

The Plot Thickens: Honduran Coup Regime and Landowning Elites Enlist the Support of Foreign Paramilitaries

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Even more evidence has come to light regarding the desperation and disregard for human rights of the Honduran coup regime and its elite backers. On Friday, October 9 a United Nations human rights panel issued a warning concerning the presence of contracted foreign paramilitary forces operating inside the troubled country. According to the UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries, [an estimated 40 members of the infamous United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia \(AUC\) have been hired](#) by wealthy Honduran landowners to defend themselves “from further violence between supporters of the de facto government and those of the deposed President Manuel Zelaya.”

As Zelaya’s Foreign Minister Patricia Rodas notes, it is widely believed that these mercenaries are being used [to “do the dirty jobs that the armed forces refuse to do.”](#) In addition, the panel established direct links between President Roberto Micheletti’s coup-installed government and foreign paramilitaries, stating that an additional group of 120 hired soldiers from several countries throughout the region had been created to provide support for the coup regime. This report [confirms allegations](#) made by the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* back in September.

Noting that Honduras is a signatory to the international convention against the use of mercenaries, the panel, comprised of a diverse array of security and human rights experts, expressed its deep concern and called upon the Honduran *golpistas* to take action against the use of paramilitaries inside Honduran territory. In response, Micheletti rejected the allegations, denying any recruitment of paramilitaries for protection.

This report represents yet another condemnation from the international community of the de facto Honduran government and offers further evidence of the degree to which Micheletti’s regime and its supporters have undermined democracy and human rights in the region. The AUC, essentially an umbrella organization of various right-wing death squads, many of which also collaborate with Colombian drug traffickers, is one of the region’s most notorious paramilitary organizations and is classified as a terrorist group by the U.S. State Department. Supposedly “demobilized” in 2006, the AUC has largely continued to carry out its drug-dealing activities and campaign of violence and intimidation against campesinos, indigenous peoples, stigmatized social groups such as homosexuals and prostitutes, labor organizers, critical journalists, and human rights advocates.

The AUC has also been directly and indirectly linked to numerous powerful elites and business interests in Colombia, including many close to President Álvaro Uribe’s

administration, and is said to operate “parallel” to the Colombian military. (See “Country Summary: Colombia.” *Human Rights Watch*. January 2008.) The AUC usually presents itself as an alternative to the leftist guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). It targets many left-leaning groups, which it generally refers to as “FARC sympathizers,” a characterization often repeated by Uribe himself and by members of his government, in order to discredit those groups and justify the brutal activities of the AUC. Above all, however, most of those targeted by the AUC are chosen precisely because their efforts on behalf of social justice and their resistance to neoliberal policies are in direct opposition to the interests of the AUC’s elite backers.

Accordingly, the linkages connecting the Honduran military regime, powerful members of the country’s landed elite, and right-wing Colombian paramilitaries are extremely troubling but not altogether surprising. Back on July 4, before any evidence of direct collaboration with Colombian narco-terrorists had emerged, journalist Al Giordano noted that the Honduran regime was in the process of making itself into a “rogue narco-state,” shutting itself off from the international community while allying with the most shadowy and reactionary sectors of the Latin American right. [Among its prominent supporters](#) have been Rafael Hernández Nodarse, a millionaire arms trafficker with ties to Cuban terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, and Otto Reich, a Washington super-hawk who played a prominent role in Iran-Contra affair. All these parties share an agenda of preserving unjust wealth and resource distributions while waging total war against social democracy using any means necessary. Honduras merely represents the most recent arena in which this war is being waged.

The right’s problem with Zelaya has never been that he tried to reform his country’s deeply flawed constitution (“the worst in the world,” according to Costa Rican President Óscar Arias), but because, [according to Micheletti himself](#), he “became friends with Daniel Ortega, Chávez, Correa, Evo Morales. ... He went to the left.” In other words, Micheletti is using the same tactics of “guilt by association” that his AUC allies use to justify their violence, only this time the “guilt” consists of association with other popular, democratically elected heads of state in the region. Nevertheless, the message and the effect are still the same: If you oppose us, and what we stand for, we will take you down with force.

But whereas the reactionary elites in the region are disposed to using violence, intimidation, and the contracting of paramilitaries to impose their will, those on the Latin American left, the people for whom Morales, Chávez, and Zelaya are merely elected representatives, have increasingly turned to strategies of nonviolence, popular organization, and civil resistance in their struggles for justice and democracy. The degree to which the popular left—and its leaders—continue to adhere to the values of peace, justice, and solidarity will ultimately decide whether or not the popular movement achieves its goals, not only here and now in Honduras, but in all of Latin America.

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