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THEDIALOGUE

FEATURED Q&A

Are Latin America's Militaries Taking on Too Much Power?

Militaries throughout Latin America have been taking on an increasing number of tasks and have had a political impact in some countries. // File Photo: Peruvian Army.

Q Over the past year, Latin American militaries appear to be taking on more visible roles in countries' domestic security and politics. In Bolivia, the military's backing of the interim government led former President Evo Morales to flee the country. In Venezuela, the armed forces' support for President Nicolás Maduro has been crucial for his retaining power. Meanwhile, military officials have assumed key government roles in Brazil under President Jair Bolsonaro, and Mexico's military has largely staffed President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's National Guard security force. To what extent has the role of the military in Latin American countries changed recently, and is it cause for concern? What similarities and differences can be observed as compared to their part in the region's history? Should the armed forces' functions be limited to defense, or can they provide valuable contributions to some aspects of governance?

A **Peter Hakim, member of the Advisor board and president emeritus of the Inter-American Dialogue:** "By the end of the Cold War, elected governments had replaced military and personalist dictatorships across the Americas, Cuba aside. Militaries continued to carry weight in public affairs, but by and large, they have kept their distance from national politics. Since 1991, the armed forces have not assumed presidential powers anywhere in the region. Recently, however, civilian leaders have been turning more frequently to their militaries for help and support. Current and former high-ranking military officers now fill one-third of Brazil's cabinet posts—although the armed forces did not openly press or lobby for these positions and, indeed, have

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TODAY'S NEWS

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New Guatemalan Government Won't Cancel Migration Deal With U.S.

Guatemala's foreign minister said the Central American country will not cancel the so-called safe third country deal that the previous government made with the United States.

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Brazil to Enter Talks on Joining OPEC: Minister

Later this year, Brazil's government will engage in talks on potentially joining the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, said Energy Minister Bento Albuquerque.

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POLITICAL

Pompeo in Jamaica Amid Regional Divisions

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness amid divisions in the Caribbean over U.S. policy toward Venezuela.

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Pompeo // File Photo: U.S. State Department.

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POLITICAL NEWS

Pompeo Meets With Jamaica's Holness Amid Divisions

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met Wednesday in Kingston with Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness at a time when Caribbean leaders are divided over U.S. policy toward Venezuela, The Wall Street Journal reported. Pompeo, who is on a tour of the region, traveled to Jamaica to attend a roundtable meeting with Caribbean leaders. However, Barbados' prime minister, Mia Mottley, who chairs the 15-nation Caricom bloc of Caribbean nations, said she would skip the meeting because some countries in the bloc had not been invited. Officials of Trinidad and Tobago told The Wall Street Journal that their country was not invited to the meeting, while Antigua and Barbuda's foreign minister said his country also was not invited. The prime minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines told reporters Tuesday that he would back Mottley and skip the meeting. In contrast to the report that the Trinidadian officials said their country was not invited, Trinidad and Tobago's prime minister, Keith Rowley, told The Guardian earlier this week that his country was boycotting the meeting. Mottley has described the meeting as "an attempt to divide the region," The Guardian reported. "I am conscious that if this country does not stand for something, then it will fall for anything," said Mottley. "As chairman of Caricom, it is impossible for me to agree that my foreign minister should attend a meeting with anyone to which members of Caricom are not invited." Speaking to reporters in Kingston, Pompeo declined to say which countries had been invited to the roundtable meeting and denied that the United States was creating divisions within the bloc, The Wall Street Journal reported. "There's no intent from the United States to divide Caricom—not yesterday, not today," he said. Pompeo also acknowledged that the United States supports the re-election of Luis Almagro, an Uruguayan, as secretary general of the Organization of American States. Almagro has described Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro as a dictator and has also supported Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó, whom the United States and dozens of other countries recognize as Venezuela's legitimate interim president. OAS members last year voted to recognize Guaidó's ambassador to the organization. Some Caribbean nations, however, have called for the OAS to remain neutral in Venezuela's political conflict.

New Guatemalan Gov't Won't Cancel U.S. Migration Deal

The government of new Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei will not cancel a migration deal his predecessor struck with the United States, agreeing to continue receiving Central American migrants stopped at the U.S. border, Guatemalan Foreign Minister Pedro Brolo said Wednesday, Reuters reported. Before taking office earlier this month, Giammattei had vowed to review the so-called safe third country agreement, which is designed to require migrants from Honduras and El Salvador to request asylum in Guatemala instead of the United States. Most migrants coming from Central America pass through Guatemala and Mexico on their way to the U.S. border. "We will continue receiving [migrants], which has really been very limited," Brolo told reporters at Guatemala's Congress, Reuters reported. He added that the government was in discussions to determine whether other nationalities would be included in the U.S. asylum deal. Giammattei had previously questioned the deal, saying Guatemala would first need to be certified as a safe third country by an international body and that both houses of the Guatemalan Congress would need to ratify the agreement, Reuters reported. The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump demanded coopera-

Giammattei had questioned the deal with the United States.

NEWS BRIEFS

Paraguay's President Contracts Dengue Fever

Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benítez has contracted dengue fever, making him one of thousands of Paraguayans affected amid a recent outbreak of the mosquito-borne disease, Health Minister Julio Mazzoleni said on Wednesday, Reuters reported. "The result of the blood test effectively confirms that the president has dengue," Mazzoleni said at a press conference. Abdo Benítez has been ordered to rest, but he is in a "good general condition," Mazzoleni said. Paraguay has the second-highest incidence of dengue in South America after Brazil.

Colombia Must Allow FARC Dissidents to Demobilize: HRW

Colombia must allow dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, rebels to demobilize and join reintegration efforts if it wants to curb armed groups operating along its border with Venezuela, rights group Human Rights Watch said Wednesday, Reuters reported. FARC rebels largely demobilized following the group's 2016 peace deal with the government, but several leaders last year rejected the agreement and re-armed. There are an estimated 2,500 FARC dissident fighters, according to intelligence sources.

Nestlé Spending $700 Mn to Modernize Factories in Mexico

Swiss food and drink processing conglomerate Nestlé said it will spend $700 million on modernizing its 17 factories in Mexico and increase production there, FoodBev Media reported Wednesday. The company is integrating new technology at its Mexico factories and expects to create 400 new jobs in coming years. The spending includes a $200 million investment in a new coffee production plant in Veracruz.

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tion from Guatemala in exchange for benefits from the "América Crece" development plan for Mexico and Central America. "If for any reason President Giammattei decides not to participate in these agreements, he is going to lose a great economic development opportunity for Guatemala," Mauricio Claver-Carone, a special assistant to Trump and senior director for Western Hemisphere affairs at the White House National Security Council, told Reuters last year.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Brazil to Enter Talks on Joining OPEC: Energy Minister

Brazil will begin discussions on potentially joining the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, in July, Brazilian Energy Minister Bento Albuquerque told Reuters on Wednesday. Albuquerque is scheduled to visit Saudi Arabia in July, when talks could begin on whether South America's largest oil producer could become a member of the group, the minister said, adding that even if talks are successful, Brazil would not become a part of OPEC this year. An energy ministry statement issued today did not specify whether Brazil was seeking to become a member of OPEC or of OPEC+, which includes other exporters, such as Russia. "The minister indicated that he intends to attend the G20 energy ministers' meeting [in Saudi Arabia in July] and that he would talk to Saudi officials about the bilateral energy agenda and could even deal with the possible cooperation between Brazil and OPEC," said the statement, which followed Albuquerque's comments to Reuters. Brazil is aiming to become one of the world's top five exporters during the next decade, the minister also told the wire service. The country's exports are expected to rise to 1.4 million barrels per day (bpd) this year, with crude output increasing 13 percent to 3.5 million bpd, Albuquerque said. Brazil exported 1.1 million bpd last year, when it became a net exporter.

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served as a pragmatic, moderating influence on the Bolsonaro government. In Bolivia, the top military commander called publicly for President Morales to resign, but only after massive demonstrations had demanded his ouster, and an OAS investigation concluded that vote totals had been manipulated to assure Morales' re-election. In Chile, it was elected President Piñera who ordered the military to keep order and halt property destruction. In these nations and elsewhere, the military was not seeking power or political gain. It was responding to appeals, mostly from governments, but sometimes from opposition leaders. It's hardly surprising that the new, more active roles of Latin American militaries have emerged concurrently with massive, unexpected, sometimes violent protests in many nations. It appears that democratic institutions, public and private, are losing legitimacy and public support, and are increasingly viewed as lacking the competence to govern. It is impossible to disregard the prospect that popular demands for change could become louder and more radical, and lead to even more expansive military intrusions."

Douglas M. Fraser, senior fellow at National Defense University and former commander of the U.S. Southern Command: "The role of the military in individual countries in Latin America has grown over the last decade—not because the militaries sought increased involvement in matters outside of defense, but rather because governments chose to use them to address intractable security problems posed by violent criminal gangs and transnational criminal organizations. The military is the wrong tool to use to address these long-term internal security challenges. The military is a capable, effective organization when performing its defense role. But while it can be used to help governments address non-defense security problems, it alone should not be used to solve these chronic, long-term problems. These problems can only be addressed when all institutions of the government work together in a coordinated and well-financed effort. Because the military is the most respected institution in many countries in Latin America, some political leaders have selected current and retired military leaders to serve their administrations in non-defense roles. Retired military personnel can be effective leaders in the political process but are generally not accustomed to addressing the varying political interests associated with working non-defense positions. Therefore, I think military leaders serve best in political positions when they run for and are elected to public office. Only by fighting through the political process and winning an election do they gain the support of the public and can then bring the full potential of their military leadership to political office."

Kristina Mani, associate professor of politics and chair of Latin American studies at Oberlin College: "Increasingly, the military is being called upon to influence political outcomes, but the common driver is civilian politicians' inability to resolve fundamental crises in their societies in the context of electoral democracy. In some cases, there is an acute political crisis in which the military is called to support the president (Peru), or oppose him (Bolivia). In others, politicians call on the military to back up police in countering protests over economic austerity (Ecuador and Chile). Different are the cases that turn the military into a de facto power—as in Venezuela, where populist Maduro inherited a state he cannot manage and ceded virtually all tasks of governance to the military. The right-wing authoritarianism of Bolsonaro has militarized some offices, but it's really more 'the military party' he represents stepping out in a still-diverse political arena. All of these cases are worrisome because the military is designed to fight wars and defend territory—not settle politics, much less govern or

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make public policy. Military roles should be strictly limited to national defense, and only a severe natural disaster or humanitarian crisis should ever bring soldiers to the rescue, then always under clear civilian direction. When the military takes roles such as policing, civic action or road building, it's because civilians have ceded those roles to the military since it makes them look effective in the short term and gives the military workful tasks; but it also makes the military an all-purpose problem solver, and no institution should have that mandate in a pluralist polity. What's needed is long-term civilian capacity-building and effective institutions that serve the public interest."

Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, professor of political science and global affairs at the University of Notre Dame: "Military officers are gaining a new role in Latin American politics. The last quarter of 2019 featured the ousting of Evo Morales in Bolivia, the dissolution of the Peruvian Congress with military acquiescence, the use of security forces to handle mass protests in Chile, Colombia and Ecuador, and the consolidation of military influence in Brazil and Venezuela. The army is increasingly playing a 'moderating' role in Latin American crises, but one that is very different from the one theorized by students of civil-military relations in the 1970s. Soldiers are providing a shield that moderates the impact of opposition attacks on presidential survival. In contemporary Latin America, the main force destabilizing governments is not military intervention, but social protest (such as Argentina in 2001 or Bolivia in 2003) or congressional impeachments (Brazil in 2016 or Peru in 2018). Yet, the Venezuelan experience—where sustained mass protests have been unable to displace Nicolás Maduro from power—has inspired an important lesson. Social movements and legislative maneuvers are insufficient when the army remains loyal to the government. If the military, on the other hand, withdraws its support for the executive, the president is doomed. Governments in the region took note of this lesson, and they are using the military to contain political threats. Unfortunately, if security forces become the decisive gatekeepers, Latin America may risk going back to an era when generals were the arbiters of the political game."

Rut Diamint, professor of political science at Torcuato Di Tella University: "Amid protests for rights, and against presidents' shady management, the manipulation of elections and prevailing corruption, the armed forces have been reinstalled as a political arbitrator. Democracies painfully achieved at the end of the 20th century are collapsing, having failed to meet expectations. Countries' return to democracy has not ensured citizens' economic and social rights. Authoritarian reactions do not come at the hands of generals, but rather from the elected governments themselves. It is those governments that politicize the armed forces and militarize public order. The new domestic functions grant governments bargaining power before a society that is ambivalent, because it rejects military repression, but that demands greater protection. While assuming these new functions, the officers resume their relationship with the political power and build an advantageous relationship with the civilian population. They don't tear down governments—they are their saviors. The use of military personnel to combat insecurity also entails the lack of the police forces' professionalization. It is an unreasonable decision from the perspective of public spending and the general organization of state administration, since it overlaps tasks and doubles expenses. Finally, the armed forces, with their overwhelming coercive capabilities, are potentially a constant threat to the social order and stability. The military trains for combat and the annihilation of enemies, not to resolve conflicts or investigate crimes. Resorting to the military is the very denial of politics."

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