

Dana Rohrabacher Speaks out on El Salvador Election, Clashes With Obama Administration

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AS the Obama Administration expresses neutrality, a group of Republican Congressmen have serious concerns about one of the candidates in the El Salvadorian elections on Sunday, March 15. West Orange County Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, who represents Seal Beach among other cities, was part of the GOP Representatives threatening sanctions if the left leaning candidate Mauricio Funes is elected.

According to published reports, a group of 46 Congressman, including Rohrabacher, sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton earlier this month expressing concerns about the "extremism" of the views of Mauricio Funes. Some of these Congressman, including Rohrabacher, have also called publicly for sanctions if Funes is elected.

In response, the Obama Administration has staked out a position of neutrality. On Friday, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Thomas Shannon said "I have met with both political candidates here in Washington. We have engaged both major political parties in El Salvador. And we have made it very clear that this is a choice of the Salvadoran people that we will respect and that we look forward to, continuing our very positive relationship with El Salvador, and working with the next elected government."

This election is the first time since the end of the civil war that the right wing ruling party in El Salvador has a chance of losing the Presidency. The history of both parties is far from unblemished. On the right hand, there is the National Republican Alliance (ARENA), a right-wing party founded by the former death squad leader, Roberto D'Aubuisson at the height of the bloody civil war. On the left hand, there is the party of the former Marxist guerrillas, Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), with Mauricio Funes as the candidate.

The sitting President of this staunch US ally is prevented from running again due to term limits. The Arena's candidate is Rodrigo Avila, a former police chief. Funes is a former TV journalist. Some of the GOP Congressman are concerned that Funes and his left leaning party will move El Salvador closer to the other leftist states in the hemisphere, such as Venezuela.

While the Obama administration has taken a position of non-interference in the election, the Bush Administration was not bashful about taking sides in El Salvador. During their 2004 elections, Bush's Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Otto Reich, said in a press teleconference at ARENA headquarters in San Salvador just before the vote "We are concerned about the impact that an FMLN victory could have on the commercial, economic, and migration-related relations of the U.S. with El Salvador."