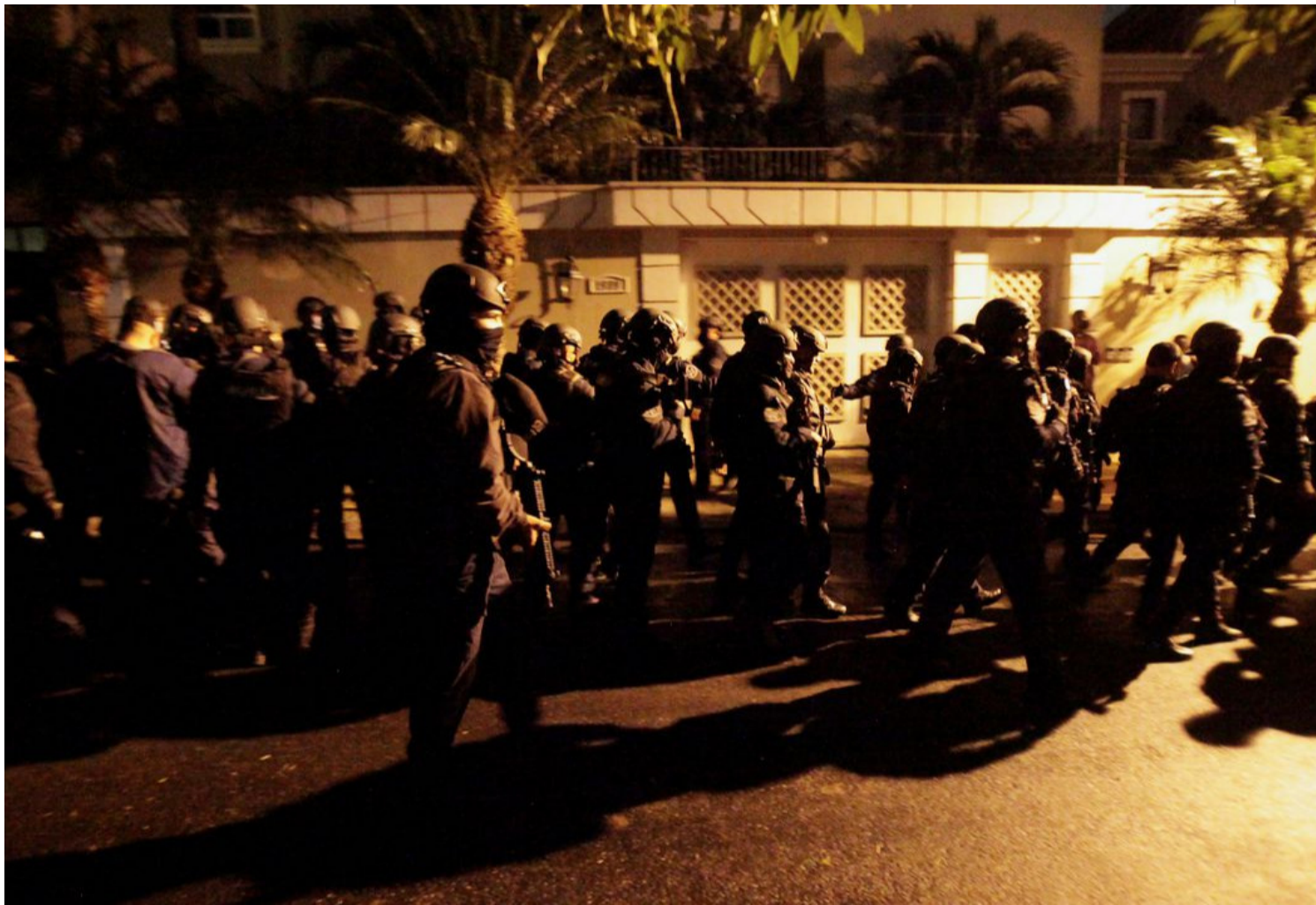


U.S. requests extradition of former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez



**Honduran police officers surround the house of ex-president Juan Orlando Hernandez after the U.S. requested his arrest and extradition, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras February 14, 2022.
REUTERS/Fredy Rodriguez**

Tegucigalpa, February 15 (RHC)-- Scores of Honduran police officers on Monday surrounded the house of former president Juan Orlando Hernandez after the United States asked the government to arrest and extradite Washington's key erstwhile ally in the region. Speculation has been swirling for months that the United States was planning to extradite Hernandez when he left office amid accusations that he colluded with drug traffickers.

Washington's request for extradition represents a major about-face by the U.S. government, which saw Hernandez as a vital ally in the volatile Central America region during his eight years in power. The United States had already placed Hernandez on a blacklist, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken this month said there were credible reports Hernandez "has engaged in significant corruption by committing or facilitating acts of corruption and narco-trafficking.

Hernandez's lawyer, Hermes Ramírez, told Canal 5 television that the former president was holed up inside his home and that the arrest warrant for Hernandez is illegal because he has immunity as a member of the regional Central American parliament. Hernandez formally joined the Guatemala-based regional body, called Parlacen, just a few hours after Castro's inauguration as president. Parlacen affords members immunity from prosecution in Central America, though that immunity can be removed or suspended if a member's home country requests it.

Luis Javier Santos, Honduras' best known anti-corruption prosecutor, said on Twitter that "there is no impediment to his extradition."

The Honduran Foreign Ministry earlier in the day said the U.S. Embassy had requested the arrest of a Honduran politician who is the subject of an extradition request to the United States, without naming him.

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