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OPINION | THE AMERICAS

Blinken Blindsides an Ally in Guatemala

Are Democrats nursing a grudge against Attorney General Porras?



By

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Maria Consuelo Porras Argueta at the national palace in Guatemala City, May 16, 2018.

PHOTO: LUIS SOTO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The migration calamity that exploded in the border city of Del Rio, Texas, this month is the product of bureaucratic incompetence. But Democratic Party politics and progressive ideology have also played big roles in fomenting the crisis.

When Democrats were out of power, their denunciations of President Trump's border policies sent a message to migrants that asylum-seekers would be welcome if there were a new occupant in the White House. It was a way to rev up the base for the 2020 presidential election. It also helped candidate Joe Biden get buy-in from extremist factions seeking to tear down institutions like private property and the rule of law.

The border mess is only the latest fallout from a strategy that puts the accumulation of power by Democrats above national security. Flying below the radar is another troubling

Biden project: resuming the effort, begun during the Obama administration, to impose progressivism on Guatemala.

On Sept. 20 Secretary of State Antony Blinken publicly accused Guatemalan attorney general Maria Consuelo Porras —without providing evidence—of having “obstructed investigations into acts of corruption by interfering with criminal investigations.”

Per Mr. Blinken’s memo, Ms. Porras’s U.S. visa has been revoked. Ms. Porras’s office told me that the U.S. never informed her personally of the allegations and that she found out about them through a tweet by Mr. Blinken.

There is no criminal case against Ms. Porras. In fact, she has a stellar reputation among U.S. law enforcement. In June the Drug Enforcement Administration’s assistant regional director for Central America, Miguel Madrigal, gave Ms. Porras a certificate of appreciation for her “dedication and effort helping to fight drug trafficking in Guatemala and support of big DEA investigations.”

In February 2020, Joseph D. Brown, the U.S. attorney for the eastern district of Texas, recognized her “commitment to justice and cooperation in joint criminal investigations between” the two countries. That same month the Justice Department gave her an award in “recognition of [her] support to Operation Regional Shield.” Her office works regularly with national police to apprehend and extradite transnational crime suspects to the U.S. and has a dedicated unit, working with Homeland Security, to combat human trafficking.

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Ms. Porras has a record as a serious prosecutor trying to build an independent, transparent rule of law. As part of this effort, in August 2020 she asked the courts to lift the immunity of 92 Guatemalan congressmen (from both sides of the aisle), 13 members

of the supreme court, and six members of the constitutional court. The message from her office was that no one is above the law.

So why is Mr. Blinken engaged in what appears to be a smear of this respected legal mind, who is also a U.S. ally? Americans have no way of knowing because the evidence is being withheld by the U.S. government. But we do know that leftwing NGOs in Washington, their friends inside the State Department and socialist members of Congress have a grudge against Ms. Porras.

Democrats' colonialism toward Guatemala took a hit in 2018, when then-President Jimmy Morales didn't renew the mandate for the U.N.'s International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, or CICIG. It had been brought into the country in 2007 to investigate and dismantle "illicit security forces and clandestine organizations" and other criminal networks. But when the left—and Democrats—realized the commission could be used to jail any political adversary, due process went out the window.

After CICIG left, attorney general Thelma Aldana, who had endorsed CICIG's lawlessness, fled the country. Congress put Ms. Porras on a short list of candidates for the job and Mr. Morales chose her. In July she fired rogue prosecutor Juan Francisco Sandoval—with cause.

Mr. Sandoval claims that he had been investigating President Alejandro Giammattei for corruption and that's why he was fired. He told the media that he took that file with him when he fled the country and that he gave it to U.S. officials. On Aug. 24, the New York Times reported that the "Department of Justice is now looking into the allegations, according to a U.S. official." I asked Justice to confirm that it received those documents from Mr. Sandoval. It issued a terse "no further comment."

Mr. Blinken has taken the side of Mr. Sandoval, whose allegations suggest that Ms. Porras is protecting the president. But she told me in a telephone interview earlier this month that she had no knowledge of Mr. Sandoval's investigation. Her office has now launched its own investigation of the president. Since Mr. Sandoval stole the documents—a felony in Guatemala—Ms. Porras has to start from scratch and prove her innocence. Just like the old days of CICIG.

If Mr. Blinken has evidence that Ms. Porras is covering up for a corrupt president, he should share it with members of Congress on a bipartisan basis.

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