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FEATURED Q&A

Will Another 'Three Amigos' Summit Happen Soon?



The last North American Leaders' Summit, sometimes called the Three Amigos Summit, was held in 2016 when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met with his Mexican and U.S. counterparts, Enrique Peña Nieto and Barack Obama. // File Photo: Mexican Gov't.

Q While Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was among the first world leaders to congratulate U.S. President-elect Joe Biden on his electoral victory in November, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador was among the last. With Biden slated to take office on Jan. 20, what can be expected of the future of North American relations, and which issues will take center-stage? Is a so-called Three Amigos Summit, which brings together the three countries' presidents, likely to happen anytime soon? How is the security situation and economic outlook for the region changing North American relations?

A Gerónimo Gutiérrez Fernández, senior advisor at Covington & Burling and former Mexican ambassador to the United States: "From a structural or strategic point of view, North America has a great opportunity ahead even if it now faces a difficult context or tactical challenges. This opportunity lies in the restructuring of world supply chains as well as the present geopolitical context. North America benefits from having a new trade agreement in place (USMCA), as well as security interests that are by and large aligned. As we have seen during the last years, the idea of North America as an economic region and a security perimeter has been quite resilient, because it benefits the three countries. I hope this will be more important than any difference that the leaders might have. Roughly 15 years ago, the first North American Leaders' Summit took place in Waco, Tex., and I believe the meetings have been useful and should continue. They provide a space to align visions, establish priorities, instruct bureaucracies to work

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Colombian Cities Enter Quarantine Amid Rising Cases

Bogotá and other major Colombian cities entered a strict quarantine as the number of Covid-19 cases rises and a new variant of the novel coronavirus has been detected in some countries.

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BUSINESS

Brazil Trials Show 78% Efficacy for Chinese Vaccine

Late-stage trials in Brazil have shown CoronaVac, the Covid-19 vaccine developed by China's Sinovac, to be 78 percent effective. Brazil is the first country to complete tests of the vaccine.

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POLITICAL

Haiti's Elections to Be Held by End of Year: Council

Haiti's provisional electoral council, which President Jovenel Moïse unilaterally appointed, said a constitutional referendum, as well as presidential, legislative and local elections, would be held by the end of the year.

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Moïse // File Photo: Haitian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Colombian Cities Enter Quarantine as Covid-19 Cases Rise

Bogotá and other major cities in Colombia will be under a strict quarantine as of today as the number of Covid-19 cases rises and a new variant of the novel coronavirus circulates, officials said Thursday. In addition to the capital, Colombia's government said a strict quarantine will also apply to Cali and Medellín, where more than 70 percent of the beds in intensive care units are occupied, Agence France-Presse reported today. People throughout Bogotá will mainly be confined to their homes from last night at midnight to until Tuesday at 4 a.m., said Mayor Claudia López, Reuters reported. Nonessential stores will be closed, and only one person per household will be allowed to leave if needed to buy food or medicine. The city will also impose nighttime curfews until Jan. 17, Reuters reported. "We are confronting a new strain of Covid, which is very possibly already circulating in Bogotá," said López. "We can't see any other reason for the viral load we are finding in patients." A new variant of the virus was discovered last month in Britain, where it has appeared to fuel a sharp increase in the number of cases of the disease. Colombian health authorities said they did not have proof, however, that the new variant had appeared in the South American nation. "Right now there's no scientific evidence that accelerating Covid-19 transmission in Colombia can be attributed to the new British strain," said Julián Fernández Niño of Colombia's health ministry.

Ex-Mine Official Pleads Guilty to Guatemalan's Killing

A former security chief at a mine in Guatemala has pleaded guilty to the 2009 murder of Adolfo Ich, an Indigenous anti-mining activist, BBC News reported Thursday. The security

chief, Mynor Padilla, admitted to shooting and killing Ich at the Fénix nickel mine, which a subsidiary of Canadian mining giant Hudbay Minerals owned at the time. A judge convicted Padilla of homicide. Ich was a Maya Q'eqchi' teacher and community leader opposed to the Fénix mine, located outside the town of El Estor. Many members of the Maya community argued that much of the mine's land belonged to them. "We have spent a long time seeking justice," Angélica Choc, Ich's widow, told The Guardian following the ruling. "It is not going to bring my husband back, but I feel satisfied," she added. Human rights groups have accused international mining corporations, many of them Canadian, of a series of abuses in Central America, including the killing of anti-mining activists, though prosecutions are not common. Hudbay Minerals continues to face civil lawsuits in Canada in connection to violence against Indigenous peoples in the region, including Ich's killing. During the 2009 incident, security guards at the mine attacked opponents of the project with machetes and firearms, according to witnesses, BBC News reported. Ich was killed, Germán Chub was left paralyzed, and at least seven others were injured.

Haiti's Elections Will Be Held By Year's End: Council

Haiti's provisional electoral council, which President Jovenel Moïse unilaterally appointed, announced Thursday that a constitutional referendum as well as presidential, legislative and local elections will be held by the end of the year, Agence France-Presse reported. The referendum is scheduled for April 25, while the presidential and legislative votes are slated for Sept. 19, with a second round scheduled for Nov. 21, when local elections will also take place. Presidential, legislative and local elections should have been held two years ago but were delayed, a move that has led to strong criticism of Moïse, who has governed with basically no checks on his power since then, according to the report.

NEWS BRIEFS

López Obrador Blasts Social Media Platforms for Blocking Trump

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Thursday criticized social media platforms for blocking U.S. President Donald Trump's accounts, the Associated Press reported. "I don't like anybody being censored or taking away from the right to post a message on Twitter or Face[book]," said López Obrador. Facebook and Instagram said they would block Trump from posting on the sites at least until his successor, Joe Biden, is sworn in Jan. 20. Twitter blocked Trump's account for 12 hours. The moves followed Wednesday's riot at the U.S. Capitol, which Trump is accused of inciting. A mob of Trump supporters broke into the building in a melee that left at least five people dead.

At Least 9 Killed as Gunmen Attack Wake in Mexico's Guanajuato State

At least nine people were killed in the Mexican central state of Guanajuato late on Thursday, when gunmen opened fire at a wake, local authorities said, The New York Times reported. The incident took place in the city of Celaya, leaving one person wounded. According to some local media outlets, the death toll could be as high as 13.

Chile's Consumer Prices Rise 0.3% in December

Chile's consumer prices were up 0.3 percent in December, the government's statistics agency said today, given an increase in clothing, footwear and home maintenance costs, Reuters reported. In the 12 months to December, inflation in Chile rose 3 percent, still within the central bank's target of 2 percent to 4 percent, according to the National Statistics Institute. In a December report, the agency forecast that inflation would reach 2.8 percent in 2020.

BUSINESS NEWS

Brazil Trials Show Sinovac Vaccine to Be 78% Effective

Late-stage trials in Brazil have shown the Covid-19 vaccine developed by China's Sinovac to be 78 percent effective, The Wall Street Journal reported Thursday. The São Paulo-based Butantan Institute, which tested the vaccine, known as CoronaVac, announced that none of the volunteers who participated in the Phase 3 trials developed severe cases of Covid-19, the newspaper reported. More than 12,000 health workers participated in the trials in Brazil, which is the first country to complete tests of the Chinese vaccine. "It's a great result," said Luiz Carlos Dias, a researcher and member of a Covid-19 task force at the University of Campinas in São Paulo state. "If it can prevent severe cases, hospitalizations, deaths, it will help get us out of this pandemic." São Paulo Governor João Doria also celebrated the announcement. "The result means that the vaccine has a high degree of efficiency to protect the lives of Brazilians," he said, the Financial Times reported. While the trials show that CoronaVac has a 78 percent efficacy rate, the vaccine developed jointly by Pfizer and BioNTech and the one that Moderna developed have been shown to be 94.5 percent and 95 percent effective, respectively. However, the CoronaVac vaccine can be stored in a standard refrigerator, while the other two must be kept much colder, The Wall Street Journal reported. CoronaVac uses a chemically inactivated version of the novel coronavirus to trigger an immune response, the Financial Times reported. Trials of the vaccine are currently occurring in Chile, Indonesia and Turkey. Brazil has the world's third-highest number of confirmed Covid-19 cases, at more than 7.9 million, after only the United States and India, according to Johns Hopkins University. Brazil also has the second-highest number of confirmed deaths from the disease, at more than 200,000, after only the United States.

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on them and conduct follow-ups, something that is always important. There are six key issues that I believe can be addressed: post-Covid economic recovery, supply chain security and resiliency, regional infrastructure and competitiveness, cooperation on climate change, security in the present geopolitical context and regional labor mobility and work force development. I am not naïve, and I expect that there will be some resistances in the three countries. However, it is clearly in the best interest of the three partners to again pursue a North American agenda."

A Christopher Sands, director of the Canada Institute at the Wilson Center and director of the Center for Canadian Studies at Johns Hopkins University SAIS: "After four difficult years working with U.S. President Donald Trump, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador will find the 46th president of the United States, Joseph Biden, to be more open to dialogue and partnership. However, the Biden administration will also be constrained by the closely divided U.S. Congress, a judiciary growing more skeptical of governing by executive orders and administrative law. The 2020 election confirmed that Americans remain politically polarized. In his personnel choices, Biden has signaled a restoration of the Washington establishment. This experienced and generally centrist team will bring welcome competence. The implementation of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) will proceed with strong bipartisan support. Joint border restrictions adopted with Canada and Mexico will continue and slow the spread of Covid-19. There is now potential for increased regional cooperation in vaccine production and distribution. Yet the USMCA allows domestic set-asides ('Buy American' provisions) in stimulus spending and border adjustment taxes on imports from jurisdictions with lower carbon pricing systems, two areas where the North

American countries could clash. North American regionalism often stalls when one of the three leaders is a 'reluctant amigo.' During the Obama years, the role was played by Canada's Stephen Harper; during the Trump years, it was Trump himself. In the Biden years, AMLO seems to be auditioning for the part. Biden may renew annual North American Leaders' Summits, set a friendlier tone and honor U.S. commitments to both neighbors. After 2020, these modest changes from Washington will be welcomed in Ottawa and Mexico City."

A Rebecca Bill Chavez, nonresident senior fellow with the Peter D. Bell Rule of Law program at the Inter-American Dialogue and former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for Western Hemisphere affairs: "Joe Biden understands the importance of the North America partnership, and he will act quickly to rebuild and strengthen U.S. relationships with both Canada and Mexico. The president-elect knows that the United States cannot act on its own to effectively address today's urgent national security challenges that transcend borders, including pandemics, climate change and irregular migration. One of the first steps to tackle these complex challenges will be to re-establish the trilateral North American Leaders' Summit, a forum for crafting a shared agenda that will include the coronavirus crisis and climate change. In the case of energy and climate cooperation, the United States, Canada and Mexico can use the summit framework to harmonize environmental regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to set targets on clean energy development. The devastating impact of Covid-19 also illustrates the importance of cross-border intergovernmental collaboration. Whereas Trump responded with ineffective and cruel border policies and restrictions, including the CDC order banning the entry of asylum seekers, we can expect Biden to revive the Global Health Security Agenda

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and the North American Plan for Animal and Pandemic Influenza, which will strengthen domestic and regional preparedness through rapid information sharing, research and development, and vector-control. Such close coordination was critical to containing the H1N1 virus that originated in Mexico in 2009, ultimately saving thousands of lives and mitigating the pandemic's economic impact. Biden has also committed to restoring funding to the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization, which play critical roles in helping nations respond to Covid-19."

A **Antonio Ortiz Mena, senior vice president at Albright Stonebridge Group:** "Mexico-U.S. security cooperation will be a major challenge: after being arrested in Los Angeles at the DEA's behest, former Defense Secretary Cienfuegos was returned to Mexico. He has not been charged there, and on Dec. 15 Mexico passed a new law severely curtailing the actions of foreign agents. In addition, a key AMLO ally proposed amending a central bank law to force it to buy foreign cash that commercial banks cannot return to their country of origin; this would significantly complicate actions to combat money laundering. Migration presents an opportunity for trilateral cooperation to address undocumented migration from the Northern Triangle in a humane and holistic way, and it should be supported by the three countries. Climate change will be a central part of Biden's environmental, economic and foreign policies. U.S.-Canada cooperation should be natural but less so with Mexico, given that AMLO wants to make Pemex and CFE great again and has an adversarial stance against renewables. U.S. economic nationalism will be more subtle and rules-based under a Biden administration, but it will not go away. On Dec. 21, the U.S. Senate passed Resolution 625, which 'declares that it is U.S. policy to Buy American.' Agricultural disputes will also likely remain, and there is not much the USMCA can do in either

case, at least in the short term. Finally, the USMCA's competitiveness charter offers an opportunity to think regionally. Given the challenges facing each country, this chapter should become one of the most important frameworks for regional cooperation."

A **Carlos Vejar, partner at Holland & Knight in Mexico City:** "Many observers see the intense exposure of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to the public media as contributing to a more divided and opinionated Mexican society, making it hard for many to judge him objectively. In this context, being among the last of the world leaders to congratulate U.S. President-elect Joe Biden was considered by many as a bad omen for Mexico's bilateral relations with the incoming Biden administration. However, such a single event, which should be irrelevant, cannot override the fact that it was under AMLO's watch that the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) negotiations took place, meaning there are no grounds to forecast a negative U.S.-Mexico relationship from a single protocol decision. The truth is that there are too many other things that will occupy the attention of the two countries' bilateral agenda that are quite unlikely to be solved through a new 'Three Amigos' gathering or other friendship gestures. Without a doubt, USMCA will become a central piece for both the U.S. and Mexican administrations, much more than the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Unlike NAFTA, the USMCA state-to-state dispute settlement mechanism is functional and ready to be used. Labor, energy and environmental issues will be most likely placed under USMCA scrutiny, and tensions between Mexico and the United States on these topics will most likely emerge. Mexico should not expect a soft enforcement of the USMCA by the Biden administration. But in a post-Covid economy, trade issues may not be as relevant or urgent to address as Mexican national security issues, involving immigration and increasing violence."

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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
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