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FEATURED Q&A

Is Venezuela Facing a Foreign Military Intervention?



Organization of American States Secretary General Luis Almagro this month raised the prospect of a military intervention in Venezuela. // File Photo: Organization of American States.

Q Organization of American States Secretary General Luis Almagro this month said that a "military intervention to overthrow" Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro shouldn't be ruled out. Almagro's comments echoed remarks a year ago by U.S. President Donald Trump that he wouldn't take a "military option" in Venezuela off the table. How likely is a foreign military intervention in Venezuela? How would it take shape, and who would orchestrate it? Would such an action be justified, and what would be the most likely outcome and consequences of foreign troops in Venezuela?

A Phil Gunson, senior analyst for the Andes region at International Crisis Group: "There can be no multilateral intervention in Venezuela under the terms of international law, as suggested by Almagro, since it would have to be approved by the U.N. Security Council, on which Maduro allies Russia and China have a veto. That only leaves a unilateral intervention by the United States, with the possible help of Colombia, based on the argument that their national security is threatened. Current saber-rattling notwithstanding, that remains improbable, although it cannot be ruled out entirely while Donald Trump is in the White House. Were it to happen, it would not be a full-scale invasion, but rather a limited operation aimed exclusively at toppling the government and neutralizing its limited retaliatory capacity, including a handful of operational Sukhoi Su-30 aircraft. This might succeed in ousting Maduro, but at the potential cost of long-term instability, including protracted, low-intensity conflict. There is no 'government in waiting,' and the Venezuelan opposition is deeply divided. The country is

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Countries to Seek Probe of Venezuela at ICC: Report

A group of five Latin American nations are reportedly planning to ask the International Criminal Court to investigate Venezuela's government for alleged crimes against humanity.

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Brazilian Judge Strips Gilead of Patent for Hepatitis C Drug

A judge stripped the U.S.-based pharmaceutical company of its patent for sofosbuvir, also known by its brand name Sovaldi.

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Haddad Closing Gap With Bolsonaro in Brazil Race: Poll

Support for Workers' Party candidate Fernando Haddad rose three percentage points to 22 percent in the latest Ibope poll. Front-runner Jair Bolsonaro led in the poll with 28 percent.

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Haddad // File Photo: Haddad Campaign.

POLITICAL NEWS

Countries Reportedly Poised to Ask ICC to Probe Venezuela

A group of five Latin American countries are planning to ask the International Criminal Court to investigate Venezuela's government for alleged crimes against humanity, the Financial Times reported today. Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Peru and Paraguay are poised to submit the request, which Canada has reportedly considered joining, tonight. The request would mark an escalation of international pressure against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's government. The countries' request cites multiple cases of alleged abuse of human rights, including in excess of 8,000 extrajudicial killings, the newspaper reported. It comes amid a migration crisis in which millions of people have fled Venezuela. "Never before has a country been referred to the ICC by an outside state," an unnamed diplomat familiar with the matter told the Financial Times. "This is a huge step. It's historic." The request could lead the United Nations to invoke its "responsibility to protect," a pledge United Nations members made more than a decade ago to act against genocide, crimes against humanity and other human rights abuses. On Monday, Maduro accused the governments of Chile, Colombia and Mexico of aiding "terrorists" in connection with an August incident that Venezuela's government has called a failed assassination attempt against Maduro, Reuters reported. In the incident, a pair of drones exploded near Maduro during a military parade. "Today I can say we have convincing elements of the participation of Chilean, Colombian and Mexican diplomats in the protection of these people who undertook a terrorist act," said Maduro, who showed a video of a young Venezuelan man, Henryberth Rivas, who said in a televised broadcast that he participated in the drone attack. In the video, Rivas said an associate had told him to seek refuge at the Chilean embassy in Caracas after the attack. From there, Rivas said he was told he would be smuggled to the Mexican embassy,

then to the Colombian embassy and finally to Colombia. However, the plan did not materialize because the Chilean embassy was closed, he said. Maduro did not provide evidence of the alleged role of the embassies, and the three countries refuted Maduro's accusations.

Nicaraguan Vice Foreign Minister Denies Repression

During a visit Monday to Washington, Nicaragua's vice minister of foreign affairs, Valdrack Jaentschke, denied that the Central American country's government and police are violating protesters' human rights and insisted that President Daniel Ortega's administration is seeking peace. In an appearance at the Inter-American Dialogue, Jaentschke blamed the violence that has beset Nicaragua since mid-April on opponents that want to see Ortega overthrown. "We defeated the coup, and we are continuing to build peace and tranquility," said Jaentschke. In



Jaentschke // Photo: Irene Estefanía González, Inter-American Dialogue.

a report last month, the United Nations Human Rights Office said Nicaragua's government has turned a blind eye toward armed mobs that have abducted and tortured anti-government protesters, some of whom were reportedly raped with rifles while in detention. "Repression and retaliation against demonstrators continue in Nicaragua as the world looks away," U.N. human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein said in a statement accompanying the release of the report on Aug. 29. Nicaragua's government rejected the report as biased and ordered the expulsion of a U.N. human rights delegation shortly after the report's release. On Monday,

NEWS BRIEFS

Haddad Closing Gap With Bolsonaro in Brazil Presidential Race: Poll

Fernando Haddad, the presidential candidate of Brazil's leftist Workers' Party, is closing the gap with far-right front-runner Jair Bolsonaro, according to a new Ibope poll released Monday, Reuters reported. Haddad gained three percentage points since last week's poll to reach 22 percent support, behind Bolsonaro, who has 28 percent approval ahead of the first round of the election on Oct. 7. If no one wins a majority in the first round, the poll shows that Haddad would beat Bolsonaro in the second round, which would be held Oct. 28.

Trump Says He's an 'Absolute No' on Puerto Rico Statehood

U.S. President Donald Trump said in a radio interview broadcast Monday that he is an "absolute no" on statehood for Puerto Rico, citing his feud with San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz, who criticized the federal government's response last year to Hurricane Maria, The Washington Post reported. "With the mayor of San Juan as bad as she is and as incompetent as she is, Puerto Rico shouldn't be talking about statehood until they get some people that really know what they're doing," Trump said on Cleveland's WTAM Radio.

ATCO Energía to Become Qualified Supplier in Mexico's Energy Market

Canada-based ATCO's Mexican subsidiary, ATCO Energía, will enter Mexico's wholesale electricity market as a qualified supplier, now that it has approval from the National Center for Energy Control, the company said. ATCO Energía will supply energy, capacity and ancillary services to customers. This year, ATCO's Canadian Utilities acquired a 35-megawatt hydroelectric power station in Veracruz State.

Jaentschke reiterated the government's denial of government and police repression of demonstrators. "The police is not a violator of human rights. There is no women being raped," he said, drawing jeers of disbelief from the audience. He said no one's human rights are being violated. "That is [a] lie. That is a complete and absolute manipulation of the truth." More than 300 people have been killed in Nicaragua in crackdowns by Nicaraguan police and armed groups backing Ortega's government in the past five months, according to human rights groups. In some of the latest violence, police and supporters of the government clashed with anti-government demonstrators on Sunday. At least one person, a 16-year-old boy, was killed in what police called "crossfire" between the rival groups, the Associated Press reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

Brazilian Judge Strips Gilead of Patent for Hepatitis C Drug

A Brazilian federal judge removed the patent protection of U.S.-based pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences' hepatitis C treatment drug in the country following presidential candidate Marina Silva's calls to do so, opening the door for cheaper generics, Folhapress reported Monday. Judge Rolando Valcir Spanholo revoked the exclusivity patent for the drug sofosbuvir, known by its brand name Sovaldi, which effectively cures hepatitis C in more than 95 percent of treatment cases. Gilead has been harshly criticized for its price, as each pill initially sold for \$1,000 in the United States, Reuters reported. Earlier this month, Silva had asked for the patent to be overturned, seeking to reduce costs for patients. Brazilian pharmaceutical companies are competing for the right to produce a much cheaper version of the drug. One company, Farmanguinhos-Fiocruz, has reportedly proposed production of a generic version that costs \$8.50 per pill, approximately 25 percent of the price charged by Gilead in Brazil, Reuters reported.

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infested with heavily armed groups of many varieties, both criminal and political as well as hybrids of the two, most of which have a vested interest in the status quo. Foreign intervention would give them a nationalist pretext to continue their depredations, and no intervention force is likely to be interested in occupying the country indefinitely to guarantee internal security. An unstable country, with a government of questionable legitimacy, would attract neither the inward investment nor the multilateral aid Venezuela will need to restore its devastated economy."

A **Asdrúbal Aguiar, professor of human rights and former judge of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission:**

"To speak of Venezuela and the statements made by the OAS secretary general requires two clarifications: first, we are talking about a criminal narco-state that has taken form since August 1999, when it began associating with Colombian drug trafficking, the cocaine industry, the supply of arms and the laundering of dirty money. And second, Juan José Rabilero, chief of Cuba's committees for the defense of the revolution, has admitted that 30,000 of his members are in Venezuela to defend the revolution. The outcome is a context of massive and systemic violations of human rights and generalized starvation that affects the whole population. It has made evident crimes against humanity. The matter goes beyond the internal affairs related to the state, according to international law. And it is the entire international community's responsibility to either resolve it or be complicit by omission. Now, what are the most effective and necessary measures for this? This is the issue under discussion. Humanitarian intervention, in particular, has precedent in the United Nations, which since 1993 has called for 'quick and secure' aid for victims. In 2000, Kofi Annan interpellated this very community of states: "If humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable

assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica, to gross and systematic violation of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity? This is, in sum, the context which, in my view, Luis Almagro finds himself in."

A **Julia Buxton, professor of comparative politics at the School of Public Policy of Central European University in**

Budapest: "The remarks of Almagro were extraordinary—completely irresponsible and unhelpful. They will have put further traction under the outflow of people—there is nothing quite like the threat of a military intervention to accelerate flight. Almagro's comments have rightfully generated a strong anti-intervention backlash from OAS countries and from the Lima Group. The secretary general's lack of diplomatic skill, debilitating partiality in handling the Venezuela 'crisis' and waning regional confidence in his leadership surely calls into question his tenure. A foreign military intervention by a combined inter-Americas force is unlikely. With the exception of possibly Colombia, which has its own motivations for following such a deeply problematic response, no country would willingly contribute to such a force. Any type of unilateral U.S. engagement (or bilaterally with Colombia) risks plunging not just Venezuela, but the wider Andean region into civil conflict and particularly at such a fragile moment in Colombia's peace process. Perhaps in response to criticism that it is the Venezuelan diaspora overseas calling for the intervention, there have been recent polls indicating domestic popular support within Venezuela for a military solution. There is skepticism as to the veracity of the data, but without a doubt any such sentiment would quickly dissipate in the absence of a rapid, well-funded and competently executed program of economic stabilization and civil disarmament—and this has absolutely not been the case in other 'regime change' experiences. There is no legitimate, democratic

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and popular government in waiting, and in this context any military intervention risks supplanting authoritarianism with authoritarianism.”

A John Maisto, member of the Advisor board, director of U.S. Education Finance Group and former U.S. ambassador to the

OAS: “The responsibility for resolving the tragedies of Venezuela still rests primarily with Venezuelans. Outside pressures must continue and increase. All the Venezuelan players, particularly an opposition that unites, and legitimate officials in exile, must focus on working together to achieve peaceful, democratic, constitutional transition; this requires true political will by all the players. The ‘carrot’ here for a new Venezuela must be international humanitarian, financial and economic aid to accompany political change. Time is not on either Venezuelan side. The Venezuelan military can still provide the impetus for change; such a role is hardly a ‘coup’ and Article 350 of the Venezuelan constitution clearly permits it. U.S. diplomacy should accompany all these efforts. Thoughts of foreign military intervention are understandable due to the emigration of millions of Venezuelans seeking relief. Such a move could only come credibly from the countries most affected—the immediate region. Political justification would have to accompany it—by regional governments, the

OAS and the United Nations. Such efforts would require unprecedented political will, and could and should involve the legitimate elected legislature, Supreme Court and other such leaders, including those in exile. Support from countries beyond the region—and a prime U.S. role—would be essential.

“The responsibility for resolving the tragedies of Venezuela still rests primarily with Venezuelans.”

— John Maisto

Such responses are akin to what is done to deal with natural disaster destruction. The sad alternatives are continued humanitarian crisis, pressures on neighboring and regional countries, and worse breakdown in Venezuela. Finally, the notion of U.S. military intervention without a prime regional role—in the absence of overriding U.S. national interest and with the promise of American responsibility for picking up the pieces—is a gigantic non-starter.”

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

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