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U.S. Should Reject Illegitimate Election Process in Bolivia

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On December 6, national elections will be held in Bolivia. If President Evo Morales (Bolivia's version of Venezuela's populist authoritarian President Hugo Chavez) and his MAS party prevail, Morales's campaign to destroy constitutional democracy in Bolivia will be nearly complete.

Rising to the presidency in 2005 as the outspoken leader of Bolivia's coca-leaf growers, Morales consolidated his political power by dismantling decades-old U.S.–Bolivia cooperation against cocaine trafficking, doling out massive government handouts, and spewing populist anti-U.S. rhetoric. The Obama Administration should reject Morales's violations of human rights and democracy, refuse to recognize the new government Morales forms, and call for Bolivia's expulsion from the Organization of American States (OAS).

An Attack on the Bolivian People. On December 6, Bolivians will head to the polls for the third time in nine years to elect a new president and both chambers of Bolivia's Congress. Over the course of those nine years, there have been six presidents. If current President Evo Morales has his way, however, he will be the only president of Bolivia for at least the next nine years. Morales is leading in recent polls¹ and, thanks to his perpetration of numerous human rights and democracy violations against his political opposition—tactics that have been the rule rather than the exception since he took power—he now seems unstoppable.

An election sweep by Morales and his MAS party will be bad news for Bolivia, and worse news for the

U.S. Not only have Morales's economic policies weakened and further impoverished the already destitute poor of Bolivia, but his win in the December 6 election will empower him to further persecute what little remains of a democratic alternative.

Many of Morales supporters are indigenous Bolivians from the western highlands who have been mired in poverty for generations. Improving these indigenous people's living conditions is certainly a laudable goal, but Morales's methodology for realizing such improvement—statist policies and totalitarian control—has been disastrous.

Contrary to Morales's claims to represent the poor and "speak truth to power," it is the Bolivian people themselves who are his ultimate victims. They are the ones hurt by Morales's systematic violations of human rights and his destruction of Bolivia's democratic institutions. These violations have been carefully compiled and recorded by the Bolivian Senate, one of the last unfettered defenders of democracy in that country. In Morales's first years in office, only the Senate was able to stymie some of his more radical Marxist proposals. Thus Morales has targeted opposition leaders in the Senate for defeat in this election cycle.

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On November 2, the Bolivian Senate president, Senator Oscar Ortiz, traveled to Washington to present his report denouncing these violations to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission at the OAS.² The report, prepared by the Senate's Commission of Constitution, Justice and National Police, is a well-documented and disturbing compilation of Morales's methodical violations of freedom of speech and constitutional processes as well as his persecution, prosecution, and imprisonment of opposition figures. The report also details the Morales regime's pattern of threats to human liberty and personal attacks (both physical and psychological) on members of the Bolivian Congress.

Morales Employing Mob Tactics to Achieve...

One of Morales's most pernicious tactics has been to maintain a human blockade around the National Assembly (legislature) building in the capital of La Paz when the Senate is in session. MAS "community organizers," rent-a-mob political street thugs, and gangster-like enforcers—all paid and directed by Morales—intimidate opposition politicians by putting pressure on voting procedures on bills in the Senate floor, taunting, jeering, catcalling, and threatening opposition Congressmen when they enter or leave the building.

This pressure is aimed at intimidating the opposition into voting in favor of the many unconstitutional bills or resolutions that have been put forward by the Morales government that would consolidate dictatorial control in Bolivia. These bills have been resisted legally and democratically by the opposition, but the executive branch has gotten its way on every occasion. According to the report, this scenario has happened five times since the current government took office.

...One Party Rule by One Man. The report states that in practice there is not any institution, independent of the executive branch, that has not been object of a threat, prosecution, or judicial pro-

cess brought about either by the Morales government or by the lower chamber in the Bolivian Congress (the House of Representatives, which is controlled by Morales's MAS party).

Measures that have been designed to weaken Bolivia's democratic institutions as well as the opposition include:

- The proposed dismantling of the heretofore independent Constitutional Tribunal;
- The prosecution, intimidation, or imprisonment of members of the Supreme Court;
- The refusal to appoint an Attorney General (also heretofore politically independent); and
- The defunding of the Office of the Comptroller General (another independent check on political power and government spending similar to the U.S. Government Accountability Office).

All of these measures have debilitated the very institutions created under Bolivia's constitution to monitor the government and protect human rights.

Executions, Assassinations, and Death Threats.

The report also reveals that the Morales regime's highly selective and arbitrary administration of justice and its persecution of Bolivia's political opposition have directly or indirectly led to the deaths of 74 people as well as injuries to hundreds of others. Many have been abducted and tortured by the regime's shadowy enforcement groups, and there have been numerous other violations of human rights, none of which have been investigated by Bolivian law enforcement or judicial officials. In some cases, government officials themselves have perpetrated these atrocities under the pretext that their political opponents are "terrorists."

The regime's persecution has targeted Bolivia's private business sector, whose leaders have been the object of trials, media campaigns designed to destroy their public image, and reprimands of any objections to government policies or actions. The

1. "Evo Toma Ventaja en 3 y 4 Puntos Respecto a Manfred y Samuel" ("Evo Has a 3-4 Point Advantage over Manfred and Samuel"), *La Razon*, November 16, 2009, at http://www.la-razon.com/versiones/20091116_006913/nota_244_910263.htm (November 23, 2009).
2. Bolivian National Senate, "Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Bolivia," Organization of American States, November 2009, at <http://www.oscarortiz.com.bo/noticias/situacion-derechos-humanos-en-bolivia> (December 4, 2009). In Spanish.

report also documents the death of the rule of law in Bolivia and states that as many as 120 Bolivian leaders from Bolivia's private sector and political institutions have been forced to seek refuge in Brazil, Spain, Peru, and the U.S.

The situation in Bolivia is deplorable. Morales already succeeded in amending Bolivia's constitution to increase his power.³ Now his goal is to take complete control and impose a totalitarian dictatorship with only the appearance of democracy.

Recommendations. In light of Morales's campaign to solidify his control over Bolivia, the Obama Administration should move immediately to:

- Reject the legitimacy of the December 6 elections in Bolivia;
- Impose punitive measures, including visa restrictions on members of the Morales regime;

- Refuse to recognize the new government Morales forms;
- Call for Bolivia's expulsion from the OAS because of the Morales regime's systematic violations of the OAS Inter-American Democratic Charter; and
- Seek to isolate Bolivia diplomatically.

Such measures will be critical if constitutional democracy in Bolivia is to have any chance of survival or restoration.

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3. See James M. Roberts and Gonzalo Schwarz, "New Constitution Pushes Bolivian Economy into Socialism," Heritage Foundation WebMemo No. 2355, March 3, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/wm2355.cfm>.