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THE DIALOGUE

FEATURED Q&A

How Well Is Brazil's Military Fighting Deforestation?

Brazil's government has been using the country's military to fight deforestation. Defense Minister Fernando Azevedo (second from right) is pictured last month at the site of an illegal logging operation. // Photo: Brazilian Defense Ministry.

Q **Brazilian Vice President Hamilton Mourão said Oct. 26 that the government will extend through April the military's deployment to fight deforestation in the Amazon. President Jair Bolsonaro ordered the deployment last May, repeating a similar action from last year when fires spiked in the rain forest. How effective has Brazil's military been at fighting Amazon deforestation? To what extent has Brazil's use of technology, such as satellites, aided the military's efforts in the Amazon? Can new technologies play a bigger role in combating environmental degradation and illicit activity in Brazil, and should multilateral institutions help in financing such efforts?**

A **Anya Prusa, senior associate at the Brazil Institute and Slater Family Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars:** "Deforestation will persist in the Amazon as long as the economic framework incentivizes deforestation: cleared land is worth more than forested land; clearing new land is cheaper than improving the poor soils of already-cleared land; and the chances of getting caught and fined—or going to jail—for land-grabbing and illicit deforestation are increasingly low. Technology can play a substantial role in changing this economic calculus, from better monitoring and enforcement to the development of new economic markets that promote sustainable activities in the Amazon region. The agencies traditionally tasked with combating deforestation in Brazil, including IBAMA, ICM-Bio and the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), have long been recognized as global leaders in the technical expertise to combat deforestation. However, budget cuts and understaffing, as well as the

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Police Open Fire on Femicide Protesters at Cancún City Hall

Mexican police officers opened fire on protesters who tried to forcefully enter Cancún's city hall during a protest against femicides. Four journalists were wounded.

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Cargill Announces Sale of Operation in Venezuela

U.S.-based food conglomerate Cargill said it has agreed to sell its unit in Venezuela. Financial details were not disclosed.

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Peru Inaugurates New President After Ouster of Vizcarra

Manuel Merino, who had been serving as the head of Peru's Congress, was sworn in as the country's new president, following the abrupt ouster of President Martín Vizcarra.

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Merino // Photo: Peruvian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Peru Swears in New President a Day After Vizcarra's Ouster

Manuel Merino, who had been serving as the head of Peru's Congress, was sworn in Tuesday as the country's new president, a day after lawmakers swiftly and overwhelmingly ousted his predecessor, Martín Vizcarra, El Comercio reported. "This is a difficult moment for the country," said Merino, who placed his hand on a Bible and donned the red and white presidential sash along with a face mask, the Associated Press reported. "Today, the country does not look at the future with hope, but with worry." Merino vowed to proceed with the country's presidential election, scheduled for next April,

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> **— Manuel Merino**

and also work to improve the economy, fight crime and improve health care to help Peru become better prepared for another wave of coronavirus infections. 'We can't divide the country,' he said. However, in Lima and other cities, divisions were clear. Hundreds of anti-Merino protesters gathered outside Congress, banging pots and pans as the new president was inaugurated, the AP reported. Protesters and police clashed in Lima and other locations, with some carrying signs reading, "Merino isn't my president," The Wall Street Journal reported. Daily newspaper La República called Vizcarra's ouster a coup, and many analysts and residents agreed. "It's a coup d'état," taxi driver Paul Mendoza told the AP. "Now we're going to have inflation, a recession, and we won't be able to get ahead because of the pandemic." Merino is Peru's third president in less than three years. In March 2018, Vizcarra took over from his predecessor, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, who resigned

under pressure amid corruption allegations. In ousting Vizcarra, Congress declared him morally unfit to be president, and lawmakers said he handled the Covid-19 pandemic poorly. Vizcarra was also accused of taking more than $630,000 in bribes in exchange for construction contracts when he was the governor of the small Moquegua department in southern Peru. Vizcarra has denied wrongdoing but quickly agreed to leave after Congress voted to remove him from office. "History and the Peruvian people will judge the decisions made," he said Monday.

Police Open Fire on Femicide Protesters in Cancún, Four Hurt

Mexican police late Monday opened fire on protesters who tried to forcefully enter the city hall in Cancún during a demonstration against the high levels of femicide in the country, The Guardian reported. Four journalists were injured, including two who suffered bullet wounds. Police reportedly detained eight protesters. Approximately 10 women are murdered in Mexico daily, sparking outrage within an increasingly visible feminist movement that has organized several widespread protests this year. The demonstration in Cancún occurred after the body of a 20-year-old woman, Bianca "Alexis" Lorenzana, was discovered in Quintana Roo state on Mexico's Caribbean coast, The Guardian reported. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has sparked anger for what critics see as a downplaying of gender issues. Following a protest in Mexico City in February during which masked women sprayed the walls of the national palace with graffiti and blood-red paint, the president suggested that his conservative opponents were behind the demonstrations and blamed the media for "manipulating" the issue. He has also said most emergency calls denouncing domestic violence in the country, which reached 26,000 in March, were mostly "false," though he did not provide proof. [Editor's note: See **Q&A** on femicides in Mexico in the Feb. 27 issue of the Latin America Advisor.]

NEWS BRIEFS

Belizeans Head to Polls Today to Select New Gov't

Belizeans will head to the polls today to elect a new government, as the ruling United Democratic Party, led by Patrick Faber as its candidate for prime minister, seeks an unprecedented fourth consecutive term in office, the Associated Press reported. Longtime Prime Minister Dean Barrow is retiring from electoral politics. Faber is facing John Briceño of the main opposition People's United Party. Belizeans will vote to fill 31 seats in the House of Representatives.

Puerto Rico's Elections Commission Finds 100 Briefcases With Ballots

Puerto Rico's elections commission said Tuesday that it had found more than 100 briefcases with uncounted ballots from the Nov. 3 general election in the U.S. territory, the Associated Press reported. Elections commission president Francisco Rosado said the briefcases were in a secured vault, blaming the situation on what he said was an underfunded and understaffed administrative board that was in charge of counting record numbers of absentee and early votes. "Every vote will be counted," Rosado added.

Event That Halted Brazil Sinovac Trial Unrelated to Vaccine: Institute

The "serious adverse event" that led Brazilian health authorities to halt clinical trials of the potential Covid-19 vaccine of China's Sinovac had no relation to the vaccine itself, the director of Brazil's Butantan biomedical institute said Tuesday, CNN reported. Sinovac began Phase 3 clinical trials with the institute in late July. The government of São Paulo state, where the trial is being carried out, said a trial volunteer had died and that the death had been registered as a suicide, Reuters reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

U.S.–Based Cargill Announces Sale of Venezuela Operation

U.S.-based food conglomerate Cargill on Tuesday said it had agreed to sell its unit in Venezuela to a group of investors represented by local firm Grupo Puig as well as Phoenix Global Investment, Reuters reported. The transaction involves all of Cargill's operations in the South American country, including facilities that produce flour, pasta, cooking oil and animal feed, said Cargill, which is headquartered in Minnetonka, Minn. "The sale seeks to ensure the continuity of operations in the country [and] access to quality goods and services that the company has provided over 34 years in Venezuela," the privately held company said. Cargill did not disclose financial details of the sale, Phoenix Global Investment did not respond to Reuters' request for comment, and the wire service was unable to obtain a comment from Grupo Puig. For years, multinational corporations have shuttered their units in Venezuela amid restrictive regulations that President Nicolás Maduro's government imposed and which made the companies' operations inviable. Maduro relaxed those restrictions last year, but several companies are still struggling there because of a plunge in consumer spending that has resulted from years of economic contraction and soaring inflation, Reuters reported. Two weeks ago, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce released a survey that said 80 percent of Venezuelan-Americans support U.S. companies operating in Venezuela. "In countries like Venezuela, American companies are often the most significant source of financial support to employees, employees' families, and their communities," said the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's senior vice president for the Americas, Neil Herrington. "Forcing U.S. companies out of Venezuela will not accelerate a return to democracy. It will only increase suffering and slow economic recovery, while allowing America's global competitors to fill the vacuum."

decision to transfer authority for combating deforestation and fires in the Amazon to the military, have left much of this expertise on the table. INPE's world-class satellite images and data, for example, are no longer being used to target violators and enforce environmental regulations. Instead, technology's potential to combat environmental degradation and illicit activity is being harnessed by nongovernmental groups, researchers and the private sector. A handful of Indigenous tribes are using drones to track and report deforestation from illicit logging, ranching and wildcat miners. Under pressure from investors, a major meatpacker has vowed to use blockchain technology to monitor its entire Brazilian supply chain by 2025, including indirect suppliers, to curb cattle laundering. Other companies are developing precise, real-time tracking of carbon emissions to create functional carbon offset markets that offer financial incentives for conservation and lower-impact agriculture. Artificial intelligence can be used to monitor the health of trees and forests, and predict which areas are most susceptible to fire and disease. In the absence of government action to enforce environmental regulations, these types of initiatives have the potential to help reshape the economic structures that incentivize land clearing."

A **Christian Poirier, program director at Amazon Watch:** "Since last year's catastrophic Amazon fires profoundly damaged Bolsonaro's reputation and jeopardized key global market relationships, his regime launched Operation Green Brazil. This was an attempt to show its response to spiking environmental crime and impunity by deploying hundreds of soldiers to police the Amazon. However, between May and August 2020, while the operation unfolded in the Amazon, the number of fires reached 39,187, essentially the same as in 2019 (38,952). This October's 17,326 Amazon hotspots were more than double the number of fires detected last October.

The numbers do not lie. In fact, they prove the tragic failure of military-led environmental enforcement, touted by Bolsonaro as a means to combat Amazon deforestation. Brazilian civilian space agency INPE's use of satellite technology and scientific analysis have played a fundamental role in tracking

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Amazon deforestation over the last 30 years, and in the process have informed public policies that effectively contained deforestation. However, since Bolsonaro took office, he has repeatedly demoralized the agency with unfounded criticism, fired key INPE officials and undermined its organizational structure. In doing so, his regime has made the country far less effective in tackling illegal deforestation and ensuing fires. By ignoring the technical expertise of environmental professionals to give positions to military officials with limited environmental knowledge, the regime also showed its true colors, allowing deforestation and fires to explode while disregarding the very tools capable of containing Amazon destruction."

A **Thomas Dolzall, defense analyst at Forecast International:** "Over the past four decades, Brazilian institutions have conducted pioneering work into the utilization of advanced new technologies to observe and contain sources of environmental degradation in the Amazon rain forest. The state's effective deployment of these tools has only become more critical to securing the region's future, as shifting climatic conditions and unregulated economic development have

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steadily accelerated the rate of deforestation and heightened the long-term danger to the rain forest's ecology. The scale of 2019's wildfire crisis jolted the presidential administration of Jair Bolsonaro to better leverage the federal government's technological assets in tandem with the manpower largess and projection capacity of the armed forces toward these ends. Geospatial assets managed under the National Institute for Space Research (INPE) provide authorities with the means to identify and track emerging and active crisis points in real time. Such assets can be a powerful mechanism for facilitating the agile and efficient allocation of military resources toward managing the deforestation challenge. Yet, despite the bevy of additional resources recently devoted to containment, recent data released by INPE indicates that these efforts have generated only ephemeral success in forestalling the pace of ecological destruction in 2020. Responsibility lies primarily with federal economic and developmental policies that act at cross-purposes with the cause of environmental protection in the Amazon. Fundamentally, neither cutting-edge technological solutions nor localized acts of military valor can compensate for the absence of sound policy planning at the national level, leaving regulatory and military personnel locked in a Sisyphean struggle."

A Mariana Lyrio, consultant at BMJ Consultores Associados: "Operação Verde Brasil 2 has not yet demonstrated evident effectiveness. Data from the National Institute for Space Research (INPE) show that, up to Oct. 23, there was a 37 percent increase in deforestation, as compared to the whole month of October 2019. Deforestation declined in July, August and September, as compared to the data from those months in 2019, which reached record levels. Therefore, despite the decrease, the numbers remained higher than the historical average. The military has various technological devices to support its operations. Importantly, it has access to INPE's Deter-Intenso, which generates an updated image every 24

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hours of five critical areas that hold about 45 percent of the deforestation in 2020. The images started being disclosed in February and show the state of deforestation even with the presence of clouds. One possible explanation for the still incipient results of the operation, despite the advanced technology, is the lack of coordination between the military and the Institute of Environment and Natural Resources (IBAMA), the agency that is traditionally responsible for inspection actions in the Amazon. As for international financing, U.S. President-elect Joe Biden has already said he wants to organize a $20 billion fund for the Amazon. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro rejected the proposal, but diplomats linked to the Democrats believe that the Brazilian government won't oppose the plan once it becomes official. Considering the history of the paralyzed Amazon Fund, financing from multilateral institutions has proven useful in combating deforestation in the Amazon."

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