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FEATURED Q&A

How Successful Was U.S. VP Harris' Latin America Trip?



U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris met Tuesday with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador during her two-country trip to Latin America. // Photo: Mexican Government.

Q In her first trip abroad since taking office, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris visited Guatemala and Mexico this week as part of the Biden administration's plan to address the root causes of migration in the Northern Triangle nations of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. The visit came days after the White House announced private sector investments in the three countries by 12 U.S. companies, in addition to the \$4 billion promised in government aid. What did Harris achieve on her trip? How significant is the announced private investment initiative, and what needs to happen for the investments to actually create economic opportunities in Central America? To what extent is the White House's current approach effective in addressing the root causes of migration?

A Eduardo Stein, former Guatemalan vice president and joint IOM-UNHCR special representative for Venezuelan migration: "The much-anticipated visit of Vice President Kamala Harris to Guatemala generated quite contradictory reactions that swarmed the local media amid the full spectrum of political contradictions that engulf our country. Some rejected and heavily criticized the visit as a new sign of U.S. oversight, intervention and impositions. Others ambiguously regarded it as ineffective, while quite a few sectors warmly welcomed it as a transcendental opportunity to jointly build a revised bilateral and subregional agenda—one that can more precisely target joint efforts to strengthen our democratic systems, to generate the necessary systemic changes toward a truly independent justice system and to have the government take on strong, concrete measures to fight corruption.

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TODAY'S NEWS

ECONOMIC

Mexico's López Obrador Taps New Central Bank, Finance Chiefs

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador nominated his finance minister, Arturo Herrera, as central bank chief, and economic advisor Rogelio Ramírez de la O as finance minister.

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BUSINESS

Canada's TC Energy Cancels Keystone XL Pipeline Project

The company that was to build the pipeline scrapped the project following years of controversy over environmental concerns.

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POLITICAL

OAS Chief Calls for Suspending Nicaragua

Organization of American States Secretary General Luis Almagro called for Nicaragua's suspension from the group following the Ortega government's arrests of several opposition figures.

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Almagro // File Photo: @Almagro_OEA2015 via Twitter.

POLITICAL NEWS

OAS Chief Calls for Suspending Nicaragua

Organization of American States Secretary General Luis Almagro on Wednesday urged members of the organization to suspend the participation of Nicaragua at the OAS following the government's detention of several opposition figures over the past week, EFE reported. Almagro asked the Permanent Council for an

Nicaraguan authorities have detained five rivals of President Daniel Ortega in the past week.

emergency meeting to discuss the situation in Nicaragua and activate "necessary mechanisms" under Article 21 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which outlines the suspension of an OAS member state if two-thirds of members consider there has been a "rupture in the democratic order" in the country under question and that "diplomatic gestures have been unfruitful," according to the report. Almagro's call came a day after Nicaraguan authorities arrested three opposition figures, bringing the total number of detained political rivals to five in the past week alone. At least four of the arrested political figures were potential candidates against President Daniel Ortega in the presidential election scheduled for November. Ortega, who has been in office since 2006, is seeking a fourth term. He had previously led the country from 1979 to 1990. His recent crackdown against opponents has sparked international outcry. On Wednesday, the United States imposed sanctions on four Nicaraguans, including one of Ortega's daughters. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States would continue to use diplomatic and economic tools against members of the Ortega government and called on the Nicaraguan

president to release the detained opposition leaders, Reuters reported.

ECONOMIC NEWS

López Obrador Taps New Finance, Central Bank Chiefs

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador announced Wednesday on social media that he would nominate his finance minister as the country's next central bank chief, and he named an economic advisor as finance minister. "A change for the good of Mexico," López Obrador said in a posting on Twitter. The president is nominating Finance Minister Arturo Herrera as central bank chief and economic advisor Rogelio Ramírez de la O as finance minister. López Obrador described both as "good economists." He added, "We will continue to act responsibly, without indebting the country, not spending more than what goes into the treasury, with austerity and honesty." López Obrador said last month that he would not endorse current central bank chief Alejandro Díaz de León for a new term, adding that he wanted an economist with a "social dimension" who is "in favor of moral economics" in the role. Last week, Jonathan Heath, deputy governor of the Bank of Mexico, told the Advisor that Herrera "has a clear understanding of the bank's role and its importance for the correct conduct of monetary policy aimed at maintaining price stability." López Obrador vowed that his government would not increase taxes or the prices of gasoline, diesel or electricity. The president, who has promised to overhaul Mexico's "neoliberal" economic model, said the changes would help maintain the country's economic policy during the remaining three years of his term, Agence France-Presse reported. "It has given us very good results because despite the pandemic, the economic crisis has been overcome," he said in a video message. Mexico's economy plunged 8.5 percent last year, its worst performance in decades, amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Mexico's government

NEWS BRIEFS

Colombian Police Responsible for Deaths of 20 Protesters: Report

An international monitoring group on Wednesday said police officers in Colombia are responsible for the deaths of 20 people amid massive anti-government protests, the Associated Press reported. In a report, Human Rights Watch also accused police of violent actions against demonstrators, including sexual abuse, beatings and arbitrary detentions. José Miguel Vivanco, the group's director for the Americas, said the abuses were not "isolated incidents," but rather "the result of systemic shortcomings."

White House Urges Cuba, Venezuela to Turn Away Iranian Warships

The Biden administration is urging the governments of Cuba and Venezuela to turn away two Iranian warships that are believed to be carrying weapons intended to be delivered to Venezuela, Politico reported Wednesday. The White House also said the United States would take "appropriate measures" against what it said was a "threat" to U.S. allies. The ships are believed to fulfill a deal that Venezuela and Iran made a year ago.

U.S. Asks Mexico to Review Second Complaint About Alleged Labor Violations

The U.S. Labor Department and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative on Wednesday announced they had formally asked Mexico to probe an auto-parts plant in the Mexican city of Matamoros for alleged labor violations under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, The New York Times reported. A group of unions including the AFL-CIO recently filed a complaint against the Tridonex plant in Tamaulipas state near the U.S. border. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the June 2 issue of the Advisor.]

is expecting growth of 6.5 percent this year, AFP reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

Canada's TC Energy Scraps Keystone XL Pipeline Project

The Canadian company that was to build the Keystone XL pipeline announced Wednesday that it had scrapped the controversial project, which would have transported oil from Canadian tar sands to Nebraska, The New York Times reported. The pipeline project has been contentious for years over concerns about fossil fuels contributing to climate change. In one of his first acts as U.S. president, Joe Biden in January revoked a key permit for the \$8 billion pipeline project, which his predecessor, Donald Trump, had reinstated. On the same day of Biden's announcement, TC Energy, the firm behind the project, said it was halting work on the line. On Wednesday, the company said that it "will continue to coordinate with regulators, stakeholders and Indigenous groups to meet its environmental and regulatory commitments and to ensure a safe termination of and exit from the project," The New York Times reported. Environmental activists welcomed the move and are now urging Biden to rescind another Trump-era permit that allowed for another pipeline, known as Enbridge Line 3. Hundreds of protesters were arrested earlier this week in protests against that project, according to the report. Supporters of the Keystone XL pipeline argue that the project created thousands of jobs and that its cancellation circumvents North American energy security. "President Biden's cancellation of Keystone XL means the United States will need to source oil from other countries with less transparency on environmental performance than Canada, or satisfy demand using other modes of transportation," Tim McMillan, president and CEO of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, told the Energy Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Jan. 29.

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Also on the agenda is developing better, wider and more inclusive socioeconomic options for the poor and extremely poor, so that they can access decent livelihoods in this country rather than taking the extreme dangers of an irregular migration path 'p'al norte.' The way the Guatemalan government seemed to have prepared for the visit was somewhat of a letdown. However, Vice President Harris was able to hear directly from diverse civil society leadership many concrete signs of commitment to take action on the central problems of our shortcomings and insufficiencies as a country and as a society. Her willingness to hear frank expressions of what has worked and what has not, and to help out in the crucial areas of socioeconomic development, political participation and transparency, was very well taken."

A Oscar Chacón, co-founder and executive director of Alianza Americas: "Addressing the root causes of migration is not a one-trip challenge. Vice President Harris' visit is a first step in a process that, if done well, should put Central American nations on a path toward equitable, more democratic and ever more respectful nations when it comes to adhering to the rule of law—nations so

“Addressing the root causes of migration is not a one-trip challenge.”

— Oscar Chacón

hopeful and prosperous that they invite their citizens to want to stay. The short-term challenge, unresolved by the vice president's trip, is the likely continuation of Central American citizens needing to flee troubled nations. In this respect, simply telling people 'do not come' is far from adequate. We need better ways to honor the principle of humanitarian protection and the laws currently in place to

accommodate people seeking safe haven. After all, immigrants and refugees have been a true blessing for the United States. One missing factor in the U.S. response so far, when it comes to addressing root causes, is the role of Central American nationals residing in the United States. The fact that they sent nearly \$23 billion in 2020 to millions of households in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador makes them the largest investors, by far, when it comes to the well-being of millions of families in the region. The United States should find creative ways to make them active partners in the efforts of advancing toward better societies."

A Katya Rimkunas, regional deputy director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the International Republican

Institute: "Vice President Harris' trip was an important indicator of how the Biden administration will manage strained relationships with Mexico and Guatemala, both strategic partners given their shared borders, security issues and increasing influence from China. The vice president's trip to Mexico came after President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)'s party failed to secure a supermajority in Congress after Sunday's elections. AMLO has publicly accused the United States of 'acts of interventionism' and has increased negative rhetoric against USAID and foreign funding sources for civil society, which have increasingly questioned the president's commitment to democracy. Vice President Harris' trip appeared to smooth relations with AMLO and focused on goals of common interest. In Guatemala, Harris emphasized the importance of an independent judiciary and that fighting corruption would continue to be a top priority for the United States. This was a welcomed statement among Guatemalans, almost half of whom believe corruption has been on the rise. Harris' trip also underscored a crucial component of the administration's approach: securing buy-in and partnerships with civil

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society. Recent backsliding in democracy, rule of law and increased corruption in Mexico and the Northern Triangle makes it fundamental for civil society and young leaders to play a key role in addressing the root causes of migration. Private-sector investment is a vital part of fostering economic growth. However, that investment will not go far nor be sustainable if democratic institutions and governance are weak. It is critical to support democratic actors and elected officials in their efforts to address corruption and unaccountable governance.”

A Ray Walser, professor at Seton Hall University's School of Diplomacy and International relations' Washington Program and retired foreign service officer and former Heritage Foundation analyst: “While my crystal ball is a bit hazy, here is what I imagine was the gist of Vice President Kamala Harris' recent conversations with her Guatemalan and Mexican interlocutors: ‘Together, we have a serious problem: your citizens are making a historic beeline for our southern border. We truly understand the root causes driving them—poverty, violent crime, natural disasters, environmental degradation, poor governance, etc. These migrants are by and large not criminals but decent people looking for safety and a better

life. We must avoid a humanitarian crisis. Unlike the previous administration, with its zero tolerance, border wall, anti-immigrant mentality, we genuinely desire to help. We have outlined a broad range of programmatic ideas, and together with the private sector stand ready to commit substantial resources. We also want to deal humanely with asylees and unaccompanied minors. You must realize, however, that we face powerful domestic political forces and a merciless electoral calendar. The previous president, who disputes the very legitimacy of this administration, stokes the fires of xenophobia and latches onto any perceived weakness in border security and immigration policy. Some on the left express guilt for past misdeeds and see virtually every would-be migrant as an entitled victim. We must clearly demonstrate there is no such thing as an open border. The welcome mat is not out. Stay in your country. We are also wise to the games you play. This leads us to question your readiness to truly address the challenges. It can no longer be business as usual: impunity, corruption, self-serving elites and democratic backsliding. We seek serious proof you are ready to engage with us and deliver positive changes. Step up to the plate. You have my telephone number. I will take your call.’ ”

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Erik Brand

Publisher
ebrand@thedialogue.org

Gene Kuleta

Editor
gkuleta@thedialogue.org

Anastasia Chacón González

Reporter & Associate Editor
achacon@thedialogue.org



Michael Shifter, President

Rebecca Bill Chavez, Nonresident Senior Fellow

Bruno Binetti, Nonresident Fellow

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Advisor Video

Peru's Presidential Runoff Election

A Latin America Advisor interview with Cynthia McClintock Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, The George Washington University



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