

Fujimori's turn to face charges

OUR OPINION: LANDMARK EXTRADITION EXPANDS REACH OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Opinión
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The Chilean Supreme Court has expanded the global reach of human-rights law by approving the extradition of former Peruvian strongman Alberto Fujimori. Now Mr. Fujimori is poised to become the first former president sent back to his home country to be tried for crimes against humanity. This is a milestone not only for Latin America but also for the entire world.

Mr. Fujimori deserves to be held to account. He has been an international fugitive from justice since he fled to Japan in 2000 to avoid charges for his abuses of power. At the time, he left Peru in political and economic turmoil. He had the gall to fax his resignation from Japan, which refused to extradite him. Two years ago, he abruptly turned up in Chile.

He may have been trying to rally supporters and provoke a political opening for his return in Peru. Instead, Peruvian authorities petitioned Chile for his extradition based on 13 corruption and human-rights charges. Notably, the Chilean Supreme Court weighed the validity of the charges. It decided to extradite him on seven of those charges, including two related to massacres.

This is a landmark. Fugitive heads of state historically have been given special treatment. Usually governments grant them immunity, refuge and quiet retirement. Think Papa Doc or Idi Amin.

More recently, governments have sent former heads of state to international human-rights tribunals. Mr. Fujimori is the first to be sent back to be prosecuted in his home country, and rightly so.

Early in his decade-long rule, Mr. Fujimori won deserved popularity for successfully taming hyperinflation and fighting the Shining Path and Tupac Amaru insurgencies. But his so-called self-coup, in which he supported the army's overthrow of his own government, turned him into a de facto dictator. Such absolute power breeds the kind of atrocities that happened under his watch, if not his orders.

Mr. Fujimori still has supporters at home, and no doubt they will rally to his defense. Current Peruvian President Alan García will be tested. But Peru has been tested before by Mr. Fujimori, and now it is stronger.

The country already has benefited from the many convictions of Vladimiro Montesinos, Mr. Fujimori's shadowy security chief. Once hailed as the power behind the presidency, Montesinos' reign ended when videos exposed his web of abuse, deceit and extortion --

and prompted Mr. Fujimori's flight. Mr. Montesinos still faces numerous charges that should keep him behind bars for decades.

Now it's Mr. Fujimori's turn to face the music.