities and institutions in the Americas, including **Georgetown University** (*Center for Latin American Studies* and *Center for Intercultural Education and Development*), **The George Washington University** (*Graduate School of Political Management*), **Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) foundation**, **National University of Panamá**, **National Autonomous University of Honduras**, **Catholic University of Guayaquil (Ecuador)**, **Catholic University of Córdoba (Argentina)**, **Institute of Journalism José Martí (Havana University, Cuba)**, and the **National University of Argentina**, among others. He is also founder and Executive Director of <http://www.infoamericas.info>.

Featured Image: Honduras after the release of the electoral results, by Wendy Fuentes.