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FEATURED Q&A

Would Another Gang Truce Reduce Violence in El Salvador?

Q This month marks the one-year anniversary of Salvador Sánchez Cerén's election as president of El Salvador. Sánchez Cerén has consistently vowed that he will not make truces with criminals in the Central American country, where a government-brokered 2012 truce between rival gangs broke down last year, leading to a sharp increase in the homicide rate. How should Sánchez Cerén seek to bring down the murder rate and improve security in El Salvador? Is another truce the answer, or are more hardline tactics against gangs needed? How would you rate the president's performance thus far?

A Ricardo Cevallos, partner at BLP Abogados in El Salvador: "What Sánchez Cerén needs to do is to apply the law. There are enough resources in the different laws that would allow the president to start affecting the levels of violence. For example, it took years for the government to force phone companies to limit communications within and from prisons, even though it was widely known that many crimes were still being ordered from inside. Additionally, the government should strictly enforce laws against gun and ammunition smuggling and the black market. Regaining territorial control over neighborhoods currently controlled by gangs would bring back security to citizens living there. Once control is restored, community policing can help maintain peace. Supporting and coordinating law enforcement institutions such as the police, crime investigators and the prosecutor's office is also something that needs to be handled immediately by the Justice and Public Security Ministry. Another truce might bring down homicide rates, but it would only be temporary. The gangs are criminal business organizations that benefit more from their current modus operandi than from a truce, and sooner or later they will break any agreement. The government should not enter into any negotiations with gang members unless there is a feasible way in which the government can verify that the

Continued on page 3

Venezuelan Agents Arrest Opposition Mayor of Caracas

Venezuelan agents on Thursday burst into the office of Caracas' opposition mayor, Antonio Ledezma, and forcibly hauled him away. Venezuela's president accuses Ledezma of plotting against his government. See story on page 2.

File Photo: Venezolana de Televisión.

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NEWS BRIEFS

U.S. Congressional Delegation Meets With Cuba's Vice President

U.S. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and eight other members of the House of Representatives met Thursday in Havana with Cuban Vice President Miguel Díaz-Canel to discuss the thaw in relations between the two countries, Reuters reported. The meeting was the first-ever meeting between Díaz-Canel, who is positioned to eventually succeed Cuban President Raúl Castro, and a U.S. delegation. The meeting came at the end of the U.S. lawmakers' two-day visit to the island.

Argentina Ignoring Requests to Talk With Bondholders: Attorney

Daniel A. Pollack, the lawyer appointed to lead negotiations between Argentina and U.S. bondholders, said Thursday that the South American country's government is not responding to requests to negotiate, Reuters reported. Pollack said in a statement that Argentina's lawyers have not responded to calls made since the end of January to meet to discuss a proposal from U.S. bondholders. The proposal has no pre-conditions and would offer the country the possibility to settle without paying cash immediately.

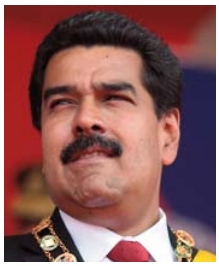
Mexican Official Optimistic About Anti-Corruption Court

Juan Porter, the head of Mexico's Federal Audit Office, said Thursday that he believes the country can restore confidence in its institutions and address concerns about corruption, partly through establishing a new independent court that could sanction public officials for offenses, Reuters reported. Portal said there seems to be broad agreement on key parts of an anti-corruption system.

Political News

Venezuelan Agents Arrest Opposition Mayor of Caracas

Venezuelan federal agents dressed in military fatigues on Thursday burst into the office of Caracas Mayor Antonio Ledezma, an opponent of President Nicolás Maduro, and forcibly hauled him away on charges that he took part in a coup plot against Maduro's government. "I just saw how they took Ledezma out of his office as if he were a dog," opposition legislator Ismael García said via Twitter. "They broke down the doors … without an arrest warrant." Ledezma's arrest happened at a time of a worsening economy and already-high tensions in Venezuela. A year ago Wednesday, opposition leader Leopoldo López was imprisoned on charges that he helped to stir up violent protests against Maduro's government. Several months of protests that began early last year left more than 40 people dead. The anniversaries of the start of the protests and López's arrest have led to clashes in Venezuela between the government's supporters and opponents. Maduro has recently said that dissident officers of the air force, aided by opposition leaders and the United States, had been planning to overthrow his government, Reuters reported. The United States has denied any such involvement. On Thursday, Maduro accused Ledezma of being part of the alleged plot. "On the orders of state prosecutors, he was captured and will be processed by the Venezuelan justice system for crimes committed against the peace of the country," Maduro told supporters at the presidential palace, Reuters reported. "He'll be held accountable for all his crimes," Maduro said in a speech that television and radio stations across Venezuela were required to broadcast, the Associated Press reported. The U.S. State Department on Thursday called the coup allegations "baseless and false" and said they are part of the government's effort to distract Venezuelans from the country's worsening economy, which is beset by the world's highest rate of inflation and shortages of many basic goods. "The Venezuelan government needs to deal with the grave situation it faces," the State Department said in a statement. "Venezuela's economic and political problems are the result of the policies of the Venezuelan government." In addition to Ledezma and López, Venezuela's government has arrested other opposition leaders including Daniel Ceballos, the former mayor of the city of San Cristóbal.



Maduro

File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

Company News

Ten Injured in Protest at Coca-Cola Facility in Mexico

Ten people were injured late Wednesday when protesters attacked a facility of **Coca-Cola** in Mexico's Guerrero state, the Associated Press reported. Protesters attempted "to damage the facilities" of the soft-drink maker in the state capital Chilpancingo, said Guerrero's state government, the AP reported. The protesters, who threw Molotov cocktails at the facility, included college students and teachers. Four police officers, four protesters and two journalists were injured. In addition, at least two Coca-Cola employees were taken hostage, but later released. **Coca-Cola Femsa** said in a statement that "fortunately, our employees are well." The hostages were released after negotiations between the demonstrators and Coca-Cola officials, who agreed not to pursue charges against three particular protesters, UPI reported. Protesters from the United Front of Guerrero Public State Teacher Training Schools, or FUNPEG, and Guerrero's CETEG teachers' union were behind the protest, according to Mexican daily newspaper *Milenio*. The groups have been protesting since the September disappearance of 43 students from a teacher training college whom authorities say were rounded up by corrupt police and then killed by a local drug gang.

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Featured Q&A

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gangs are complying with their part of the agreement. Sánchez Cerén is not doing very well when you analyze what his presidency has achieved so far, and this issue is not the exception. There have been communications coming from the president as to tentative plans that will be implemented. However, since there has been no action coming from those plans, there is really no way to rate his efforts to stop the increase in the homicide rate."

Adam Blackwell, secretary for multidimensional security at the Organization of American States: "Any government in El Salvador is going to face challenges in resolving long-term underlying issues leading to insecurity. I believe we can break down these issues into a formula composed of social vulnerabilities, institutional weaknesses and accelerants, like drugs and guns; factors any strategy will have to deal with in a balanced and integrated manner. As I recently said in *The Economist*, if gangs are a violent expression of social exclusion then more repression will lead to more exclusion and violence. Instead of rating governments, we should help by identifying means and mechanisms to facilitate discussions. Discussions we know come with a high moral hazard and are politically unpopular. A multidimensional approach to violence reduction through targeted, preventative policies is essential. Programs and resources that are tailored to communities' specific needs must be provided. Local initiatives, coupled with federal facilitation, need to meet these local needs in a comprehensive effort, aimed at prevention, reinsertion and rehabilitation. The involvement and commitment of all relevant actors is also essential. Civil society, government, police, the private sector, NGOs, community groups and the gangs themselves each have a role and must work together, even if through the formation of nontraditional coalitions. There is no single solution to the gang issue, like a truce; rather it needs to be a process. Policymakers need to evaluate the situation and adapt their approach to the issue, taking into account their individual capacity and the roots of gang involvement while also making a sustained and consistent commitment to the process as a whole."

Michael Allison, associate professor and chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Scranton: "For at least the last two decades, El Salvador has been among the world's most violent countries as measured by homicides per capita. Endemic poverty, social and economic discrimination, weak institutions and regional and global forces have, unfortunately, contributed to epidemic levels of gang violence, organized crime, drug trafficking, domestic abuse, ordinary crime and other ills. As has been learned by now, the effects of a combination of years of failed policies, willful neglect, underinvestment, politicized security sector reforms, mano dura-heavy security policies and other unfortunate occurrences will take enormous financial and human effort to reverse. Salvadorans will head to the polls for the third time in four years on March 1. While politics is part of designing any public policy, including security policy, the electoral considerations of such important decisions will hopefully decrease following the March election when Salvadorans will have some sort of respite from campaigning until 2018. There are no shortcuts—neither half-baked mano-dura policies nor gang truces—to a more prosperous and secure El Salvador. Domestic public and private sectors must work with local, regional and international partners to invest in social and economic programs, improve infrastructure, tackle corruption, reduce impunity and strengthen democratic institutions. A proposed increase in U.S. assistance to the region and ongoing multi-sector collaboration through the National Council for Citizen Security (CNSCC) are potentially positive developments. Largely beyond its control, however, El Salvador will also need serious regional and global efforts to minimize the damage that it suffers from climate change and the international drug trade."

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