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FEATURED Q&A

Will Chile Be Able to Avoid More Bloodshed?



Violent protests have convulsed Chile for months. A demonstration in downtown Concepción is pictured above. // File Photo: Alvaro Navarro via Creative Commons.

Q Chilean President Sebastián Piñera has called for calm ahead of expected protests in March, when at least 25 demonstrations have already been scheduled. Meanwhile, nearly 2,600 police officials have undergone a “re-training” for potential confrontations, including courses on dialogue with protesters, the use of force and human rights. How prepared is the Chilean government to deal with both planned and unplanned demonstrations over the next month? What have been the most important lessons from nationwide on-and-off protests that began in October, and what tactics do authorities in Chile need to employ to manage potential unrest? What’s at stake in terms of public security, and how can Chile’s police ensure the protection of private property in upcoming protests?

A Maria Velez de Berliner, managing director at RTG-Red Team Group, Inc.: “On April 26, Chileans will vote for either reforming Pinochet’s constitution or drafting a new constitution. Discounting the crowd-damping effect of COVID-19, if it spreads within Chile, and with history as a bellwether, Piñera can expect large demonstrations, tainted by random acts of vandalism against public and private property, and injury to civilians and police. Training police to engage in dialogue with protesters bent on violence and disruption runs counter to police duties and tasks. There is considerable difference between peaceful demonstrations and acts of willful, premeditated violence, which police have the duty to counter. Police need to be firm and civil in protecting peaceful demonstrators while ensuring people’s safe passage, unharmed operation of businesses and undisrupted delivery of public

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TODAY’S NEWS

POLITICAL

U.S. Sanctions Nicaraguan National Police

The Trump administration imposed sanctions on Nicaragua’s National Police, saying the force has violated human rights in the Central American country.

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BUSINESS

Group Asks Credit Suisse to Probe Ex-Nazi Bank Accounts

The Simon Wiesenthal Center said it has acquired a list of former Nazis living in Argentina who held ill-gotten money in bank accounts at what is now Credit Suisse.

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POLITICAL

Venezuela Accuses Guaidó of Staging Gun Threat

Venezuela’s government accused opposition leader Juan Guaidó of staging an incident in which a man pointed a gun at him during a recent rally. A photograph of the incident was widely circulated and condemned.

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Guaidó // File Photo: Facebook page of Juan Guaidó.

POLITICAL NEWS

Venezuelan Gov't Accuses Guaidó of Staging Gun Threat

Venezuela's government on Thursday accused opposition leader Juan Guaidó, whom dozens of countries recognize as Venezuela's legitimate interim president, of hiring a known criminal to point a gun at him during a recent rally, the Associated Press reported. A photograph of the incident was widely circulated and condemned internationally. Authorities have arrested the man who made full confession and implicated the opposition, said Venezuelan Communications Minister Jorge Rodríguez. In a purported confession that was videotaped, the man with the gun, Clímaco Medina, also known as "El Caracas," said Guaidó's intermediaries paid him \$200 to point a gun at the opposition leader. "He took out a pistol and gave it to me," said a man identified as Medina, which was broadcast on state television. "He said I had to point at the people, frighten them, and aim at Guaidó." The street rally happened last Saturday in the central Venezuelan city of Barquisimeto. Some 200 armed civilians and government security forces confronted anti-government demonstrators that Guaidó was leading at the rally, the AP reported, citing five people present at the demonstration. The wire service was not present at the rally and was unable to confirm the identity of the masked man who pointed a gun at Guaidó. The opposition leader was seen staring down the armed man. Juan Pablo Guanipa, an opposition lawmaker, rejected Rodríguez's claims surrounding the incident, saying they amounted to an attempt to "cover up the truth." Guanipa added that the opposition does not stage events like President Nicolás Maduro's government does. The rally on Saturday marked the first time that Guaidó had traveled outside Caracas since returning from an international tour to secure more support for his efforts to oust Maduro. Among Guaidó's stops on the tour was Washington, where he attended President Donald Trump's State of the Union address. Guaidó did not

immediately respond to Rodríguez's accusation, but he posted a video on Twitter showing him in the street near his home confronting a vehicle of Venezuela's SEBIN intelligence agency. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Feb. 12 Advisor.]

U.S. Treasury Dept. Sanctions Nicaraguan National Police

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday imposed sanctions on the Nicaraguan National Police over accusations of human rights abuse, Reuters reported. The Treasury Department in a statement said it blacklisted Nicaragua's police force over its role in significant acts of violence, including "using live ammunition against peaceful protesters and participating in death squads, as well as carrying out extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and kidnappings." The Nicaraguan government under former revolutionary and longtime strongman Daniel Ortega has called previous U.S. sanctions on officials a continuation of its "imperial" ambition to control the Central American country. In 2018, then-U.S.



Ortega // File Photo: Nicaraguan Government.

National Security Advisor John Bolton first used the term "troika of tyranny" during a Florida speech describing the United States policy of seeking regime change in the nations of Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela. Nicaragua's two main opposition groups—the Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy and Blue and White National Unity—in January announced that they were forming an alliance ahead of next year's presidential and legislative elections to unseat Ortega, but it remains uncertain if they

NEWS BRIEFS

At Least 32 Killed Since Sunday in Brazil Floods, Mudslides

At least 32 people have died since Sunday in the Brazilian states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro due to flooding and mudslides, CNN reported. As of Thursday, more than 5,000 people have been displaced, and dozens remain unaccounted for. The threat of more mudslides continues to grow, authorities warned Thursday. February was the rainiest month for São Paulo since record-keeping began 77 years ago, according to the National Meteorological Institute.

Coca Cultivation in Colombia Remains at Record High: White House

The area of land in Colombia dedicated to coca production remains at a record high despite a push to manually eradicate the plant, new data released by the White House on Thursday shows, the Associated Press reported. Coca cultivation reached some 524,000 acres last year, an increase of 2 percent from the year before. U.S. President Donald Trump, in a meeting this week with Colombian President Iván Duque, called for spraying the illicit crops with herbicides. Duque said he supported "precision spraying" as part of a broader approach to combat drug trafficking.

Apple Pay Platform to Launch in Mexico This Month: Report

Apple is poised to launch its Apple Pay platform in Mexico this month, Apple Magazine reported today. The platform will allow users in Mexico to make contactless payments using their iPhones and Apple Watches. Last year, the company introduced Apple Pay in several European countries, including Portugal and Slovakia, the magazine reported.

can achieve that goal without international pressure and election monitoring. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Jan. 30 issue of the Advisor.]

BUSINESS NEWS

Credit Suisse Asked to Probe Accounts of Argentine Ex-Nazis

The U.S.-based Simon Wiesenthal Center this week said it received a list containing the names of former Nazis living in Argentina who are believed to have deposited ill-gotten monies into bank accounts at what is now Credit Suisse, UPI reported Thursday. The center, which for decades has tracked down members of Germany's Nazi Party and war criminals, alleges that some people on the list, which contains 12,000 individuals, held stolen profits from German appropriations during World War II. From 1930 to 1938, Argentina became home to thousands of pro-Nazi organizations. It is believed that Argentine banks with ties to Germany took the money stolen from the regime's victims and transferred them to what was then called Schweizerische Kreditanstalt, which is now Credit Suisse, Deutsche Welle reported. The records were found in a Buenos Aires building that was formerly a Nazi headquarters, Argentine officials said. The list was apparently compiled in the 1930s by the anti-Fascist government of President Roberto Ortiz in an effort to collect evidence against the Nazi Party there. Ortiz died while in office in 1942, and many documents since then have been destroyed in an effort to conceal stolen funds. The Wiesenthal Center has asked Credit Suisse to identify the bank accounts associated with the names "to settle this matter on behalf of the diminishing number of Holocaust survivors." Credit Suisse said that an investigation in the 1990s into accounts of victims of Nazi persecution at Credit Suisse and other Swiss banks provided "as complete and exhaustive a picture as possible" into the matter, but added that it would examine them again, UPI reported.

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services that might be under the threat of violence. This balance requires training in crowd control and management and constitutional protections, while leaving police free to enforce the law by all legal means, a balance that might not be maintained. Added to the losses of \$1.4 billion caused by the 2019 demonstrations, the slow recovery of exports of copper, fruits and wine to China due to COVID-19 restrictions in China's imports, means Piñera has limited resources to meet the protesters' wide-ranging demands, exacerbated as they are by financial constraints and rising youth unemployment. Demonstrations and the projected growth contraction across all sectors combine to create a combustible environment between the government and protesters, continuing the erosion of the stability that has distinguished Chile during the last 30 years."

Alex Schober, senior analyst for the Southern Cone at Ducker-Frontier: "Public trust in security personnel is at extremely low levels in Chile. While the 're-training' of more than 2,500 police officers (los carabineros) was a positive step, it will likely take months for Chileans to trust them again. It takes more than 're-training' a small portion of the police force to erase the allegations of human rights violations last year. This bodes poorly for managing the protests that will inevitably reignite. The Piñera administration finds itself in a 'Catch-22' with regard to how to handle the mobilizations. On the one hand, the opposition has begun to criticize the president for not controlling the public order. Conversely, the administration's poor manner of controlling it in 2019 feeds current social discontent. Piñera could reshape the narrative by repudiating the violations of los carabineros during the protests last year and calling for structural reform. However, this could splinter the governing coalition. Some members of the right-wing Independent Democratic Union (UDI) political party have called for unwavering support for los

carabineros. This raises the question of how Chile can move forward. Progressing on structural reforms is critical, and the pension reform is particularly important. Approving it in the next two months would satisfy a key social demand. Changing the narrative of public security while making progress on structural reforms will likely begin the slow dissipation of the protests. This could usher in a newfound level of confidence in Chilean society. Accordingly, 70 percent of Chileans (according to the March 3 Cadem poll) believe that when Chile resolves the social crisis, it will be a better country than before."

Lucía Dammert, associate professor at the University of Santiago in Chile and expert on public security issues: "Chile is facing a political crisis. Police forces' high levels of autonomy allowed the use of repressive measures in the past, but police abuses after Oct. 18 had a nationwide impact. Reforming the police should be the natural way for the government to tackle this situation, but there are political gears that slow that process. To develop a clear path toward the end of conflict, the government and the opposition need to move forward on three agendas: the social agenda with specific changes to the health and pension systems; the human rights agenda that will limit impunity of abuses that occurred in the last five months; and the political reform agenda, which includes a detailed definition on the constitutional process. It is difficult to assess how demonstrations will develop in the short term in Chile. Momentum for change has built in the streets, but violent polarization has also been strengthened. The government needs to clearly signal that the agendas are moving forward and that police actions are being controlled and monitored. Otherwise, the escalation of violence could even endanger the referendum. Still, the most important element to consider is that there is no way back to the pre-October 'normalcy.' Public demonstra-

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tions will be constant, political discussions will include different voices, and the right to protest will be debated; the police instead of limiting spaces for demonstration will have to ensure that it can be done. Most Chileans under 35 perceive the presence of police as dangerous and violent. As for police strategies, using de-escalation tactics seems to be needed to reduce or manage behaviors linked to conflict, including verbal and physical aggression or even bullying. But even if a pension reform is implemented, social unrest and violence may continue.”

A Gonzalo Cordero A., partner at Morales & Besa in Santiago: “The government was initially caught by surprise and was unprepared to deal with the extent and violence of the protests. However, I think that it is now better prepared to deal with the situation. A number of measures have been announced from October to March, including the call for a constitutional referendum, which has helped to calm the intensity of the protests. Today, we can sense a different atmosphere to that of October, in which the most complex episodes are isolated events. Even though it is difficult to draw lessons at this stage, since there are different explanations for the reasons or causes behind the protests, I think there is no doubt that dialogue has played a key role in bringing positions closer together and seeking agreements. Proof of this is that today’s situation is less tense. There is a lot at stake and, therefore, I believe that all the actors have been called upon to assume a greater role in this regard. The government and the police will act with the utmost caution in order to avoid exacerbating the process of polarization that the country has experienced in recent months, with the consequent social, economic and political impact. An increase in violence could also affect the April 26 constitutional referendum and the procedure established for the drafting of a new constitution.”

A Jenny Pribble, associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Richmond: “As summer comes to a close in Chile, citizens are preparing for a return to the large-scale protests seen during the final months of 2019. During that time, mobilization was met with harsh repression by security forces, and reports from Amnesty International and the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights documented widescale abuses by Chile’s military police. In preparation for the likely increase in mobilization, President Sebastián Piñera announced that police underwent new training for improving crowd control strategies and communication with protesters. The administration also purchased new equipment, including body cameras, drones and tanks. In recent weeks, the media has reported increased arrests at rallies, particularly among the so-called ‘front line’ groups. None of these initiatives addresses the underlying issues that motivate Chile’s ongoing protests, and as such, the policies are unlikely to promote social peace. Moreover, the efforts fail to alter the public perception that security forces have abused power and that the Piñera administration is disinterested in addressing those abuses. The initiatives also neglect a more pressing task: rebuilding public trust in security forces, state institutions and the political system. Absent such efforts, mobilization and conflict are likely to persist. Piñera’s new security initiatives reinforce the perception that his government, and the political class more broadly, are out of touch with protesters and deaf to the social demands that motivate ongoing mobilization. This feeds Chile’s cycle of protest, conflict and discontent. Any effective effort to break this cycle must focus on deep policy reform and genuine efforts at dialogue.”

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