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FEATURED Q&A

Why Is Mexico Cracking Down Now on Migrants?



Mexico's government has deported thousands of migrants over the past month, officials have said. Migrants in a camp along the Huixtla River in Chiapas State are pictured above. // Photo: Notimex.

Q Mexico has sent 15,000 migrants back to their home countries in the past month, the head of the country's National Migration Institute said last week. The announcement followed a series of raids in which Mexican authorities detained immigrants in the southern part of the country, halting their trek toward the United States. Are U.S. President Donald Trump's threats to close the U.S.-Mexico border the main reason behind Mexico's detention of migrants? What other reasons are behind the move? What costs and benefits will Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador see from the crackdown? Will Mexico's actions stem the flow of Central Americans heading north?

A James R. Jones, member of the Advisor board, chairman of Monarch Global Strategies and former U.S. ambassador to Mexico: "In this instance, President Trump's blustering threats are not the reason for Mexico assuming a harder stance against immigration at its southern border. I am on the Homeland Security Advisory Council, having been appointed by then-President Obama's Homeland Security secretary, Janet Napolitano, 10 years ago. The current massive flow of immigrants from Central America is unprecedented. Also new is the makeup of immigrants. For the first time, families and children are the majority of those seeking asylum. At first, Mexico was merely a transit country as asylum seekers headed for the United States. Mexico was generous with humanitarian visas and passage for these immigrants. But domestic political and economic backlash has occurred in Mexico, and President López Obrador and his government

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Cubans Take to Streets in Marches Against U.S. Sanctions

Cubans protested across the country on May Day in massive demonstrations against U.S. sanctions.

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ECONOMIC

Manufacturers Raise Concerns Over Brazil Farm Credit Measures

Agricultural equipment manufacturers expressed concerns about uncertainties over Brazil's planned farm credit program.

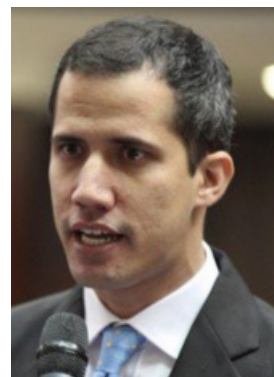
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POLITICAL

Violent Protests Continue in Venezuela, at Least One Killed

Pro- and anti-government demonstrators clashed in rival May Day protests in Venezuela as opposition leader Juan Guaidó continued his call to overthrow President Nicolás Maduro.

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Guaidó // File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Rival Violent Protests Grip Venezuela, at Least One Killed

Pro- and anti-government protesters clashed in the streets on Wednesday, May Day, in Venezuela in the second consecutive day of widespread demonstrations following opposition leader Juan Guaidó's call for the country's military to overthrow President Nicolás Maduro. "There's no turning back," Guaidó told supporters at a rally in Caracas, The New York Times reported. "Despite the repression, we're still here." Pro-government forces reportedly used live fire against protesters in Caracas' Altamira neighborhood. A 27-year-old female protester was killed after being shot in the head, according to local human rights groups. More than 100 people have been injured this week in the violent demonstrations, CNN reported, citing the independent Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict. Additionally, 168 people have been detained, according to Human Rights Watch. Guaidó, whom the United States and dozens of other countries recognize as Venezuela's legitimate interim president, early Tuesday had called for the military uprising, saying the opposition's effort to force Maduro from power was entering its "final phase." However, Maduro has remained in power. Some Venezuelan troops have switched sides to stand alongside Guaidó, but his call for a military uprising did not lead to any defections of military top brass. "We have to acknowledge that yesterday there were not enough [people], we have to insist that all the armed forces protest together," Guaidó said Wednesday. "We are not asking for a confrontation among brothers, it's the opposite. We just want them to be on the side of the people." Guaidó also called on public-sector employees to go on strike. Maduro has blamed U.S. President Donald Trump for what he has called a "coup d'état attempt." Maduro urged supporters to show their "utmost loyalty" and called on them to protest in the streets. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Wednesday that the Trump administration wants to see

a peaceful transition of power in Venezuela, but he told Fox Business Network in an interview that "military action is possible." He added, "If that's what's required, that's what the United States will do." The Trump administration on Wednesday convened a meeting of top national-security officials to discuss the administration's next steps in the crisis, said White House National Security Advisor John Bolton, The Wall Street Journal reported. No U.S. military action is imminent, a top administration official told the newspaper. "The objective is to work pressure points and see what we can do."

ECONOMIC NEWS

Ag Machine Makers Raise Concerns Over Brazil Uncertainty

Executives from the world's largest agricultural machine makers are concerned over the uncertainty regarding Brazil's new farm credit package, as their sales could take a hit if the definition of the program is delayed, Reuters reported Thursday. Directors for John Deere, Case IH and AGCO are worried that Brazil's new administration will impose unfavorable financing rules given its promises to cut public funding to the private sector, according to the report. Brazil has for years subsidized interest rates on loans for farmers, with the government paying banks the difference between conditions it sets for farmers in the annual farm credit package and those of the market. However, Economy Minister Paulo Guedes favors a gradual increase on private financing for the agricultural sector, Reuters reported. "I think this liberal vision is important for the country. But we need a period of transition, of accommodation," Rodrigo Bonato, Brazil sales director for John Deere, told the wire service, adding that the lack of information surrounding the administration's plans is causing "anxiety among farmers." Interests are "critical" when farmers calculate return on investments, according to Christian González, vice president of South America for Case IH. While Brazil's

NEWS BRIEFS

Cubans Take to Streets in Massive Protests Against U.S. Sanctions

In government-organized demonstrations, Cubans took to the streets in massive May Day marches on Wednesday to protest U.S. sanctions and efforts to remove Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro from power, Reuters reported. Cubans participating in the marches numbered in the millions, the wire service reported. On Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump threatened a "full and complete embargo" against Cuba if it continued supporting Maduro.

Mexico's Senate Rejects Education Reform Bill

Mexico's Senate late on Tuesday rejected a bill to reverse parts of the 2013 education reforms in the absence of several senators from the ruling Morena party, the Associated Press reported. The measure will now go back to the lower house, which had previously approved the proposal. The bill is seen as one of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's key campaign promises. Former President Enrique Peña Nieto's overhaul imposed mandatory teacher evaluations and stripped unions of their influence over hiring.

Banco Santander Chile Posts \$184.5 Mn in Profit, Misses Analysts' Estimates

Banco Santander Chile posted a profit of \$184.5 million in the first quarter of this year, the bank said, the Associated Press reported Wednesday. With earnings of 39 cents per share, the results did not meet the expectations of Wall Street analysts, whose average estimate was 49 cents per share, according to a survey by Zacks Investment Research. Its revenue net of interest expense, at \$643.3 million, also missed forecasts. The bank's shares have fallen 7 percent since the beginning of the year.

official credit line for agricultural machines has annual interests of 7.5 percent and seven years of repayment, for example, a private line at a commercial bank would cost 11 percent with repayment in five years. The administration did not announce the measures before the Agri-show, Latin America's largest farm equipment exposition taking place in São Paulo this week, as it usually does.

BUSINESS NEWS

Peru Reapproves Exploration Contract for Tullow Oil

Peru has reapproved a contract for Tullow Oil to explore a shallow-water block nearly a year after the original contract was canceled, Argus Media reported Wednesday. Tullow had won the rights to explore block Z-64, a 54,000-hectare block off the northern department of Tumbes, in March of last year, with the contracts published just one day after former President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski stepped down. Congress then pressured the new government to cancel the contracts based on an energy ministry recommendation to overhaul the citizen participation process, prompting the annulment of the award, according to the report. The ministry approved new participation rules earlier this year, *América Economía* reported. The U.K.-listed oil company could still face an uphill battle with environmental groups and coastal communities that have called for the designation of Peru's first maritime protected area, the Grau Tropical Sea National Reserve, which President Martín Vizcarra had reportedly promised, according to the country's ombudsman's office. The Peruvian Hydrocarbons Society says the proposed protected area would push investors away, Argus reported. Tullow is present in more than 16 countries, mostly in Africa, and its average production last year totaled more than 90,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day, *América Economía* reported.

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had to respond. Many of the municipalities in southern Mexico complained that they were being overrun and couldn't cope. In some northern cities, complaints began that immigrants were taking jobs and resources to the detriment of Mexicans. And when U.S. Customs and Border Protection had to be deployed all along the border to help police the huge influx of immigrants, it meant that many were taken away from their duties to assess and expedite the flow of commerce at ports of entry. Consequently, commerce was significantly slowed, which had a detrimental impact on the economies of both countries. López Obrador's top priority of growing Mexico's economy at 4 percent in order to substantially reduce poverty would be jeopardized. So Mexico had to crack down on its migration policy to respond to domestic concerns in addition to the ever-present threats from Trump."

A **Liliana Meza, professor in the migration studies' master's program at Universidad Iberoamericana:** "The way the new Mexican administration started handling migration flow contrasts with the mechanisms that previous administrations adopted. There was a shift in how migration was approached upon the enactment of the new migration law in 2011; from national security narrative to an emphasis on the protection of the migrants' human rights. However, political pressures from the United States hindered an effective application of the law. López Obrador was expected to show consistency in the application of policies toward migrants and fair treatment for vulnerable populations. The implementation of the new migration law proved successful, ultimately catalyzing a greater influx of migrants entering the country. Numbers dramatically increased, and it reached a point where migration officials were forced to reverse their actions to strategically cope with the situation. Deportations of foreigners without legal status in large numbers be-

gan to occur. Mexican officials have claimed this was not a reaction to U.S. discourse and that it was solely a response to the threats involving the increase in migration. However, this event gives light to Mexico's economic and political dependence on the United

“ Mexico is not in a position to challenge the U.S. government.”

— Liliana Meza

States despite the claims made to justify its responses. Mexico has had the opportunity to treat migrants the way it demands for its own citizens in the United States. However, the friendly and inclusive treatment toward migrants provoked massive inflows, intensifying the situation with the United States, and Mexico is not in a position to challenge the U.S. government."

A **Andrew Selee, president of the Migration Policy Institute:** "The decision by the Mexican government to be more strict in border control probably owes a great deal to U.S. pressure, but it was probably inevitable, given the significant increase in irregular migration over the past few months (around triple the previous monthly rates in March). There is nothing wrong with countries choosing to enforce their own immigration laws. However, the López Obrador government will be judged not on whether it's getting tough on enforcement, but whether it begins to take immigration seriously, which means vastly expanding its asylum system, creating new work-based visas for Central American migrants and investing sufficiently in the National Immigration Institute so that it can carry out enforcement actions with respect for human rights. Today, Mexico's asylum system receives only \$1 million a year in public funding, even though it's on pace to get 50,000 applications this year (and had nearly 30,000 last year). And that's just a

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small indication of how little investment has been made in managing migration effectively and proactively in Mexico. So there's nothing wrong with enforcement—even if pressure from President Trump is the immediate reason for it—but the long-term question is whether Mexico can decide its own priorities and develop a sensible, balanced and fair immigration system that has both immigration controls and legal immigration pathways.”

A **Ruben Olmos, president of Global Nexus:** “Mexico is currently dealing with a real crisis at its southern border as large numbers of families and minors—at least 300,000 since January—from Central America, Cuba and Africa are trying to cross the country illegally as they seek political asylum in the United States. It seems that, in part, López Obrador did get some pressure from several channels in Washington, but most importantly read well Trump's threats to close the border, in addition to seeing increased bottlenecks in several points of entry, which is causing great economic losses. Let's remember that during the presidential campaign, López Obrador said his government would approach the migration issue from a more humane perspective and would address the causes and find new solu-

tions. He wanted to show change after the Peña Nieto government was about enforcement and deportation. Once in office, he announced ample jobs for migrants to construct his signature project, the Mayan Train, and offered thousands of visitor entry cards for humanitarian reasons. This message was immediately received in Central American countries, and many undocumented workers began to cross the border using legal points of entry, creating a bureaucratic nightmare for the Mexican authorities. As the numbers of Central Americans increased, and the Trump narrative became harsher, AMLO took a step back, temporarily suspending the visitor entry cards, and began the crack-down and deportations. In the long run, it is yet to be seen what direction the Mexican government will take, if it complies with Washington in the middle of a tough USMCA ratification negotiation or decides to navigate as a good neighbor to Central America and a bridge to funnel more investment to the region to stop illegal immigration. Politically, AMLO's high approval ratings, his control of the daily narrative, in addition to the vast support from his core base will let him do whatever he thinks is best.”

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

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Erik Brand

Publisher
ebrand@thedialogue.org

Gene Kuleta

Editor
gkuleta@thedialogue.org

Anastasia Chacón González

Reporter
achacon@thedialogue.org



Michael Shifter, President

Genaro Arriagada, Nonresident Senior Fellow

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