

Video: ‘The Coup Turned Honduras into Hell’: Interview with President Manuel Zelaya on the 10th Anniversary of Overthrow by the US

By [Manuel Zelaya](#) and [Anya Parampil](#)

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The Grayzone’s Anya Parampil sat down for an exclusive interview with Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, on the 10th anniversary of the US-backed right-wing military coup that overthrew him.

He discusses the extreme violence, drug trafficking, economic depression, migration crisis, Juan Orlando Hernández (JOH), WikiLeaks, Venezuela, and more.

Full transcript of the interview below.

ANYA PARAMPIL: Thank you for your time, Mr. President. It has been 10 years since you were removed in a US-backed coup from your position as the democratically elected president of Honduras. What has the United States accomplished since then, what has changed in your country?

MANUEL ZELAYA: The rupture of a social contract, which we call the constitution of the republic, in the constitution of the state, when a social contract is broken, what logically comes next is the the law of the stronger (survival of the fittest). Crimes, killings, torture. Always the winning side against the opposition.

That has been a sacrifice for the Honduran people, because the side that took power had the support of the United States. The US is the major beneficiary of the coup. And there is a principle in penal law that says the beneficiary of a crime is the principal suspect.

How has it been the beneficiary? The US has almost complete control over Honduras. Control over justice through the OAS (Organization of American States). It controls security through US Southern Command. It controls the economy through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and IDB (Inter-American Development Bank).

It controls the main media networks in Honduras; it has a big influence over the opinion of the main media outlets. It funds many churches, which receive donations from North American NGOs. And it finances Honduran NGOs. That is, it controls public opinion. It controls the powers of the state.

And in this way, it has a high interference in the decisions of states like Honduras, poor states, weak states, where their rulers, to receive protection, give up everything to the

North Americans.

ANYA PARAMPIL: What has been the impact on the average Hondurans throughout these years?

MANUEL ZELAYA: Poverty increased. There are more poor people. The poverty level already surpasses almost 70 percent of the population. Crime increased. Drug trafficking increased. According to a report from the US State Department, the drug trafficking in Honduras after the coup increased by almost double. And the report says that Honduras became "the drug-trafficking paradise."

External debt increased. When they took me out at gunpoint, we owed \$3 billion. Today, in 10 years, we owe \$14 billion. That is four times more. So this means the country has serious problems with a lack of economic growth, a lack of investment, human rights violations.

And I will present you with only one piece of proof: The [migrant] caravans heading to the US are from Honduras. Because the [US-backed] coup d'état turned Honduras into hell.

ANYA PARAMPIL: How has this situation, what has happened over the last 10 years, contributed to the development of your party, Libre?

MANUEL ZELAYA: We are a party of opposition to the coup d'état. And for 10 years those who carried out the coup have governed. They are the spawn of the coup. And the more errors they commit, the more they oppress, the more the opposition grows.

ANYA PARAMPIL: And this has led to the strengthening of the social movements here?

MANUEL ZELAYA: Well, social movements don't grow for a sectarian political reason; they grow because electricity was privatized and they can't pay for light. Many social services have been privatized. They have been given to private companies. And the problem is not just that they leave it to private enterprise. Private enterprise is efficient, but it's expensive.

The most comfortable thing for a ruler is to say, "Security will be managed for me by US Southern Command." "The economy will be managed for me by the IMF." "The soldiers will manage internal security for me." "And private enterprise will manage the money for me." So, what does the ruler do? Nothing. Simply give benefits to his followers.

ANYA PARAMPIL: Who is Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) and why are we seeing now, 10 years after the coup, a re-ignition of unrest in the streets and a demand that JOH leave office?

MANUEL ZELAYA: He (JOH) is a son of the coup. He has serious personality problems. For example, I was president. And I walked in the streets. And people greeted me. And they told me, "Hi Mel! Hi President!" He (JOH) travels with armored cars, with helicopters. He travels with a huge security team.

In my opinion, he has a problem with mental illness. He believes that being president is a big deal. And the pastors come and tell him he is chosen by God. So it becomes even worse. And he begins to act like a person who is not in touch with reality.

The people are protesting because of hunger. And he thinks they're protesting because of

politics. And he tells to the United States a speech that the US, its right-wing, conservative governing class wants to hear. He says, "In Honduras there is terrorism. [Venezuelan President Hugo] Chávez's people are there in Honduras. And they are affecting me, the drug traffickers."

I think he is suffering from psychopathy.

ANYA PARAMPIL: And what about the accusations of corruption? Some Hondurans I spoke to today told me now JOH is one of the richest men in the region.

MANUEL ZELAYA: The corruption is public. They broke the social security system. Look, how do you sustain an illegal government? Paying people off. If they are legal, they don't need to pay. Because they are the product of a social pact.

But when there is a coup d'état, there is fraud. So they need to corrupt the institutions to sustain themselves. The fact that the United States supports a coup d'état makes them support a dictator. And that is why corruption is surging. The corruption is the result of the dictatorship.

ANYA PARAMPIL: Hondurans have also told me that a small group of families control much of the country in terms of industry and specifically the media. Can you talk about the media's role in the coup and also in sustaining the dictatorship, which you describe?

MANUEL ZELAYA: That is how capitalism works. In the US, France, anywhere. Capitalism is based on just one principle: accumulation of wealth. That is how it functions here and in the rest of the world.

A small elite of transnational [corporations] associated with people in countries who clean up for them. They do business, and that business creates the need to set up security for themselves.

They don't tolerate competition. I brought in oil from Venezuela, with Hugo Chávez, and they insisted that they had to maintain their agreements. And they did not accept Venezuela. And that was one of the motives behind the coup.

ANYA PARAMPIL: And I believe the US ambassador at the time, Charles Ford, told you you're not allowed to do this, as though he had the right to do this as a foreign ambassador.

MANUEL ZELAYA: The US gives advice that if you don't follow, they act with reprisals. US President George W. Bush told it to me. John Negroponte told it to me. Ambassador Ford told it to me. And other government officials.

Bush said it to me in these words: "You cannot have relations with Hugo Chávez." John Negroponte, his deputy secretary of state, told me, "If you sign the ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance), you are going to have problems with the US."

And I signed the ALBA. And I would sign it again if I had the chance. Because it is to help Honduras progress.

I needed the support from Brazil, the support from Venezuela, the support from the US, the support from Europe. We are not able to depend solely on the US, because the US has its

own interests. It's another nation.

ANYA PARAMPIL: I would like you to comment on the significance of Wikileaks in the history of your country but also the region, and what you think about what is currently happening to Julian Assange with the help of the government in Ecuador?

MANUEL ZELAYA: Julian Assange is a symbol of freedom in the world today, tomorrow, and forever. He will be one of the people, in the future, like one of the great prophets. In their day, they are repressed. And later they become a symbol. That's what Julian Assange will become.

Julian Assange proclaimed a world without secrets, an open world, a free world. Of course he affects the [powerful] interests of today. But in the future, I, and others in other generations, will follow the example of Assange.

ANYA PARAMPIL: We were speaking about Ambassador Ford, I believe after he finished his work in the embassy here he went to go work for SOUTHCOM, the military. Can you talk about how central the interests of the US military are to what happened with you and how its presence in the country has grown since you were ousted?

MANUEL ZELAYA: [Honduran] soldiers are trained at the [US] School of the Americas. All of their drills they do with the US. For the soldiers, the ideal of their life is to be like the US Marines, like the US soldiers.

And here, the US controls the armed forces and the police. They do what the US wants them to do. They are occupation forces.

ANYA PARAMPIL: I want to talk a little bit about the region, specifically Nicaragua. What do you think about the US-backed coup attempt he (Daniel Ortega) has faced over this last year? This month, I believe, is the one year anniversary since the government there defeated a US backed regime change operation.

MANUEL ZELAYA: When I returned [after the coup], I made several attempts to return to Honduras. In the return from Washington to Honduras, I was not able to land, because the military blocked me. So I had to come back through the Las Manos border crossing in Nicaragua. Then I secretly entered the Brazilian embassy. Two years later I returned from the Dominican Republic, from the Dominican Republic to Nicaragua, and from Nicaragua to Honduras.

In relation to the US trying to overthrow [Nicaraguan President] Daniel Ortega, I believe it already did it before, in the 1980s. The US armed Contras here in Honduras to fight against Nicaraguans. Since that time, I have always protested against this US occupation of Honduras to invade Nicaragua. And the people [today] voted for the Ortega government. He was elected.

Now, the US has been unable to overthrow him. Now, he is strong. Now Ortega has a lot of popular support. And I don't think they are able to overthrow him, as they did in the past, from Honduras.

ANYA PARAMPIL: Can you compare your party, Libre, to the Sandinista Movement and what lessons you took from them?

MANUEL ZELAYA: They are two different historical moments. Sandinismo was developed by a military sergeant, who went to the mountains at the beginning of the 20th century, and he created an anti-imperialist force that created a party called the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN). This party won a war, overthrew the Somoza dictatorship, and now organizes democratically to stay in power.

We (in Honduras' Libre Party) are a party that did not come out of the armed struggle. We did not come out of a war. We were born out of a movement that is revolutionary and democratic, but peaceful. Against the coup d'état. And against those who support the coup. The US supported the coup.

ANYA PARAMPIL: I want to talk about your personal political development because when you were elected you were considered part of a more center-left party and movement, and now you are speaking about socialism. Why did you change and how would you characterize yourself now?

MANUEL ZELAYA: Center-right actually. (Not center-left.) It has been an evolution. Because the right wing is done for. It sustains itself with weapons, with coups, with fraud, with deceptions.

The future of humanity has to be social. You are a social being. You. Aristotle says that we are rational beings. The human is a rational animal. But we think that the human being, today, is a totally social being. Without society, men and women can't survive. Everything that we think and perceive is related to our social environment.

So where should humanity walk to? To individualism, to egoism? To individual interests, or social interests? It's to social interests.

The future of humanity is socialist. We might have to struggle for 10,000 years or more. But in the future, if humanity does not advance to be social, we would be living in caves, according to the survival of the fittest. Human beings are advancing, progressing to become social.

I was raised in a liberal political philosophy. But now I evolved to a new politics: first liberal and pro-socialist, but now democratic socialist.

ANYA PARAMPIL: How were you influenced by other governments of the Pink Tide, specifically Hugo Chavez of Venezuela?



MANUEL ZELAYA: Well you would have to ask how Chávez, a soldier, became a socialist. If you find this explanation, then you will find an explanation for how I, a land-owner, went from being a capitalist to a socialist. It is a heightening of the spirit. It is the conviction of a human being.

Capitalism is so barbaric. It is not the future of humanity. If capitalism is the future of humanity, humanity is destroyed. It is defeated. It is doomed to fail. The same for the planet.

The future of the humanity has to be social. It's simple. It's not money. It's not commerce. It's not simply economic activities that should lead humanity. No, those should be subject to

the social.

It's fine that private enterprise exists, private initiative. It's fine that capital exists. But it is not ok for capital to direct the world. No, it is the world that should direct capital. This is an upside-down world.

And when you reach the highest governmental position in a country, which I reached, even in a small nation like Honduras, I learned then that there is no way to deal with capital other than subjecting it to popular sovereignty. Capital should continue to exist, but subjected to a plan of popular sovereignty that is the people.

The voice of the people is the voice of God. You have to have faith.

ANYA PARAMPIL: Like Chavez, you were pursuing the process of a Constituent Assembly in your country the day of the coup, to change the character of the state here. Why do you think that specifically was so threatening to the oligarchy here and the US government?

MANUEL ZELAYA: The question is not well formulated. Do you know who Thomas Jefferson is? Do you know who George Washington is? They created the United States, with a constitution.

Why mention Chávez? Chávez is simply from the 21st century. Jefferson and Washington were from 1776. The American Revolution was anti-imperialist, against the British Empire. They developed a constitutional assembly. And you have your constitution in the US. It's not Chávez who invented the constituent assembly; it's Jefferson and Washington. So why be afraid of the way in which nations are formed?

When the social pact is broken, because there is a lot of poverty, there is a lot of hunger, many people in need, and the majority does not resist the economic and social situation, you have to return to the constituent dialogue. This is basic in a society.

Inside the US, there are no coups. No, there presidents have to be ready in case in any moment they are killed. Here, there are coups. And in these countries in Latin America there have been 170 coups. And the great majority of them were sponsored by the US.

And what do you do when the pact is broken? You start over with a constituent assembly.

ANYA PARAMPIL: When you were facing the coup, Maduro was the Foreign Minister of Venezuela and you worked very closely with him at that time. What did you think about him, what was your impression of Nicolas Maduro, and what do you think about what's happening now with Venezuela?

MANUEL ZELAYA: Two things: One, Chávez did not seek me out. Chávez was never going to look for a far-right country like Honduras, almost totally governed by the US. And now more than ever. And me, a president who arrived with the center-right. Chávez would never have sought me out.

I reached out to Chávez. I have to clarify that. Chávez never had an interest in Honduras. This is an invention of right-wing activists in the US, like Otto Reich, Robert Carmona, and Roger Noriega. I had to convince him [Chávez] to come here to help us, with oil, with the ALBA alliance, with Petrocaribe.

Two: Nicolás Maduro, yes he is a socialist from birth. He is a worker, from the working class, from the class that is exploited by capital, from the class that sells its labor force, and that is denied the rights that capitalists enjoy. He is a socialist, like Chávez.

And moreover, the Bolivarian Revolution, that was initiated by Chávez, with his socialist convictions, was inherited by Nicolás [Maduro]. And he has led with a great capacity, sensibility, and conscience.

They don't want you to recognize it, but Nicolás [Maduro] is a Latin American leader of great international stature.

ANYA PARAMPIL: We're 10 years since the coup, since then, one by one other progressive governments have been picked off and changed back into pawns of the United States. What gives you hope that one day we will see progressive governments return to power in Latin America?

MANUEL ZELAYA: No empire is eternal. With the exception of God eternal. Since the end of World War II, the US has ruled over much of the world. But it has serious contradictions. It is a country with high levels of poverty. There are serious internal contradictions.

And sometime soon, the North American ruling class will learn that to survive in the world, it will have to reduce military spending, to give medicine, healthcare, education and a good quality of life to its people. Someday they are going to understand that being the soldiers of the world, that being the police of the world, does not bring them as many benefits as they think.

And one day they are going to understand that it is better to have democratic countries than military dictatorships. When they come around, let's hope it's not too late.

The world is going to applaud, and meanwhile they continue giving fascist and imperialist orders installing dictators in our countries, setting up multinational corporations that exploit our rivers, our seas, our forests, our lands, and our working class. Then they will be pointed at and called practices that do not suit our countries.

I don't have anything against the North American people. Nor do I have anything against the North American society. I'm an admirer of Lincoln, Kennedy, Jefferson, Washington, of what the US had signified. But I condemn its imperialist practices toward small countries like ours.

Instead of strengthening democracies, it strengthens military dictatorships. And that impoverishes our nation, and immigrants move there. And when immigrants move there, they start to complain.

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