

THE NEXT HONDURAS

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While I was off gallivanting in England, Paraguay had a coup.

Mind you, the oligarchs who staged the coup against populist Fernando Lugo cloaked it in legalistic niceties—though they're about as convincing as (and may have taken their cue from) the Clinton impeachment.

But those legalistic niceties are not persuading Paraguay's neighbors, who are considering ways to pressure the government in response.

Neighboring leftist governments were rallying to support Mr. Lugo. Argentine President Cristina Kirchner called the impeachment process a coup and recalled her country's ambassador to Paraguay "until democratic order is re-established," the foreign ministry said in a statement Saturday.

Regional economic powerhouse Brazil condemned the impeachment and called back its ambassador for consultations while it weighs its response. The blistering pace of the impeachment proceedings didn't give Mr. Lugo a chance to prepare an adequate defense, compromising "the fundamental pillar of democracy," Brazil's foreign ministry said in a statement. The Brazilian statement said that "the rupture of the democratic order in Paraguay" would be evaluated by regional trade and political groups, including Mercosur, a trade bloc comprising Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.

What's most striking to me is the widespread recognition—even at the WSJ—that this bears similarities to the 2009 Honduran coup.

Mr. Lugo's impeachment raises the specter of a repetition of the long diplomatic hiatus that followed the coup that deposed Honduran President Manuel Zelaya in 2009. Honduras wasn't readmitted to the Organization of American States until mid-2011.

Which makes Democracy Now guest Greg Grandin's comments about those similarities particularly worth noting.

GREG GRANDIN: Well, it was interesting. The first interview, I take, was before the Honduran coup in 2009, when Lugo said that a coup would be unthinkable. And so, Honduras—it shows you how Honduras kind of changes the rules of the game, emboldened the right, presented new tactic, new ways of limiting this kind of—

[snip]

AMY GOODMAN: Or I should say President Obama, initially, actually, said that it was not legitimate.

GREG GRANDIN: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: But then they—

GREG GRANDIN: But then, eventually, legitimated it over a long, torturous process. In the case of Paraguay, the administration's response has been—to call it tepid would be an overstatement. It really has been silent, for the most part. Latin American countries, South American countries, including conservative countries like Chile and Colombia, have come out very strongly against it. So, again, you see this great divergence between the U.S. and between South America and Latin America.

It'll be interesting to see. I mean, the two things to look out for is, one is if military aid to the Paraguayan military

will—army will continue—the U.S. is a supplier of much material and financial support to security forces in Paraguay—and, two, if it will take advantage of the crisis to go forward with a long-sought military base in the region, which the Pentagon, SOUTHCOM, has wanted for a while. I think those are the two things to look out for.

That is, Honduras both laid the foundation for this latest coup, and Obama's silence here seems to repeat his capitulation (to a lot of far right wing pressure here in the US) after the coup that ousted Zelaya.

And then there's the basing. Since the Honduras coup we've installed a Forward-Operating Base and started facilitating the shooting of civilians (ostensibly by accident). Not only will the US be able to use the same excuse of war on drugs in Paraguay, but it will also point to terrorism—the Igazu Falls area has long been alleged to host terrorists. And based on that we'll plop a base amongst the populist countries that are increasingly skeptical of US hegemony of late.

Sure, maybe that isn't the point behind this coup. But it sure seems a convenient way to warn and threaten Latin American populists.