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U.S. Seeks to Get Rid of Left Governments in Latin America

By Mark Weisbrot

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Recent events indicate that the Obama administration has stepped up its strategy of “regime change” against the left-of-center governments in Latin America, promoting conflict in ways not seen since the military coup that Washington supported in Venezuela in 2002. The most high-profile example is in Venezuela itself, during the past week. As this goes to press, Washington has grown increasingly isolated in its efforts to destabilize the newly elected government of Nicolas Maduro.

But Venezuela is not the only country to fall prey to Washington’s efforts to reverse the electoral results of the past 15 years in Latin America. It is now clear that last year’s ouster of President Fernando Lugo of Paraguay was also aided and abetted by the United States government. In a brilliant investigative work for Agência Pública, journalist Natalia Viana shows that the Obama administration funded the principal actors involved in the “parliamentary coup” against Lugo. Washington then helped organize international support for coup.

The U.S. role in Paraguay is similar to its role in the military overthrow of democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya of Honduras in 2009, where Washington hijacked the Organization of American States (OAS) and used it to fight the efforts of South American governments who wanted to restore democracy. Zelaya later testified that Washington was also involved in the coup itself.

In Venezuela this past week, Washington could not hijack the OAS but only its Secretary General, José Miguel Insulza, who supported the White House (and Venezuela opposition)

demand for a “100 percent recount.” But Insulza had to back down, as did Spain, the United States’ only other significant ally in this nefarious enterprise – because they had no support.

The demand for a “recount” in Venezuela is absurd, since there has already been a recount of the paper ballots for a random sample of 54 percent of the voting machines. The machine totals were compared with a hand count of the paper ballots in front of witnesses from all sides. Statistically, there is no practical difference between this enormous audit that has already happened, and the 100 percent audit that the opposition is demanding. Jimmy Carter called Venezuela’s electoral system “the best in the world,” and there is no doubt about the accuracy of the vote count, even among many in the Venezuelan opposition.

It is good to see Lula denouncing the U.S. for its interference and Dilma joining the rest of South America to defend Venezuela’s right to a free elections. But it is not just Venezuela and the weaker democracies that are threatened by the United States. As reported in the pages of this newspaper, in 2005, the U.S. government funded and organized efforts to change the laws in Brazil in order to weaken the Workers’ Party. This information was discovered in U.S. government documents obtained under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act. Most likely Washington has done much more in Brazil that remains secret.

It is clear that Washington did not see the mildly reformist Fernando Lugo as threatening or even radical. It’s just that he was too friendly with the other left governments. The Obama administration, like that of President Bush, does not accept that the region has changed. Their goal is to get rid of all of the left-of-center governments, partly because they tend to be more independent from Washington. Brazil, too, must be vigilant in the face of this threat to the region.