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**Honduran Violence and U.S. Aid
Test Obama's Global Image
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While English language television in the United States mined the minutiae of Michael Jackson's upcoming funeral, millions watching Spanish, Portuguese and French language media in the rest of the Americas were transfixed by live broadcasts of the Honduran military shooting and killing a 10 year-old boy and other protesters.

From the U.S.-Mexico border to the southern tip of Argentina and Chile, Latin Americans were besotted by television and internet images of the tens of thousands of Hondurans who risked their lives while staging a peaceful march to the airport where a plane carrying the ousted President of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, and United Nations President Miguel d'Escoto was trying to land.

In the course of Sunday's mass mobilization by Hondurans, many throughout the continent watched the drama of the police stepping out of the way of the marchers when their chief declared that he "holds the military responsible" for any bloodshed. Shortly after blood was, in fact, spilled as at least 2 people were killed by the military and several others were injured, according to Telesur, which broadcast live from the Tegucigalpa airport.

Public and official outrage in response to the killings and shootings are sure to intensify pressure on the military coup leaders who already face worldwide denunciation and pressure. The Organization of American States (OAS) suspended Honduras' membership Saturday; The European Union and most countries in Latin America with embassies in Honduras have withdrawn their ambassadors; the World Bank and some governments have either suspended or frozen loans to Honduras.

But the military coup leaders are still recipients of U.S. economic and military aid.

As a result, the whole Latin American world is watching Honduras and President

Obama, who still has not heeded calls to suspend U.S. military aid to Honduras. In fact, Latin America may well be where the decline and fall of Obama's global rock star status begins.

The Obama Administration has chosen to respond to the crisis in a manner that will signify little to millions watching the bloodshed taking place in Honduras; While nobody in the hemisphere wants the return of the actions of the Bush era, many already believe that the Obama Administration's inactions mean that the "new" or fundamental "change" Obama promised during his also widely-viewed Summit of the Americas speech last April adds up to little more than this: more militarismo, but with a smile.

For example, rather than officially declare and denounce the Honduras putsch as a "coup", which would, among other things, trigger a cutoff of military and other aid, the Obama Administration has instead chosen the symbolic act of suspending joint military operations.

In a region where U.S. military aid, U.S. military training and U.S. political support for dictatorships responsible for killing, torturing and disappearing millions are at the heart of why Obama needed urgently to signal a "new" U.S. policy, Obama's continued "Si Se Puede" (Yes We Can) to continued military aid for such human rights violation-plagued governments as those of Colombia, Mexico and Honduras will only tarnish his and the U.S. image in the region.

The President's inability or unwillingness to call for an immediate suspension of U.S. military aid is already raising questions about the motives and role of Obama Administration operatives like Hugo Llorens, the current U.S. Ambassador to Honduras.

From 2002-2003 – the year many in Latin America condemned the attempted military coup in Venezuela - Llorens was the Director of Andean Affairs at the National Security Council (NSC).

Llorens was charged with advising then President Bush and his National Security Advisor on issues pertaining to Venezuela, Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador. Although Llorens and the Obama Administration do not recognize the current government, they did, apparently, know that the Honduran coup was going to take place.

That the Obama Administration knew of the coup and did not cutoff aid immediately after it took place, makes its claims that it tried to "stop" the coup seem naive, at best.

That the Administration may not cutoff aid even after coup-appointed Honduran Foreign Minister Enrique Ortez described President Obama as "ese negrito que no sabe nada de nada" (that little black boy who knows nothing about nothing) is to add political insult to tragic injury before a hemispheric audience; That Obama may not cutoff military aid even after Sunday's increased bloodshed adds even graver injury to that insult.

And in Latin America, a region where the word "Honduras" now means "defend democracy", a region where many know that Democrat-led U.S. regimes have propped up military dictatorships, assassinated leaders and covertly destabilized left-leaning governments with the same zeal and effectiveness as Republican regimes, President Obama and the United States, no longer have the luxury of being on the wrong side of history made on the streets. This hemispheric sensibility was articulated forcefully by Argentinian President Cristina Fernandez, who traveled with the Presidents of Ecuador and Paraguay to El Salvador on Sunday in order support Zelaya. During their late night

press conference, Fernandez seemed to speak to and for millions when she stated, "We're not just defending Honduras. We're defending ourselves." The question President Obama must answer as unequivocally and rapidly as possible is, "Who are Latin Americans defending themselves from?"

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
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BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator, Roberto Lovato is a contributing Associate Editor with [New America Media](#). He is also a frequent contributor to [The Nation](#) and his work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Salon, Der Spiegel, Utne Magazine, La Opinion, and other national and international media outlets. Prior to becoming a writer, Roberto was the Executive Director of the Central American Resource Center ([CARECEN](#)), then the country's largest immigrant rights organization. [Click here](#) to contact him or via his [Of América blog](#).

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