

Bolivian politicians and journalists threatened with arrest in massive purge



La Paz, November 19 (RHC)-- The de-facto military government of Bolivia has tasked a special prosecutor with rooting out “subversives” in MAS, the political party of Evo Morales, and dissident journalists have also been threatened with arrest, according to local media reports.

A “special apparatus of the Prosecutor’s Office” has been created to root out “subversion and sedition” in Morales’ MAS (Movement to Socialism) party, Minister of Government Arturo Murillo announced. He warned any leaders who might be harboring disloyalty to the new right-wing government that he already had a list of the names of “subversives,” accusing them of stirring up violence in the country, and pledged to begin issuing arrest orders.

According to reports, socialist politicians are not the sole target of the new regime. Murillo called out journalists working for MAS-related media during a press conference in La Paz, warning them that they too could be subject to prosecution for their disloyalty.

“We ask you to inform, not to misinform,” he warned those he called “dissident” reporters, insisting they “do their job and not commit sedition.” Murillo’s words echoed threats from Minister of Communications

Roxana Lizarraga, who declared in recent days that journalists “who are causing sedition” had been identified and warned foreign reporters they were not immune to Bolivian law.

The interim government has already shown it is willing to use force to exert its will over the people, thousands of whom have taken to the streets to demand the safe return of Morales, who fled to Mexico in fear of his life after losing the support of Bolivia’s military. Security forces opened fire on protesters in Cochabamba over the weekend, killing at least nine and injuring scores more, following a decree issued by self-declared President Jeanine Anez exempting them from criminal prosecution.

Footage of the carnage triggered international condemnation, while Evo Morales personally pleaded with security forces to “stop the massacre.” Protesters could be heard begging for media coverage in some of the videos, suggesting the interim government’s warnings have already had a chilling effect on the press.

The interim government’s heavy-handed crackdown on nonviolent protest, along with its designation of leftist politicians and journalists as subversives, has evoked fears it will follow in the footsteps of Latin American coup regimes past, many of which were not-so-secretly backed by the United States. Military juntas in Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay “disappeared” or otherwise massacred thousands of left-wing activists, union leaders, and politicians in the latter half of the 20th century over the course of Washington’s ‘Operation Condor.’

Journalist Ben Norton likened the “far-right coup regime” to a “Pinochet-style dictatorship,” warning it was becoming “more authoritarian and murderous by the day.” Author Naomi Klein, who wrote about the Operation Condor juntas in detail in her book ‘Shock Doctrine,’ declared “Bolivia is living through a violent, regressive, completely undemocratic power grab,” and urged nations to “sever relations with this illegal regime.” And former Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein pondered “which U.S.-backed coup will be the model for Bolivia?” recalling the Washington-assisted devastation of Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, and Haiti.

Formerly an opposition senator, Anez declared herself interim president last week in absence of the requisite quorum of lawmakers, and MAS politicians loyal to Morales have refused to legitimize her leadership – nor have they technically accepted Morales’ resignation. MAS still has a two-thirds majority in Congress. The interim government, however, has wasted no time in severing diplomatic relationships, kicking Venezuelan diplomats and some 700 Cuban doctors out of the country for allegedly fomenting dissent against the right-wing regime. Bolivia has withdrawn from ALBA, the regional alliance with Cuba and Venezuela, and recalled most of its ambassadors.

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