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FEATURED Q&A

Is the Trump Gov't Creating Divisions Within Caricom?



The prime minister of Barbados, Mia Amor Mottley, who also chairs the Caribbean Community, or Caricom, criticized the United States for not inviting all Caricom members to a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last month. // File Photo: Government of Barbados.

Q Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago on Jan. 22 reportedly boycotted a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Jamaica on topics including Venezuela, trade and national security. It was the latest development of a growing dispute among member countries of the Caribbean Community, or Caricom, over leaders' alliances with the U.S. government. What are the reasons behind the spat, and what consequences could it have on diplomatic ties among Caribbean countries? Why did the prime ministers of Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago refuse to participate in the meeting with Pompeo, and are their decisions justified? What effects could such moves have on U.S. relations with these specific countries, and with Caricom in general?

A Ronald Sanders, ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda to the United States: "No Caricom government boycotted the Jan. 22 meeting, hosted by the government of Jamaica, with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. All invited Caricom countries attended. Eight Caricom countries, including Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, were not invited. The meeting's real purpose was to target six Caricom countries and the Dominican Republic to vote for Luis Almagro to be re-elected as the secretary general of the OAS. Almagro has been an ardent associate of the U.S. government in its policies toward the Maduro government in Venezuela; and in the stance it has taken on other countries, such as Nicaragua and Bolivia. But Almagro has been a divisive and controversial secretary general and, having added up the numbers, the U.S. government is aware that he does not have the 18 committed

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Guaidó Rallies Venezuelan Expats in Miami

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó rallied thousands of supporters in Miami as he began wrapping up a two-week international tour that has taken him to Colombia, Europe and the United States.

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BUSINESS

Uber Shuts Down Operations in Colombia

Ride-hailing company Uber shut down its operations in Colombia on Saturday after failing to reach agreement with regulators in the country. Users trying to access the app were greeted with a message reading "Adiós Colombia."

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ECONOMIC

Fernández Meets With Pope in Vatican City

Argentine President Alberto Fernández met in the Vatican with Pope Francis, who vowed to give any support he can to his native country amid its economic crisis.

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Fernández met with Pope Francis on Friday. // Photo: Argentine Gov't.

POLITICAL NEWS

Venezuela's Guaidó Rallies Thousands of Supporters in Miami

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó on Saturday told a crowd of expatriates in Miami that there would be a "great mobilization in Caracas" to dislodge President Nicolás Maduro when Guaidó returns to his home country following a two-week international tour, Agence France-Presse reported. "In the next few days, despite the risk, we will be entering Venezuela," Guaidó said at the rally, held at a convention center near Miami International Airport. Guaidó urged the crowd of about 3,500 to stay unified and to resist Maduro's government even though



Guaidó rallied supporters Saturday in Miami. // Photo: Facebook site of Juan Guaidó.

they now live outside of Venezuela, the Associated Press reported. "All options are on the table, but also under the table," said Guaidó. "There are things that are not talked about. All necessary actions will be used to finally liberate Venezuela." Some 4.5 million Venezuelans have left the country of 30 million, which has grappled with numerous economic problems, including hyperinflation and shortages of several basic goods. Venezuela's Supreme Court has banned Guaidó from leaving the country, but the opposition leader defied that ban in order to travel to Colombia, Europe, Canada and the United States in order to meet with world leaders. During his international tour, Guaidó has said that Venezuelans want to be freed from Maduro, whom he calls a dictator, but that they need help. Among those attending Guaidó's rally in Miami were U.S. Sen. Rick

Scott and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, both Florida Republicans, AFP reported. Also in attendance were Democratic Representatives Donna Shalala, Debbie Wasserman Schultz and Debbie Mucarsel-Powell. Not in attendance was U.S. President Donald Trump, whose administration has imposed several rounds of sanctions on Maduro's government and has recognized Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate interim president. Earlier in the day, Trump tweeted a photo of himself playing golf at his Mar-a-Lago resort, just up the coast from Miami. When asked about a possible meeting with Trump, Guaidó replied "stay tuned," the AP reported. Guaidó added that he was planning his return to Venezuela.

Central American Nations Restrict Travel to Fight Virus

Central American governments have restricted travel in a bid to keep coronavirus out of their countries, including barring travelers who have recently visited China, officials said on Friday, Reuters reported. Guatemala and El Salvador announced blanket restrictions on people who have recently been in China, where the new strain of the coronavirus broke out. The World Health Organization last week declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei said those who have been to China in the last 15 days will not be allowed into his country. Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele had announced a similar ban a day earlier. Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández told reporters his government would soon announce measures seeking an "effective management of the situation." Costa Rican officials said they will monitor transit points such as airports but for now will allow Chinese travelers into the country, while Panama said ships arriving in canal waters would have to report suspected cases 30 days prior to their arrival if they have ports in countries with confirmed cases. Meanwhile, Brazil's government is outlining a plan to evacuate Brazilian nationals from China's Hubei province, the epicenter of

NEWS BRIEFS

Resurgence of Violent Protests in Chile Lead to Third Death

A man in Santiago died of carbon monoxide poisoning on Friday after a supermarket was set on fire in the Chilean capital, bringing the death toll from a resurgence in violent protests over the past week to three, Agence France-Presse reported. Another man died last Wednesday after being hit by a hijacked bus, and a football fan was killed a day earlier after a police van hit him. Protesters also looted supermarkets and burned barricades on several roads in Santiago. More than 30 people have died in protests that began in October.

Pope Vows Support During Meeting With Argentina's Fernández

Pope Francis has promised to "do everything he can" to help Argentina during its debt crisis, President Alberto Fernández said on Saturday following a private meeting with the Argentine pontiff in the Vatican City, Reuters reported. A Vatican statement said Fernández and the pope had discussed Argentina's economic crisis, poverty, corruption and drug trafficking.

Mexican Gov't Plans to Support Argentine Candidate to Lead IDB

The administration of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is planning to support Argentina's Gustavo Béliz, currently President Alberto Fernández's secretary for strategic affairs, to lead the Inter-American Development Bank, the Mexican Finance Ministry told Bloomberg News on Friday. Argentina's government has not publicly said that it will field a candidate to lead the multilateral lending institution, and it declined to comment to the news service on Mexico's backing. Béliz previously ran the IDB's Institute for the Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean.

the virus' outbreak, President Jair Bolsonaro said in a statement on Sunday. "Every Brazilian in the region who wants to return to Brazil will be brought back," he said, adding that they would be placed in quarantine for a period.

BUSINESS NEWS

Uber Shuts Down Operations in Colombia

Ride-hailing company Uber on Saturday closed down its operations in Colombia after failing to reach an agreement over regulations with the country's authorities, *El Tiempo* reported. The move follows a court ruling in December that Uber had violated competition law, a decision Uber described as "arbitrary." On Saturday, users who tried to use the app instead were greeted with a message saying "Adiós Colombia," the *Financial Times* reported. In an email to local users, Uber wrote, "Many thanks for join-

Uber had operated in Colombia for six years.

ing us on this six-year journey." The San-Francisco based company had begun operations in Colombia in 2013, but the government never regulated it, and the company faced consistent opposition from traditional taxi drivers. Last year, Uber scrapped plans to build a \$40 million support center in the Andean country, citing uncertainty over the regulatory environment. Uber provided jobs for nearly 88,000 drivers in Colombia and service to 2.3 million users, according to the company. The government said Uber should have registered as a transportation company in Colombia, but it had repeatedly refused to do so. Other ride-hailing services, including China's Didi Chuxing and Greece's beat, also operate in Colombia. However, the recent ruling has also cast doubt over their future in the country, the *Financial Times* reported.

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votes needed to win. Trade and national security were never on the agenda for the meeting. A few Caribbean foreign ministers raised issues such as migration, the loss of correspondent banking relations, the decline in U.S. aid and investment in the region, except for Haiti and Jamaica, and the poor terms of trade. By all accounts, Pompeo was not briefed for those discussions and made no commitments. The concerns of Barbados' prime minister, as current chair of Caricom, about 'attempts to divide Caricom' would better have been directed at Caricom countries themselves, for only they can allow Caricom to be divided. Generally, it has been the practice in Caricom that when high-level representatives of a major country visit a Caricom state, all Caricom countries are invited for a multilateral meeting. The meeting in Jamaica departed from this general practice. U.S. relations with Caricom countries, generally neglectful, is ad hoc. Nothing will change because of the Jan. 22 meeting. A coherent Caribbean policy, developed in consultation with Caribbean countries, is required. To be effective, it would have to include efforts to address the economic and global warming challenges confronting the region, now being addressed by other major players, especially China."

A **Patsy Lewis, visiting professor of international and public affairs at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs and interim director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Brown University:** "The countries of the Caribbean Community have been struggling to reconcile conflicting perspectives on Venezuela's ongoing crises, as seen in their votes on various OAS resolutions. These differences are based on the conservative ideological leanings of some countries (Jamaica and St. Lucia), the strength of U.S. influence (Haiti), tensions with Venezuela over territorial claims (Guyana) and Venezuela's role in the economy of some (Dominica, Grenada

and St. Vincent and the Grenadines). So far, they have managed to maintain a common front in favor of a peaceful resolution of the conflict and against external intervention. The United States has sought to undermine their shaky solidarity by meeting twice with select members of the grouping considered more amenable to U.S. influence. The first meeting was held at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort last March and the second, this January, in Jamaica with U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo. While the invitees to meet President Trump were named, it is not as clear which leaders were invited to Pompeo's meeting. Nevertheless, four prime ministers, including Caricom's chairperson, Barbados' Mia Mottley, were vociferous in their opposition, viewing this as an attempt to divide the region. Even if the United States were successful in undermining their solidarity, this is unlikely to have significant repercussions for the group. They have weathered significant differences before, such as the U.S. invasion of Grenada, which sidelined Caricom. Caricom survived because of its importance in overcoming some of the challenges of small size and insignificance. There is also unlikely to be any significant distancing of the United States from the countries opposing its approach, because of the region's strategic position and competition with China for regional influence."

A **Scott B. MacDonald, chief economist for Smith's Research & Gradings and senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS):** "In his visit to Jamaica, Pompeo stressed that the challenges and threats facing the Caribbean and the United States 'are very different from the times of the Cold War.' But he also warned about 'the meddling' of Cuba and Russia; 'the easy money of China'; ISIS fighters coming from Trinidad and Tobago; Hezbollah's 'tentacles' in South America; and the 'unprecedented migration crisis' out of Venezuela. Moreover, he made clear U.S.

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support for the re-election of OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro, who has been a leading voice in the fight against Venezuela's dictatorial leader and backed what some are calling a coup in Bolivia. Although there is plenty of debate about whether a new Cold War has descended upon the global political system, the tone from Washington is shaped by national security concerns, especially in regard to China—which is seen as having reconfigured the Caribbean's geopolitical landscape—and Venezuela, backed by Cuba, Russia and China. U.S. policy in the Caribbean thus is marked by a return to being an active force. In the case of the Jamaican summit, Washington is taking the path of least resistance, working with those countries which would prefer to work with it (or at least that is how it is being conveyed). There are three things to take from Pompeo's trip: 1.) big power politics have returned to the Caribbean; 2.) there is a certain sense of resentment over this from some Caribbean states, especially those which are apprehensive about being strong-armed into policies that they do not agree with; and 3.) there is the challenge of national interests puncturing efforts at regional unity under the Commonwealth Caribbean flag. The Caribbean has exited the post-Cold War era, when the United States was a generally disinterested player. It is now back, and the challenge is how to balance that with the stickier geopolitical problems posed by Venezuela and the attachments that come with Chinese economic statecraft, not to mention other critical issues such as climate change and migration."

A **Jacqueline A. Braveboy-Wagner, professor at the City University of New York and founding chair of the Global South Caucus**

of the International Studies Association:

"Pompeo wrapped up a visit to Jamaica, during which matters such as the role of China in the hemisphere, drug trafficking and democracy (including in Venezuela) were reportedly discussed. The fact that only the

Bahamas, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia and St. Maarten were invited to the talks predictably encouraged commentators, and no less than Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley, the current chairperson of Caricom, to complain that the United States was trying to 'divide' the Caribbean Community. Such an idea has been promoted at least since a selective White House invitation last year only to the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica and St. Lucia. It is giving the United States too much credit to see its invitations as a deliberate attempt to divide the region (which Pompeo has denied). Clumsy or not, these are rather attempts to engage the region—not just on Venezuela but also on China, a topic which Pompeo has been harping on. The problem for Caricom is that the United States is engaging within the narrow bilateral parameters that it has historically favored, especially under Republican administrations. The United States usually chooses the countries that it thinks are its best or potential allies and engages with them. Multilateralism is not a strong point for most U.S. administrations. As an instrumental matter, the superpower tends to search for an entry point (appropriate partners), as a shorthand for dealing with a large grouping of small states. On the U.S. side, it is understandable that the country looks out for its national interests, searches for friends and allies, and thinks that more tangible benefits are to be gained via a bilateral approach. This is normal diplomacy. However, Caricom itself risks marginalization when it delays action on important issues and its members go in different directions. The organization is not very good at foreign policy coordination and should do a better job. Until that happens, complaints about external attempts to divide a region will continue. While these complaints may score political points for leaders, nothing will change."

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

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