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US-backed coup regime in Peru extends emergency rule and military repression

The Peruvian regime installed with the connivance of US imperialism in a parliamentary coup against president Pedro Castillo is moving to consolidate dictatorial forms of rule behind the “constitutional” façade of the Congress and Castillo’s former vice-president Dina Boluarte.

Curfews have expired, but a national state of emergency continues, suspending basic democratic rights like the right to assembly and authorizing the military to remain deployed across the country.



Peru's National Police special forces unit, which has played a major role in the martial law repression. (Photo: @PoliciaPeru) [Photo: @PoliciaPeru]

Defying the repression and despite Congress's approval of a bill promising to new elections in April 2024, demonstrations have continued in Lima, Cusco and across southern Peru against the December 7 coup and demanding the resignation of Boluarte.

As of December 22, according to the Ministry of Health, at least 27 demonstrators—all civilians—have been killed and 367 more have been hospitalized.

While the Ministry of Interior has claimed the bloodbath is a response to “acts of war,” the streets and airports were turned into battlefields and armed encampments by the regime's deployment of thousands of soldiers, marching in formation and chanting across city centers, shooting live ammunition at unarmed youth, workers and peasants.

In the southern department of Ayacucho, all but one of the 10 confirmed dead were teenagers, and eight autopsies confirmed that they were killed by gunfire. As details continue to emerge about the victims, it is clear that most were impoverished youth living in precarious conditions, largely from small farming communities and scraping by in the informal sector.

Based on interviews with relatives, for instance, Ojo Público reports that D.A.Q., 15, who was killed during the occupation of the Andahuaylas airport, was a student and the main source of income for his family doing odd jobs in the local farms or in construction. Wilfredo Lizarme Barboza, 18, worked on similar jobs and was saving money to study medicine.

Beckham Quispe Garfias, 18, was a high-school student and rising football star. His father is a small farmer of root crops, and his mother sells corn on the cob. Carlos Huamán Cabrera, a 26-year-old father and former singer had moved in search of a job from the Amazonas to Lima and then to La Libertad, where he settled and worked at an agro-export company.

The occupations of the international airports of Arequipa, Cuzco, and Juliaca, and the local airports of Ayacucho and Andahuaylas, along with the blockades along the Pan-American Highway and the railway to Machu Picchu, were crushed by the military and police

Moreover, in recent days, the regime launched a series of legal cases against student leaders and raids against universities, the Peasant Confederation of Peru and the pseudo-left New Party.

On Sunday, the “counter-terrorism” Special Command of the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers region (VRAEM) and the police used brute force, including live ammunition, to end a 12-day occupation of a natural gas plant by residents of the town of

Kepashiato in the southern department of Cusco. They were demanding the closing of Congress and resignation of Boluarte.

The impoverished rural population in the VRAEM jungles of southeastern Peru has faced constant harassment by the military, under repeated states of emergency ostensibly to destroy widespread coca leaf plantations. The Peruvian military and police not only receive constant training and intelligence from the Pentagon, but US officials are routinely embedded in the Peruvian military.

Meanwhile, more information has emerged that confirms that Washington worked behind the scenes to oust Castillo and install a government of law and order even more subservient to US interests. Ultimately, this led to Castillo's preemptive and failed attempt to dissolve Congress ahead of an impeachment vote on December 7.



US Ambassador Lisa Kenna meeting with Peru's defense minister Gustavo Bobbio the day before the ouster and arrest of President Pedro Castillo (Photo: mindef-Peru) [Photo: mindef-Peru]

The day before, US ambassador Lisa Kenna, who worked for nine years for the CIA and was executive secretary for Trump's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, met with Gustavo Bobbio, who had been named Defense Secretary a day earlier. Bobbio, as described in an interview with RPP Noticia, gave the "indication" to the military command to disobey Castillo's orders on December 7 and keep the troops in the barracks that day. Bobbio's predecessor had resigned earlier that week, and the chief commander of the armed forces resigned hours before Castillo's speech to dissolve Congress.

Almost immediately after Castillo's speech, Kenna tweeted condemning the action, which was followed shortly after by a joint statement of the Peruvian military and police vowing to defend the "constitutional order," the expedited impeachment of Castillo by Congress and his arrest under the orders of the high command. Then the State Department and the European Union quickly recognized Boluarte as the new head of state.

On December 13, one day before the declaration of a state of emergency and troop deployment against protesters, Boluarte met with Kenna, "who reaffirmed the complete support of her country to the democratic institutions in Peru and to the actions of the constitutional government to stabilize the social situation," according to a tweet by the official account of the Peruvian regime.

An article published on Monday in *La Jornada* reports that the military attaché to the US embassy, Mariano Alvarado, played a key role in coordinating the coup with the Peruvian high command. The Mexican daily then cites sources tied to the transnational corporations in Lima who point to a "sophisticated intelligence operation" since September to convince Castillo that he had the support of the armed forces to dissolve Congress, in order to facilitate his impeachment.

Now, Boluarte's regime is controlled by figures from military backgrounds and with clear ties to Washington:

- Prime Minister Alberto Otárola, who has been the face of the crackdown, was vice-minister of Defense in the Alejandro Toledo administration and special adviser to a reform commission working to give the military a cover of civilian oversight, as promoted by the US. At the time, USAID financed countless programs to train the Congress and "civil society" to promote to refurbish the image of the military after the resignation of authoritarian president Alberto Fujimori. The funds were used to train more than 7,000 civilians in security matters.
- The new intelligence chief, retired colonel Juan Carlos Liendo O'Connor, worked in the Directorate of Strategy Policy and Plans of the US Southern Command as Liaison of the Peruvian Ministry of Defense and Joints Chiefs of Staff.
- The new minister of defense, Gen. Jorge Chávez Cresta (ret) is a graduate of the West Virginia National Guard and the William Perry Center in Washington, and has repeatedly worked as liaison with the US and European militaries.

The ouster of Castillo is the latest of countless coups in Latin America orchestrated by Washington to secure US corporate and geopolitical interests—most recently, the Bolivian military coup that ousted Evo Morales in 2019. Regarding Peru, its biggest export and

import partner is China, which is openly considered by US imperialism as the main threat to its global hegemony.

Meanwhile, the US and Peruvian ruling classes are desperately seeking an end to the ceaseless political instability in Peru—with five presidents in just over two years and the overturn of 80 ministers under Castillo—and waves of weeks-long roadblocks and protests. Amid numerous supply chain crises globally, Peru has seen significant disruptions in mining as the world's second largest producer of copper, silver, and zinc.

Castillo's own deployment of the military against rural demonstrators who had shut down the major Las Bambas mine owned by the Chinese MMG Ltd., as well as the police repression against strikes in Cusco, Lima and other cities over soaring food and fuel prices earlier this year, played an enormous role in discrediting the former rural schoolteacher and union leader. This has played a significant alienating role, limiting the extent of the current protests, with the working class yet to intervene en masse.

However, the aim of US imperialism and the Peruvian oligarchy to establish a period of stability under an authoritarian military regime is easier said than done. The social contradictions are so immense that another eruption is on the horizon as part of the growth of the class struggle across the Americas.

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