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FEATURED Q&A

Is Colombia Doing Enough to Neutralize Militias?

Q A report released last week by Human Rights Watch said the Colombian government has failed to deal effectively with human rights violations committed by groups linked to former paramilitaries. The report, which Colombia's defense minister said was unfair, accuses officials of often ignoring militia violence. Is the government doing enough to neutralize the armed groups? How big a threat are militias to Colombia's stability and President Álvaro Uribe's legacy of successfully handling the FARC?

organizations. We are working to ensure permanent reintegration into civil society of these men and women, and to deter their return to illicit activities through the creation of legal jobs. The government has extended an invitation to Human Rights Watch to thoroughly go through the report with the relevant agencies in charge of fighting these criminals, so that HRW and those who read their reports can fully understand the nature of the problem and the very serious efforts under way to combat it. We look forward to this dialogue."

Continued on page 2

A Carolina Barco, ambassador of Colombia to the United States: "The Colombian government's commitment to fighting all illegal groups, including new criminal bands linked to drug trafficking, has been and will remain resolute and unyielding. The new criminal bands are different in their objectives, nature and operation from the paramilitary movement in Colombia. While the paramilitaries were created to confront the guerrilla movement, the bands we are fighting today are solely involved in drug trafficking, and are many times complicit with the FARC and other guerrilla groups. As in all peace processes, recidivism is a challenge. When you have tens of thousands of demobilized men and women in an environment where a very lucrative activity such as drug trafficking persists, there is a clear danger that some may join these organized drug trafficking



Mexican Interior Secretary Resigns From Ruling Party

Mexican Interior Secretary Fernando Gómez Mont, a central figure in the government's fight against drug cartels, has stepped down from the ruling National Action Party. See story on page 2.

File Photo: Mexican Government.

Inside This Issue

FEATURED Q&A: Is Colombia Doing Enough to Neutralize Militias?	1
Mexico's Interior Secretary Gómez Mont Leaves Ruling Party	2
Governor of Brasília Arrested on Corruption Charges	2
Lula Signs Decree to Allow Brazil's Economic Retaliation Against U.S.	3
Mexican Regulator Clears América Móvil to Acquire Stake in Telmex.....	3
Capitol Hill Watch: A Look at U.S. Congressional Activity on Latin America	3

NEWS BRIEFS

Governor of Brasilia Arrested on Corruption Charges

Police in Brazil arrested José Roberto Arruda, the governor of the federal district of Brasilia, on corruption charges Thursday, the Associated Press reported. Arruda, who denies wrongdoing, is accused of accepting bribes from companies seeking government contracts. The corruption scandal, which came to light in November, could affect the October presidential election. Arruda, of the conservative Democratas party, is aligned with leading presidential candidate São Paulo Gov. José Serra of the PSDB party.

Former Costa Rican President José Joaquín Trejos Dies

Former Costa Rican President José Joaquín Trejos died Wednesday night of natural causes at age 93, his family said, the Associated Press reported Thursday. Trejos, who led the Central American country from 1966 to 1970, had no political experience before being elected and campaigned on a pledge to fight corruption.

Peruvian Trade Minister to Visit U.S. for Free-Trade Meeting

Peru's Minister for Foreign Trade and Tourism will be in Washington next week, state news agency Adina reported Wednesday. Martin Pérez will attend the first meeting of the Peru-U.S. FTA's Free Trade Committee on Feb. 18. Environmental issues have been added to the agenda. Richard Bustamante, the head of Peru's Forestry Timber Resources Supervisory Body, known as Osinfor, will be traveling to Washington for the meetings, as well. The Peru-U.S. FTA took effect Feb. 1, 2009.

Political News**Mexico's Interior Secretary Gómez Mont Leaves Ruling Party**

Mexican Interior Secretary Fernando Gómez Mont has left the ruling conservative National Action Party (PAN) after a public dispute with party leaders over an alliance with the leftist Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), the Associated Press reported. Gómez Mont announced his decision Wednesday night to PAN leaders. Despite his dispute with the PAN, Gómez Mont did not explain Wednesday why he was leaving the party. The move will likely strain relations between him and President Felipe Calderón, and the move has fueled speculation that Gómez Mont will resign from his post as interior secretary. "The relationship between Calderón and Gómez Mont probably won't be the same," José Antonio Crespo,

a political analyst at the Center of Investigation and Economic Studies in Mexico City, told the AP. Calderón, who was in Ciudad Juárez Thursday, did not comment publicly on Gómez Mont's decision. The PAN and the PRD have worked together to back the same candidates in two Mexican gubernatorial elec-

“The relationship between Calderón and Gómez Mont probably won't be the same.”

— José Antonio Crespo

tions to take the offices away from the Institutional Revolutionary Party. Gómez Mont has said the alliance sacrificed ideology for political gain and called it "a sort of electoral fraud."

Featured Q&A

Continued from page 1

A Adam Isacson, director of programs at the Center for International Policy in Washington: "I commend Human Rights Watch for drawing unprecedented media attention to a problem that has been growing quickly and getting insufficient response in Colombia. The proliferation of so-called 'emerging groups,' mostly led by former mid-level paramilitary commanders, has caused a spike in violence in several parts of the country, including in the city of Medellín. The reversal is calling President Uribe's security policies into question. These 'neo-paramilitaries,' along with some guerrilla fronts, are the new model of a drug-trafficking organization in Colombia today. They have low-profile and sometimes unidentified leaders, well-armed private militias, physical control of territory, allies in the local political elite and corrupt ties with the local security forces. Occasionally, they cooperate with other illegal groups, and occasionally they fight them. In these respects, they bear some similarity

to Mexico's cartels. The April 2009 capture of 'Don Mario,' a former paramilitary and major sponsor of the new groups, was an important step. But it had to be done by Bogotá-based police, not local forces, and meanwhile dozens of local warlords remain at large and become increasingly powerful. Now that

“Colombia needs to do far more to dismantle these groups' leadership.”

— Adam Isacson

these groups' combined size is approaching that of the FARC, Colombia needs to do far more to dismantle these groups' leadership. In particular, Colombia must work to reverse their infiltration of the state by aggressively investigating and punishing any officials linked to them.

Continued on page 4

Economic News

Lula Signs Decree to Allow Brazil's Economic Retaliation Against U.S.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva signed a decree Thursday, allowing the South American country to retaliate against the United States in the countries' dispute over farm subsidies, Bloomberg News reported. The law allows Brazil to break U.S. patents and suspend intellectual property rights as long as the World Trade Organization gives its approval. In August, the WTO ruled Brazil can impose \$294.7 million worth of sanctions annually because of U.S. subsidies to cotton farmers.



Lula

File Photo: Brazilian Government.

Company News

Mexican Regulator Clears América Móvil to Acquire Stake in Telmex

Mexico's antitrust regulator on Thursday said it approved mobile phone carrier América Móvil's planned acquisition of a controlling stake in **Teléfonos de México**, or Telmex, Dow Jones reported. The Federal Competition Commission said that because both companies are controlled by Carlos Slim, the deal would not change the competitive environment. The approval also allows América Móvil to acquire Telmex Internacional, or **Telint**, as Slim consolidates his holdings in the sector. América Móvil in January announced it wanted to acquire **Carso Global Telecom**, which has controlling stakes in Telmex and Telint, in an all-stock deal.

To Our Subscribers

The Latin America Advisor will not be published Monday, Feb. 15 in observance of the Washington's Birthday holiday in the United States. We will resume publication on Tuesday, Feb. 16.

Capitol Hill Watch

A Look at U.S. Congressional Activity on Latin America

Florida's Lincoln Diaz-Balart Announces Retirement From Congress

Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.), an ardent supporter of the U.S. embargo against Cuba, announced Thursday he won't seek re-election to Congress, the *Miami Herald* reported. "Today I am announcing that I will not seek a 10th term in the United States Congress this November," Diaz-Balart said in a speech at Florida International University. Within minutes of the announcement, Diaz-Balart's brother, Mario Diaz-Balart, also a congressman, launched a campaign to succeed him, the *Herald* reported. That move would open up Mario Diaz-Balart's seat, which is adjacent to his brother's. "One of the achievements of which I am most proud was the codification, the writing into U.S. law, of the U.S. embargo on the Castro dictatorship, and the law's requirement that before any U.S. president can lift the embargo, all political prisoners must be freed, all political parties, labor unions and the press must be legalized and free multiparty elections must be scheduled in Cuba," Diaz-Balart said.



Lincoln Diaz-Balart

File Photo: U.S. Congress.

Mexican Economy Secretary Expecting End to Trucking Dispute With U.S.

Mexican Economy Secretary Gerardo Ruiz Mateos said Tuesday that the United States and Mexico would resolve a trade dispute over crossborder trucking by the end of the year, Agence France-Presse reported. Mateos made the comments at a joint press conference in Mexico City with U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk, who said the Obama administration was working with Congress and U.S. stakeholders to resolve the spat. Mexico slapped tariffs on nearly 90 U.S. products last year after Congress cut funding for a pilot program allowing Mexican truckers access to U.S. highways. Rep. Rick Larsen (D-Wash.) and Rep. Dennis Cardoza (D-Calif.) had asked congressional colleagues to sign a letter requesting the Obama administration end the stalemate, *The Trucker*, a transportation trade publication, reported last week. "Despite repeated letters and communication with the administration, the Department of Transportation has not moved forward to develop a plan that would remove these burdensome tariffs from the backs of our domestic businesses and farmers," the letter to their colleagues said, *The Trucker* reported.

Congressional Republicans Call for Cancellation of Cuba Migration Talks

Eight Republicans in Congress on Feb. 5 called for the cancellation of bilateral migration talks between the United States and Cuba, now scheduled for Feb. 19, suggesting the Obama administration is trying to "appease" the Cuban government after the arrest in Havana of a U.S. government subcontractor, the *Miami Herald* reported last week. "We are greatly concerned about the manner in which the administration is handling the arrest of Alan Gross," and its impact on U.S. pro-democracy programs in Cuba, they wrote to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The letter was signed by lawmakers including Dan Burton and Mike Pence of Indiana, Thaddeus McCotter of Michigan and Todd Tiahrt of Kansas.

Featured Q&A*Continued from page 2*

Meanwhile, Uribe government representatives need to retire their stock phrase that 'paramilitarism is over in Colombia.' It leaves the impression that they lack the political will to take on this growing problem."

A **Maria Velez de Berliner, president of Latin Intelligence Corporation in Alexandria, Va.:**

"Ignoring militia violence is not new in Colombia, nor is the Uribe government the first to do so. La Violencia (1948-1958) was a proxy war in which peasant militias fought at the behest of Liberals and Conservatives while the central government did nothing to stop it. Worse, its armed forces colluded with the militias to murder and displace political opponents. Local governments are doing today what they can with limited resources to combat the urban violence exercised by the bandas emergentes; few pay attention to the violence meted upon the internally displaced. And no one really knows at whose behest the new militias fight. The proliferation of small arms, weapons, demobilized paramilitaries and guerrillas without alternatives of gainful employment, and the general lack of education, opportunity and advancement

(other than crime) among 14-24 year olds abet the feeling that the Convivir groups are back, and social instability and fear follow in their wake. What remains of the FARC is a serious problem in Colombia, but a bigger problem is the corruption and collusion of the powers that be and that of the ruling elites with irregular groups. They entered into a Faustian bargain when they looked the other way because the atrocities and displacement perpetuated by gangs of thugs did not affect them directly, or because the gangs were acting at the behest of the government. Uribe or his successor (if there is one) must act swiftly and deploy all available resources to counter the growing, fear-based power the gangs have in several communities, no matter who the real power is behind the gangs. Otherwise, Uribe and successor presidents will preside over a deterioration of Colombia's social fabric worse than the insecurity situation that brought Uribe to power in 2002."

The Advisor welcomes reactions to the Q&A above. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org with comments.

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