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## FEATURED Q&A

# Is a New National Guard What Mexico Needs for Security?



Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador this month named Gen. Luis Rodríguez Bucio to head the country's new National Guard. // Photo: Notimex.

**Q** Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on April 11 named Gen. Luis Rodríguez Bucio to command the country's newly formed National Guard, a security force composed mainly of military police from the army and navy tasked with fighting organized crime. Just days before, López Obrador signed an agreement with the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, for her agency to provide human rights training to the security force. Bachelet said her office would offer technical assistance and incorporate elements such as a mechanism for transparency and accountability. Is Gen. Rodríguez a good fit to head the National Guard, and what experience does he bring to the job? What should the U.N.-led training entail, and is it enough to calm opponents' concerns over the potential for human rights abuses by a military-run police force?

**A** Gonzalo Escribano, government affairs director at Spey-side Mexico: "Security is not an issue in which President Andrés Manuel López Obrador feels entirely comfortable. This explains in part why he decided to leave the operational leadership of the National Guard to the military. Many questions remain regarding the institutional design of this new force that have given rise to concerns regarding transparency and civilian control. While the various national and state police forces were not exempt from concerns related to human rights abuses, official reports from the Mexican Human Rights Commission and NGOs show that the instances of human rights violations by the military have been much higher. The members of the armed

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## Red Cross Delivers 24 Tons of Medical Aid to Venezuela

The shipment of medical supplies and equipment marked the first major delivery of aid to Venezuela during the country's current economic crisis. President Nicolás Maduro has blocked previous attempts to bring aid into the country.

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### ECONOMIC

## U.S. to Allow Lawsuits in Cuba Property Cases

The Trump administration is expected to announce that it will allow lawsuits in U.S. courts against companies that use properties that Cuba confiscated during the country's revolution.

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### ECONOMIC

## Brazil Announces Aid Package for Truckers

President Jair Bolsonaro's offer of financial aid aims to prevent a truckers' strike like the one that caused widespread shortages across Brazil last year.

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Bolsonaro // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Red Cross Delivers 24 Tons of Medical Aid to Venezuela

Following years of government denials that Venezuela needs humanitarian aid, the administration of President Nicolás Maduro on Tuesday allowed 24 tons of medical equipment sent by the Red Cross into the country, *The New York Times* reported. The shipment marked the start of a large-scale campaign to bring humanitarian aid into the country, which is suffering from a severe economic crisis, including hyperinflation and shortages of food, medicines and other basic goods. The aid that was delivered by air to Caracas' international airport consisted of medical supplies and power generators for hospitals, which, like much of the country, have endured frequent power outages. The series of aid shipments, expected to be delivered over the coming days, are intended to help some 650,000 Venezuelans, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The federation had announced the aid campaign in late March, and on Tuesday said it would not

allow any political interference in Venezuela, where both Maduro and opposition leader Juan Guaidó both claim to be the country's legitimate president. Red Cross workers will distribute the aid where it is most needed, whether it goes to hospitals that are government-run or not, said the federation's president Francesco Rocca, the Associated Press reported. The Venezuelan Red Cross' president, Mario Villarroel, reiterated that pledge on Tuesday. "It will be distributed in conformance with the fundamental principles of our movement, especially neutrality, impartiality and independence," he said. Guaidó previously amassed hundreds of tons of aid just outside Venezuela, much of it across its borders with Colombia and Brazil. However, Maduro has refused to allow it to enter Venezuela. "We aren't beggars," Maduro said in February. Late Tuesday, however, Maduro said on national television that the aid from the Red Cross had been coordinated with his government in accordance with "international protocols." A report by Human Rights Watch and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health recently said Venezuela's public health system is in "utter collapse." Some 3.4 million Venezuelans have left their homeland amid the crises, the United Nations Refugee Agency and the International Organization for Migration said in February.

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Ex-Peruvian President García Hospitalized After Shooting Himself

Former Peruvian President Alan García shot himself just before authorities were to detain him in connection with the multi-country Odebrecht corruption scandal, the Associated Press reported today, citing his lawyer. García, who served two nonconsecutive terms as president, most recently from 2006-2011, was rushed to a hospital where he was undergoing surgery.

## Brazilian Government Announces Financial Package for Truckers

The government of Brazil's far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, on Tuesday announced a financial package aimed at preventing a truckers' strike, the Associated Press reported. The country's state development bank, BNDES, will provide \$128 million in credit to truckers, and the Ministry of Infrastructure will spend \$514 million on improving roads, said Chief of Staff Onyx Lorenzoni. Last year, a nationwide truckers' strike caused a shortage of food, medicines, and fuel across Brazil.

## Mexico's López Obrador Vows to Suspend Education Reform

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Tuesday he will unilaterally suspend a 2013 public education overhaul until his proposed reforms are addressed in Congress, *The Washington Post* reported. Opposition lawmakers questioned the legality of the move, which calls on all federal agencies to ignore the constitutional changes in education made under the previous government of President Enrique Peña Nieto. López Obrador also called for the reinstatement of teachers fired for refusing to take evaluation tests and the release of teachers jailed during protests.

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forces are not properly trained to participate in public security operations and do not follow procedures aligned with Mexico's human rights commitments. The U.N.-led training should start from that diagnosis. The new national guard needs both theoretical and practical training in human rights issues and public security. Operationally, there is still a question mark in terms of how quickly and effectively this new force—which will hail from very different backgrounds, including a mix of army, navy, federal police and new recruits—will be integrated into one single body. It is much too soon to evaluate the National Guard, but the appointment of General Rodríguez Bucio is a good sign overall. While he comes from the Mexican Army, which has traditionally been closed to civilian and

international oversight, he has an exceptional résumé with significant experience in handling civilian-military relations, human rights issues and international affairs."

**A** Raúl Benítez Manaut, researcher at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Science and Humanities at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM): "In the last 20 years, there have been four efforts in Mexico to construct a national-level police force with capacity to confront high-impact common crime and organized crime, especially drug trafficking. In 1999, the Federal Preventive Police was founded and had 7,000 members; in 2007, it became known as just the Federal Police,

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## ECONOMIC NEWS

## U.S. to Allow Suits in Cases of Properties Seized by Cuba

The Trump administration is expected to announce today a major shift in Cuba policy by allowing lawsuits in U.S. courts for the first time against foreign companies that use properties confiscated by Cuba under Fidel Castro's communist revolution six decades ago, a senior U.S. official told The New York

**Every U.S. president has suspended the provision since the Helms-Burton law passed in 1996.**

Times. In an effort to add pressure on Cuba and its allies, such as socialist Venezuela under embattled President Nicolás Maduro, the legal action could cripple Cuba's efforts to attract more foreign investment. It could also alienate U.S. allies such as Canada and countries in the European Union. The act also allows lawsuits by Cubans who became U.S. citizens years after their properties were taken. President Donald Trump's national security advisor, John Bolton, will reportedly explain the administration's decision in a speech in Miami today and announce new sanctions on Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, the Associated Press reported. The European Union has already warned it could lodge a challenge with the World Trade Organization. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said in a speech on Saturday that the United States "has pushed the precarious relations with our country back to the worst level ... trying to activate the hateful Helms-Burton Law, which aims to return us in principle to ... when we were a slave nation of another empire." Every U.S. president has suspended the right to sue in U.S. courts under the law every six months since it passed in 1996. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the March 18 issue of the Advisor.]

## IN FOCUS

## Transparent Data, Communication Key to Selling IMF Reforms in Ecuador: Moreno

By Anastasia Chacón González

WASHINGTON—The Ecuadorean government has several tools that it might resort to if it fails to build legislative consensus for reforms required in its financing deal with the International Monetary Fund, President Lenín Moreno said Tuesday during an event at the Inter-American Dialogue.

Moreno said providing transparent data and presenting the situation clearly would be best way to prompt state entities to take action regarding the necessary reforms, which include a fiscal overhaul. "But we have many instruments at hand ... that

we will use as an alternative if we are not able to convince [them]," Moreno added, without providing further detail.

Ecuador in February reached a \$4.2 billion staff-level financing agreement with the IMF, in addition to announcing \$6 billion in loans from several other multilateral lenders, as the government struggled with an external debt inherited from the previous administration of President Rafael Correa that reached \$70 billion, or 70 percent of the country's gross domestic product, according to Moreno. The inherited debt is "unmanageable," Moreno said.

Moreno's decision to negotiate a deal with the Washington-based lender sharply contrasted with his predecessor's policies. During his time as president from 2007 to 2017, Correa refused to resort to the IMF or

other international lenders when Ecuador's economy struggled with falling oil prices. "We had always been told that multilateral organizations were nothing but representatives of imperialism," Moreno said, in reference to Correa's administration. "It's good that this is not true."



Moreno // Photo: Latin America Advisor.

Moreno served as Correa's vice president during his first term from 2007 to 2013, and Correa supported Moreno during his presidential campaign. But Moreno has since broken from Correa, and his government has accused Correa of pocketing millions of dollars, among other illegal

activities, prompting him to flee to Belgium under political asylum to avoid arrest.

"Frankly, I never worried about technical and economic subjects [as vice president]," Moreno said, adding that he had believed that the numbers Correa gave him to show the absence of corruption were true. "But it wasn't the case."

The country has turned a corner, Moreno said, and economic indicators show that Ecuador is on the right track. Importantly, the president added, Ecuador has finally regained the confidence of multilateral organizations.

"This will allow us to tidy up our public finances and move positively toward development," Moreno said.

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reaching 36,000 members; and in 2013, the Gendarmerie was planned, with 70,000 members. Now, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is founding the National Guard. Why did the three previous efforts fail? Among the most important reasons are a lack of coordination with military forces and intelligence apparatuses, the lack of commitment from state and municipal governments and accusations of corruption. The National Guard has a challenge. It will be very difficult for the army and navy elements, just through discipline and loyalty, to succeed in reducing crime and fighting drug trafficking. They do not have police training, for example, to be in contact with the population. Furthermore, in a legal aspect, they must be subject to human rights principles. However, the fear of many civil society organizations is the weakness of a civil command that would represent a new militarization following the model that Felipe Calderón implemented in 2007. The appointment of Gen. Rodríguez Bucio, however, is a good sign as he is a military man with a high amount of international contact and recognition. Hopefully, this fourth effort will be the definitive one and Mexico will finally have a force to halt the grave problems of common and organized crime."

**A** **Cecilia Farfan-Méndez, post-doctoral scholar at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California**

**San Diego:** "Gen. Rodríguez brings significant experience related to counternarcotic operations in Mexico. While this is certainly an advantage, the question remains on whether this also signals how the current administration has diagnosed the causes for violence in Mexico. It is true that drug trafficking groups have escalated the levels of violence across the country. However, not all the violence can be solely attributed to dynamics within the market for illicit drugs. In recent years, we have also observed the emergence of groups that are involved in

other criminal activities, such as extortion. It will be important to closely follow how this administration, and the Guardia Nacional in particular, defines the issues as well as the solutions they propose. Rodríguez's international experience has also been hailed as a positive attribute for the job. This could open avenues for cooperation with the

“**The challenges the region faces are transnational in nature, and therefore the solutions also must come from cooperation.**”

— Cecilia Farfan-Méndez

United States and the United Nations. The challenges the region faces are transnational in nature, and therefore the solutions also must come from cooperation. One of the first steps the Sedena can take to show commitment to respecting human rights is providing information on the lethality of their engagements with civilians and alleged criminals. Mexico's Institute for Transparency has already ordered that Sedena provide this information, but they have not complied. Making this information publicly available will demonstrate a willingness to be accountable to the public. The opaquer the Guardia is and Sedena remains, the greater the concerns will be. There is potential for U.N.-led training to also happen at the subnational level, helping local police forces and rule-of-law institutions develop more capacity. If municipalities and states continue to lag in terms of their ability to deal with everyday crime, Mexico will maintain high levels of impunity, and the population will continue perceiving a great absence of the rule of law."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [ekuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:ekuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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