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FEATURED Q&A

How Would Pompeo Affect U.S. Policy Toward the Region?



U.S. President Donald Trump this month fired Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and tapped Central Intelligence Agency Director Mike Pompeo (pictured) as his replacement. // File Photo: U.S. Senate.

Q U.S. President Donald Trump announced his firing of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on March 13 in a tweet in which he also said that he would nominate current Central Intelligence Agency Director Mike Pompeo for the role. Tillerson's dismissal came just days after the White House announced that Trump would attend the Summit of the Americas next month in Peru, followed by a stop in Colombia, marking his first trip to Latin America as president. Will Pompeo receive smooth confirmation in the Senate? What does Pompeo's rise to secretary of state mean for U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean? What will Trump accomplish on his trip to South America next month?

A James R. Jones, member of the Advisor board, chairman of Monarch Global Strategies, former U.S. ambassador to Mexico and former member of the U.S. House of Representatives: "Rex Tillerson and Donald Trump are two entirely different personalities, and they never clicked. What was surprising is that Tillerson put up with Trump's undercutting as long as he did. That air of uncertainty must also have affected his apparent lack of attention to what was going on inside the State Department. Clearly, there was widespread discontent there. Mike Pompeo came to Congress after I left, and I have never had occasion to know him. But he is obviously smart, even if he is much more hawkish than I think is needed at State. What is encouraging is that his record at the CIA indicates that he respects and uses talented career government servants. While many of our best foreign service officers have retired since Trump took office, there are many

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TODAY'S NEWS

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At Least 68 Killed in Fire at Venezuelan Jail

The fire swept through jail cells connected to a police station in the northern city of Valencia. A riot reportedly preceded the blaze.

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ECONOMIC

Argentina's Economic Activity Surges in January

The country's economic activity surged 4.1 percent in January as compared to the same month a year, according to the state statistics agency. Argentina's poverty rate also declined.

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POLITICAL

Ecuador Cuts Off Assange's Internet Access

Ecuador's government suspended the Internet access of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange at the country's embassy in London, where Assange has been living since 2012. Ecuador accused Assange of violating an agreement not to interfere with other nations.

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Assange // File Photo: Ecuadorean Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

At Least 68 Killed in Fire at Venezuelan Police Station Jail

At least 68 people were killed Wednesday when a fire broke out in the jail area of a police station in the northern Venezuelan city of Valencia, the country's prosecutor general, Tarek William Saab, said in a posting on Twitter. Sixty-six men and two women were killed in the blaze, said Saab, who added that the women were overnight visitors in the jail. Saab also

“We will deepen the investigations to immediately clarify these painful events that have left dozens of Venezuelan families in mourning.”
— Tarek William Saab

said four prosecutors have been appointed to investigate the incident. “The Public Ministry guarantees that we will deepen the investigations to immediately clarify these painful events that have left dozens of Venezuelan families in mourning,” Saab said in a tweet. A Window to Freedom, a nonprofit group that monitors prison conditions in Venezuela, said the fire broke out following a riot in the jail, CBS News reported. The group said preliminary but unconfirmed reports said an altercation began after an armed detainee shot an officer in the leg. Fires then broke out and spread to mattresses, which then became engulfed in flames. Rescue crews reportedly had to break holes in the cell walls in order to free some of the prisoners trapped inside. Following the fire, dozens of family members gathered outside the police station, demanding information about their relatives, Venezuelan newspaper El Universal reported. Family members clashed violently with police, who pushed them back using tear gas. The jail had a capacity of ap-

proximately 60 detainees, The New York Times reported, citing workers at the scene. However, Venezuelan prisons are notoriously overcrowded, with decrepit facilities and inadequate numbers of personnel. In 2015, the most recent year with reliable statistics, 49,644 people were incarcerated in Venezuelan prisons designed to hold 19,000, according to research organization InSight Crime. The country also has 33,000 people in temporary holding cells designed to house 5,000, the group said.

Ecuador Cuts off Assange's Internet Access at Embassy

Ecuador's government on Wednesday announced that it had cut off Julian Assange's Internet access at the country's embassy in London, where the WikiLeaks founder has been living for nearly six years. In a statement, the South American country's government said it had pulled the plug on Assange's communications with the outside world because he violated an agreement not to interfere with other nations. Messages Assange wrote on social media “put at risk the good relations that the country maintains with the United Kingdom with the rest of the states of the European union and other nations,” Ecuador's government said in the statement. Ecuador's move came after Assange posted a tweet on Monday challenging Britain's accusation that Russia was to blame for the poisoning of a former Russian double agent and his daughter earlier this month in the English city of Salisbury, The Guardian reported. Assange also questioned the decisions by Britain and more than 20 other countries to expel Russian diplomats in the wake of the poisoning. Assange has been holed up in the embassy since June 2012 to avoid extradition to Sweden over allegations of sex crimes, which he has repeatedly denied. Sweden has since dropped the charges, but he has remained in the embassy in an effort to avoid arrest by British authorities for jumping bail and also on fears that he could be extradited to the United States to face questioning on the leaking of government documents.

NEWS BRIEFS

Peru's Vizcarra Reportedly Taps Opposition Politician as Prime Minister

New Peruvian President Martín Vizcarra appointed an opposition politician as his prime minister, La República reported Wednesday, citing officials of his party. César Villanueva has reportedly accepted the post and is working with Vizcarra to fill the rest of the cabinet by Monday. César Acuña, president of Villanueva's Alliance for Progress Party, hailed the move and called on leaders to ensure “political stability” in Peru.

U.S. Asks Brazilian Gov't to Review Quotas on Imported Ethanol

The United States has asked Brazil to review its quotas on the importation of U.S. ethanol, Folha de S.Paulo reported Wednesday, citing Thomaz Zanotto, director of foreign commerce for the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP). He said the United States had asked for the review in exchange for its removal of tariffs on steel and aluminum on Brazil. Zanotto also said the United States discussed supporting Brazil's entry into the OECD.

Colombia Blocks App Linked to Cambridge Analytica

Colombia has temporarily blocked the app Pig.gi after allegations that the app was linked to Facebook's recent data collection scandal, El Tiempo reported. The country's Superintendency of Industry and Commerce ordered the move on Wednesday after it was revealed that the app had a link to British data firm Cambridge Analytica, which is accused of collecting users' data without their consent during elections in several countries. Colombia will vote in a presidential election on May 27. Pig.gi has dismissed allegations that it was involved in political advertising as “completely false.”

ECONOMIC NEWS

Argentina's Economic Activity Surges in January

Argentina's economic activity grew 4.1 percent in January as compared to same month last year, according to data released on Wednesday by state statistics agency Indec, La Nación reported. The country's economy expanded 0.6 percent in January as compared to December. "We are on the right path," said President Mauricio Macri. "That's why call on everyone to work together and let this new data serve to help us understand that the path we're on has one clear goal: reducing poverty." Macri's government celebrated the release of data yesterday that showed that the number of Argentines living in poverty had fallen by 1.9 million in



Macri // File Photo: Argentine Government.

2017, reducing the overall rate to 25.7 percent, Clarín reported. The data also showed a significant reduction in homelessness and poverty among children. Macri, a center-right former mayor of Buenos Aires, was elected in 2015 on promises to reform the government and kickstart Argentina's stagnant economy. One of his first moves as president was revamping the central statistics agency, which had suffered a decline in credibility after his predecessor claimed that Argentina had lower poverty rates than Germany. The data released yesterday showed that fishing and construction were the sectors that grew most in January, compared to the same month in 2017. [Editor's note: See [Q&A](#) on potential labor reforms in Argentina in the Jan. 30 issue of the Advisor.]

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more who should be included in developing and implementing policy. Pompeo also seems to have the respect of the president and apparently can communicate with him effectively, unlike what Tillerson was able to do. Pompeo should have a fairly smooth confirmation process in the Senate unless he takes a hard-right militaristic view of foreign diplomatic policy. It also should help that he comes from a background of elective politics where one learns that winning votes is best done by finding common ground and mutual respect with those you are trying to influence, not by bullying or lecturing them on how inferior they are. If he can convince Trump to change his approach with the Latin American leaders to emphasize partnership, not paternalism, that could be a major change in how Latin America perceives the United States and how much it is willing to work with us."

A **Ray Walser, retired U.S. Foreign Service officer and former Latin American policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation:** "During his time as CIA director, Mike Pompeo gained the confidence and trust of President Trump like few others, according to Washington pundits. It is therefore hoped that the president, the secretary and the State Department will work in greater harmony. Once the 'first line of defense,' diplomacy has suffered a recent death by a thousand cuts. It should be noted, however, that Pompeo would be the first secretary of state since Alexander Haig to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, where leadership, professionalism and service are the watchwords of a great institution. Clearly, the new secretary's most urgent priorities will focus on the gravest geopolitical challenges—North Korean nukes, Chinese and Russian revisionism, Iran, Syria and the post-ISIS Middle East. One assumes Pompeo will not drastically change compass points for the Western Hemisphere and will seek viable partnerships with pivotal nations like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia,

Mexico and Peru, increase vigilance for security threats, including terrorism and transnational crime, and implementing effective strategies targeting the vicious circle of crime, corruption and poverty-driven instability in Central America. Undoubtedly Venezuela's future as a functioning democracy and viable nation-state will loom high on the secretary's agenda. I rate expectations for President Trump's summit participation as comparatively low. The president is not popular, and his knowledge of the region is limited and outdated. Following scripted talking points is not his style. A combative 'America First' approach to the summit, focused on border walls, economic protectionism and 'mano dura' law and immigration enforcement, will float like a lead balloon. To succeed even modestly, it will be incumbent upon the president to offer a positive vision and pathways forward that address shared security and prosperity, strong anti-corruption measures and strengthened democratic institutions. This is a tall order."

A **Riordan Roett, director of the Latin American Studies program at the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies:** "Trump's trip to Latin America to attend the Summit of the Americas will follow the less-than-successful visit of Vice President Pence, which followed Trump's offhand comments regarding military action against the Maduro regime in Venezuela. Regional leaders were not amused. Former Secretary of State Tillerson recently traveled south, issuing dire warnings about the growing role of China in the region, overlooking the dynamic trade relations between most of the countries and Beijing. He also resurrected the Monroe Doctrine. Again, regional leaders were not amused. Trump's nominee for secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, is a conservative Republican who has been director of the CIA for the first year of the Trump administration. Democrats in the Senate will balk at voting for him, but

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the Republicans are in the majority, and he is the president's choice and will probably be confirmed. Trump carries a great deal of baggage. He canceled U.S. membership in the Trans-Pacific Partnership; he has imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum; his administration has rolled back many of the Obama administration's decisions on Cuba; and he continues to insist on building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. It is difficult to imagine that he will receive little more than a formal, polite reception from his fellow heads of state at the summit. And he deserves little more."

A **Raymond A. Joseph, former ambassador of Haiti to the United States:** "Even before leaving for his trip to Peru to attend the April 13-14 summit, President Trump must rearrange his agenda. As expected, he won't be meeting with Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, the 79-year-old former Wall Street banker who resigned last week as Peru's president. Interestingly, the theme of the summit is 'Democratic Governance Against Corruption.' Will President Trump meet privately with Peru's new president, Martín Vizcarra, a longtime ally of Kuczynski? The anti-corruption movement sweeping through the region will be a test for the nominated secretary of state, Mike Pompeo. A former congressman who

received Senate confirmation last year as CIA director, he will probably be approved for his new post. He must repair relations with the region, which are frayed after his predecessor evoked the Monroe Doctrine to warn against China's increasing influence in the

“ [Pompeo] must repair relations with the region.”

— Raymond A. Joseph

region. President Trump's immigration policy and his previous derogatory comments about Mexicans and Salvadorans don't endear him to 'friends' south of the border. His stiff tariffs on aluminum and steel products specifically harm the economy of Brazil. Though Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos was invited to the White House last month, President Trump still plans a stop in that country, no doubt to bolster Colombia's resolve against Venezuela, a political and economic headache for the region."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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