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Bill Van Auken

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## ***Biden administration backs state of siege in Ecuador***

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken flew to Ecuador on October 19 to declare US support for the country's beleaguered President Guillermo Lasso, one day after he imposed a state of emergency (estado de excepción), suspending constitutional rights and deploying heavily armed troops in the streets.

Appearing before the media alongside Ecuador's foreign minister, Mauricio Montalvo, Blinken declared, "In extraordinary moments, democracies require exceptional measures."



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and President Guillermo Lasso at presidential palace in Quito. (Credit: @EmbajadaEcuUSA)

Referring directly to Lasso's imposition of dictatorial measures, Blinken continued, "As I discussed with President Lasso, we understand that, support that, but know as well that these measures, of course, need to be taken pursuant to the constitution."

Lasso announced the state of emergency on October 18, seizing as his pretext an incident in the coastal city of Guayaquil in which a 13-year-old boy was killed in the crossfire between police and gunmen.

While the Ecuadorian president claimed that his state of siege measures are aimed at suppressing crime and drug traffickers, his order allows the suspension of basic democratic rights, including freedom of movement, assembly and association.

They have been imposed under conditions in which his presidency has been plunged into deep political crisis.



Troops on the streets of Ecuador, October 20, 2021(Credit: @FFAAECUADOR)

Lasso, a right-wing multimillionaire ex-Coca Cola executive and banker, was elected president last April in what was seen as an upset victory in a second-round election. His path to power was paved by the failure of the so-called "Pink Tide" government of Rafael Correa, whose limited reforms were eroded with a fall in oil prices. Correa's hand-picked successor, Lenin Moreno, initiated a sharp turn to the right, ingratiating his administration with US imperialism by expelling WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange from Ecuador's

embassy in London, turning him over to the British government to face extradition to the US on espionage charges.

Lasso's party, however, holds only 12 of the 137 seats in the National Assembly, and, even with backing from other rightist parties, he has been unable to force through his free-market agenda.

He has sought to impose an IMF-dictated structural adjustment program that includes sharp cuts in social spending, a "labor reform" that would strip workers of job protections, tax cuts for capitalist investors and the lifting of restrictions on mining, oil drilling and foreign control over key sectors of Ecuador's economy.

Lasso has seen his approval ratings plummet by more than 20 percent since the publication of the so-called Pandora Papers, which exposed his investments in at least 10 offshore shell companies located in Panama, South Dakota and Delaware.

Like other heads of state and top officials exposed by the Pandora Papers, Lasso insisted that his offshore holdings were all perfectly legal. The National Assembly, however, has launched an investigation, declaring that the right-wing president "may have breached" a statute that "prohibits candidates and public officials from having their resources or assets in tax havens." Lasso has boycotted the probe, declaring himself the victim of a foreign conspiracy.

While Lasso was elected on promises that his policies would create jobs and raise living standards, some 6 million Ecuadorians—more than a third of the population—are living below a miserably low poverty line, with two and a half million barely surviving under conditions of extreme poverty. According to the government's own figures, just three out of 10 Ecuadorians have formal employment, with the rest either unemployed, under-employed or eking out a living in the so-called informal sector.

His administration has also been rocked by violent prison revolts that have resulted in the deaths of about 230 inmates.

With growing popular opposition, the declaration of the state of emergency, imposed in the name of combating serious "internal unrest," is a warning that Lasso intends to rely on naked force to remain in power and impose his right-wing agenda.

Lasso addressed a rally Wednesday, outside the Carondelet presidential palace, comprised of public employees, right-wing supporters and demonstrators who were paid by business interests. He denounced unions and indigenous organizations calling for an October 26 strike against his government's policies as "conspirators" and "coup" supporters, vowing that he would defend Quito against them.

"With the support of the glorious Armed forces together with the National Police, we will give protection to the entire territory of Ecuador and the entire Ecuadorian family," Lasso declared.

Earlier, he announced that his government is forming a legal defense body to defend any cop or soldier charged in connection with the state of emergency. "The law should intimidate the criminal, but not the police," he said. He promised to pardon any member of the repressive forces charged with a crime, effectively granting them absolute impunity to carry out acts of violent and deadly repression against the population.

It is under these conditions that Secretary of State Blinken traveled to Quito to praise Lasso for "the strong pro-democracy voice that you have shared with the Ecuadorian people, but also with the people of our hemisphere."

These statements, delivered on the first trip to Latin America by the Biden administration's secretary of state, could be described as the "Blinken Doctrine." Washington will support police state measures and dictatorship wherever they are required in the hemisphere to protect capitalist interests, sanctifying them as a defense of "democracy."

Blinken's second leg of his Latin American tour took him to Colombia, where he urged far-right President Iván Duque to "prevent rights abuses," after his security forces gunned down dozens of protesters in nationwide demonstrations sparked by the government's regressive tax policies. He proclaimed Duque "a very valued friend of the United States."

In Bogota, Blinken met with foreign ministers from Chile, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Honduras, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala and El Salvador, among others, to secure collaboration in suppressing migration to the United States.

A central aim of the US Secretary of State's first Latin American tour was also to shore up the support of the region's right-wing regimes against the growing economic weight of China, which has displaced the United States as the region's top trading partner, if Mexico is excluded from the equation.

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