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FEATURED Q&A

What Did Pompeo Achieve on His Trip to Latin America?



The final stop on U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's four-country tour of Latin America was Colombia, where he met Sunday with President Iván Duque (L). // Photo: Colombian Government.

Q U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo this month made a four-day visit to Latin America, with stops in Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Colombia. During the trip, Pompeo reiterated the Trump administration's call for a political transition in Venezuela. What did Pompeo accomplish on the trip? Is Washington's push to end Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's rule working? Should the Trump administration be doing more to help Venezuelan migrants who have sought refuge in the United States?

A Ray Walser, retired U.S. Foreign Service officer and former Latin American policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation:
"The brief South American circuit ride by Secretary Pompeo occurred almost three months after the United States, the Lima Group and dozens of other nations recognized National Assembly President Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate president. Pompeo undertook the trip to reinforce diplomatic support for Guaidó and for a policy of maximum political and economic pressure aimed at forcing Nicolás Maduro to step aside and open a pathway to a democratic transition. According to press accounts, the backing of all four countries remains solid. In addition to a symbolic visit to the Colombia-Venezuela border, Pompeo most likely solicited fresh ideas for peaceful means to unseat Maduro as frustrations mount over an unsustainable standoff in a failing Venezuela. The secretary firmly rejected suggestions that U.S. sanctions are contributing to the humanitarian crisis, saying 'a hundred percent of the refugee challenge ... is the direct result of the Russians, the Cubans and Nicolás Maduro.' With the Venezuelan military showing no

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TODAY'S NEWS

ECONOMIC

U.S. Slaps New Sanctions on Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua

U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton announced the sanctions in a speech in Florida, calling the leaders of the three countries "the three stooges of socialism."

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BUSINESS

ExxonMobil Wins Argentina Oil Exploration Rights

The oil major said it won rights to explore for oil in the Malvinas basin, 200 miles off the country's coastline.

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POLITICAL

Former Peruvian President García Commits Suicide

Alan García, who served two nonconsecutive terms as Peru's president, fatally shot himself in the head as police attempted to arrest him in connection with the sprawling Odebrecht corruption case.

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García // File Photo: TV Perú.

POLITICAL NEWS

Former Peruvian President Alan García Commits Suicide

Former Peruvian President Alan García, who served two nonconsecutive terms as the country's leader, committed suicide Wednesday, shooting himself in the head as police officers attempted to arrest him in connection with the sprawling Odebrecht case. Current President Martín Vizcarra confirmed García's death in a tweet. "Saddened by the death of former President Alan García. I send my condolences to his family and loved ones," said Vizcarra. When officers arrived with at García's Lima home with an arrest warrant early Wednesday morning, the former president locked himself in his bedroom, shot himself and then was rushed to a hospital, his personal secretary told reporters, The New York Times reported. On Tuesday, García, who was 69, asserted his innocence via Twitter. "I never sold myself, and it's proven," he said in a tweet. In a 2016 agreement with the U.S. Justice Department, Brazilian construction conglomerate Odebrecht acknowledged that it paid bribes throughout Latin America in order to secure lucrative contracts. Peru has been among the most aggressive countries in investigating the graft scandal, with prosecutors there pursuing top politicians and business leaders, The Wall Street Journal reported. García was among four former Peruvian presidents who have faced corruption allegations in connection with the scandal. Odebrecht admitted to paying approximately \$29 million in bribes in the Andean nation. After García died, Peru's Congress lowered its flag to half staff, and dozens of police officers in riot gear blocked the entrance to the hospital where he had been taken. A small group of the former president's supporters gathered outside the hospital, embracing each other. García was just 36 when he first became Peru's president in 1985. His election marked the first time that his Apra party had won the presidency after Peru's military regimes had outlawed it for years, The Wall Street Journal reported.

However, the efforts by García's government to print money and nationalize banks left the country with soaring inflation as it teetered on the edge of bankruptcy. The Shining Path guerrilla group began a series of bombings and assassinations. After his term ended, García faced corruption allegations and fled to Colombia and then France. García's presidency led to the election of Alberto Fujimori who ruled the country for the next decade. García returned to power in 2006 and oversaw solid economic growth during his second term before leaving office in 2011.

ECONOMIC NEWS

U.S. Imposes New Sanctions on Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday announced tough new sanctions and restrictions on Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, three countries whose leaders National Security Advisor John Bolton called the "three stooges of socialism," the Associ-

“The United States looks forward to watching each corner of this sordid triangle of terror fall...”

— John Bolton

ated Press reported. Bolton announced a new cap on the amount of money families in the United States can send their relatives in Cuba, limiting remittances to \$1,000 per person per quarter. Bolton also announced that the U.S. was sanctioning Venezuela's central bank, as well as adding sanctions against financial services provider Bancorp, which he claimed is a "slush fund" for Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega. "The United States looks forward to watching each corner of this sordid triangle of terror fall: in Havana, in Caracas, and in Ma-

NEWS BRIEFS

Guatemalan Presidential Candidate Estrada Arrested in Miami

A Guatemalan presidential candidate was arrested in Miami on Wednesday and charged with plotting to use drug cartel money to win the June 16 election and assassinate rivals, Reuters reported. According to U.S. officials, Mario Estrada, 58, a candidate of the center-right National Change Union, is accused along with another man, Juan Pablo González, of seeking some \$10 million from Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel to fund his campaign and transport cocaine into the United States.

Brazil's Attorney General Accuses Supreme Court of Violating Constitution

Brazil's attorney general, Raquel Dodge, has accused the nation's highest court of violating the constitution with an order for news organizations to withdraw some online reports on a corruption investigation that include references to one of the tribunal's justices, the Associated Press reported. This week, Dodge attempted to throw the order out, but on Wednesday Alexandre de Moraes, a Supreme Federal Court judge, said she cannot legally dismiss it and that it should stand. Critics say the court's order amounts to censorship.

ExxonMobil Wins Rights to Search for Oil in Argentina

ExxonMobil announced Wednesday it had won rights to search for oil in three blocks in Argentina's latest offshore bid round. The award adds 2.6 million net acres to the company's upstream holdings in Argentina and builds on its existing presence in Neuquén Province, which includes the onshore Vaca Muerta unconventional oil play. The blocks are located in the Malvinas basin, approximately 200 miles offshore Tierra del Fuego.

nagua,” Bolton said in a South Florida speech marking the anniversary of the failed U.S.-backed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Democratic lawmakers assailed the changes. Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said that limiting remittances to struggling Cuban families deprives them of the resources they need to survive. “This is quite simply inhumane. I urge President Trump to return to smart policies aimed at supporting the Cuban people rather than causing further harm to these individuals,” he said.

Argentina Launches Price Controls to Curb High Inflation

Facing persistently high inflation and falling approval ratings, the government of Argentine President Mauricio Macri reached an agreement with companies to freeze prices on 64 staple food items Wednesday, Bloomberg News reported. Officials also reached agreements with mobile phone service operators to fix prices for the next five months. Prices for gas, electricity and public transportation will also remain unchanged, according to official documents. Economy Minister Nicolas Dujovne said the short-term measures were meant to ease the financial burden on Argentines suffering from the nation’s second recession in three years. Dujovne added that the move was not intended to freeze prices as an anti-inflationary tool, as past administrations have done with generally disappointing results. The government also announced that it would provide more loans to pensioners and offer discounts at supermarkets in an effort to spark an economic rebound. On Tuesday, state statistics agency INDEC said consumer prices in March rose by 4.7 percent as compared to the month before, a rate that was “significantly higher than expected,” according to Goldman Sachs analyst Alberto Ramos. “Inflationary pressures remain high despite a very deep recession, and we expect consumer price inflation to reach new cyclical highs in April-May,” Ramos told clients in a research note.

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imminent signs of turning against Maduro, senior administration officials—Pompeo in Latin America, Vice President Pence at the United Nations, special envoy Elliott Abrams in Washington along with National Security Advisor John Bolton—seek additional means short of military intervention to end the Venezuelan nightmare. Bolton’s speech to Bay of Pigs veterans on Wednesday unveiled additional measures aimed at weakening Cuban support for Maduro. In dealing with Latin American refugees in the United States, the Trump administration treads a fine line, including questions of moral disparity, between a hardline stance on Central American border crossers, refugees and asylum seekers and presumed sympathy for the plight of Venezuelans fleeing repression, crime and poverty at home. Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelans has earned bipartisan support but remains lodged on the congressional agenda.”

A **Geoff Ramsey, assistant director for Venezuela at the Washington Office on Latin America:** “Secretary Pompeo’s trip served as a reminder of the failure of the Trump administration’s strategy on Venezuela, and there are signs of cracks in regional support for U.S. policy. Privately, Latin American diplomats are growing annoyed by their U.S. counterparts consistently turning the conversation to Venezuela—even in meetings that begin on unrelated topics. The Chilean government’s subtle shift in recent days has been a clear sign of this dynamic. While Chilean President Sebastián Piñera remains an active participant in the Lima Group, he has recently embraced the International Contact Group (ICG). The ICG, which Washington does not view particularly favorably, has an explicit mandate to pursue separate negotiations with both Maduro and the opposition in pursuit of free and fair elections. After sending a representative to the ICG’s March 28 meeting in Quito, Piñera has called for ‘greater unity’ with the ICG

mission. This, paired with the Lima Group’s continued reluctance to follow the United States in implementing sanctions and its outright condemnation of a ‘military option,’ is a sign that Latin America’s patience for U.S.-Venezuela policy is thinning. More urgent, for Latin American governments, is addressing the needs of the 3.7 million Venezuelans who have fled their country. However, after rolling out new promises of regional aid for displaced Venezuelans on a near monthly basis in 2018, the Trump administration has grown noticeably silent on the issue. If the White House wants to continue to enjoy the support of Latin American governments, it will have to show renewed commitment to funding the regional response to this exodus.”

A **Francisco Durand, professor of political science at the Catholic University of Peru:** “I hate Maduro but I do not like American intervention in Venezuela,’ a Venezuelan immigrant in Peru told me when the ‘humanitarian crisis’ started. The opinion summarizes well the predominant state of opinion in Latin America at a moment the U.S. offensive has lost momentum and any hint of intervention is silently opposed by many countries, the Brazilian military in particular, a crucial player if the military intervention card crystalizes. Let’s not forget that no Latin American country has ever invaded another to provoke regime change. Pompeo’s trip is an attempt to keep the Lima Group alive at a moment that another front is opening in Peru and Colombia, the main recipients of more than three million Venezuelan migrants whose presence exerts tremendous pressure on the poor and the underpaid, the ones being displaced by super cheap labor from Venezuela. So there are two problems that will worsen as time passes, one in Venezuela (where Maduro survives but feels the brunt of the economic oil revenue embargo) and those who accept the Venezuelan migrants. Pompeo’s \$30

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million offer to Peru (which has 740,000 Venezuelan migrants) is an indication that the United States is trying new ways to keep the front united. In the meantime, Guaidó's 'no dialogue' position results in him losing support, and the Mexican and Uruguayan proposal to start a dialogue (that will give Maduro extra time) seems now more attractive than before. The crisis is just beginning."

A **Brian Turner, chair of the Department of Political Science at Randolph-Macon College:** "Secretary Pompeo's visit to Paraguay was clearly a reward to the country for having not only recognized Juan Guaidó as interim president of Venezuela but also having cut diplomatic ties with Caracas. Foreign Minister Luis Castiglioni referred to the visit as 'strong backing,' and reportedly President Mario Abdo Benítez will meet with President Trump this summer. When the press asked Castiglioni if Paraguay would support military intervention in Venezuela, he said 'It's going to be the Venezuelans themselves ... who will really liberate their country from tyranny, with the cooperation and help of the U.S., of Paraguay and all the other countries in the world.' Castiglioni denied to local press that Pompeo had made any request for Paraguayan support for an eventual military intervention in Venezuela, but did not answer questions about whether Paraguay would support this. Pompeo also praised Paraguay's 'warm relations' (and diplomatic recognition) with Taiwan and warned against Beijing's 'predatory practices.' Pompeo pressed Paraguay on fighting criminal and terrorist activity in the Tri-Border region, and improving transparency and fighting corruption. Pompeo said Paraguay has made good efforts but 'there is much work still to be done' to address concerns about money laundering and support for Hezbollah in the Tri-Border region. Not mentioned in public documents was any discussion by Pompeo about Abdo's reversal of his predecessor Horacio Cartes' move of the embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, or accusations surrounding

people close to Cartes of smuggling and money laundering. This visit took place the same week that Abdo and Cartes negotiated a political pact between their factions of the ruling Colorado Party."

A **Maria Velez de Berliner, managing director of RTG-Red Team Group, Inc.:** "The exigencies of Trump's re-election will drive U.S. action on Venezuela. Nothing the United States, Juan Guaidó or Colombia have done has dislodged Maduro and his military. As Venezuelans' struggle for survival increases, Guaidó's shine dims. It seems no one has yet devised a reality-based plan that responds to what plan B is if Maduro doesn't leave and who can effectively unite, govern and rebuild a bankrupt and politically riven Venezuela. Short of a direct military intervention, it seems U.S. nonmilitary options decrease as Maduro remains in power. Let's not overlook that Russia, Cuba, Iran, China and Turkey, embedded in Venezuela's military, intelligence and what remains of a national economy, count heavily when considering any U.S. military option. What Trump's administration and Latin America does not need is a Venezuelan internecine war that turns into a regional conflict involving exogenous adversaries of the United States. The solution to Venezuela rests on in-country Venezuelans alone. Trump's threatened military intervention will not restore Venezuela to pre-Chávez/Maduro times. Maduro still has powerful supporters within the high ranks of Venezuela's military, his Colectivos and Militias Bolivarianas, and those who have become criminally wealthy during Chávez's and Maduro's regimes. Rather than threats, the Trump administration should be negotiating a satisfactory exit for Diosdado Cabello and Vladimir Padrino. Maduro will leave with them, hopefully without a bloodbath in Venezuela. Trump's expected military intervention will help neither Guaidó, who cannot afford to be seen as the 'U.S. Man in Venezuela' nor the face of current or future policies of the United States in Latin America."

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