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FEATURED Q&A

Is El Salvador's Bukele Effectively Handling Gangs?



President Nayib Bukele is seeking to double El Salvador's number of military personnel in order to take territory back from gangs. // File Photo: Salvadoran Government.

Q Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele in July vowed to double the country's number of military personnel in the next five years to 40,000 troops in a bid to regain control of territories that gangs have dominated for decades. Homicides in El Salvador increased by about 10 percent in the first half of the year as compared to a year earlier, while 2020 registered a historic low in the country's homicide rate, according to preliminary government figures released in July, EFE reported. How well has Bukele's administration responded to gang violence in El Salvador? What accounts for last year's decline in the homicide rate and the sharp increase so far this year? To what extent will strengthening the military help El Salvador more effectively fight gangs, and what are some potential downsides of this strategy?

A Leonor Arteaga, program director at the Due Process of Law Foundation: "Since Bukele took office, there has been a drastic drop-off in homicides, leading to a rise in his popularity. He attributes this success to his territorial control plan, which remains a secret, but security experts and journalists believe he has a clandestine truce with gangs in order to lower homicides. This strategy has created a fragile peace that a gang can break at any moment, which could explain the recent peaks in violence. Despite the drop in homicides, Bukele's announcement to increase the size of the military is another controversial security strategy that specialists criticize as ineffective. There is no doubt that gangs exercise territorial control

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TODAY'S NEWS

ECONOMIC

Brazil Income Tax Reform Unlikely to Pass: Ramos

An income tax reform bill is unlikely to win approval because of wide opposition to it among Brazilians, said Marcelo Ramos, the deputy speaker of Brazil's Chamber of Deputies.

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BUSINESS

Workers at Chile's Escondida Mine Getting Big Benefits Package

Unionized workers at BHP's Escondida mine in Chile struck a deal for significantly higher benefits and bonuses.

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POLITICAL

Death Toll Surpasses 2,100 From Powerful Haiti Earthquake

Rescue crews pulled more bodies from the rubble following last Saturday's 7.2-magnitude earthquake in Haiti. The country is "now on its knees," said Prime Minister Ariel Henry.

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Henry // File Photo: Haitian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Death Toll Surpasses 2,100 From Powerful Haiti Earthquake

The death toll from last Saturday's powerful earthquake that struck Haiti surpassed 2,100 as search crews discovered more bodies in the rubble, the country's Office of Civil Protection said late Wednesday in a tweet. At last count, 2,189 people have been killed, 12,268 have been injured and 332 are reported missing, the office said, adding "Search and rescue operations continue!!" Additionally, at least 600,000 people need humanitarian assistance, and 135,000 families are displaced following the earthquake, Jerry Chandler, the head of Haiti's Civil Protection Agency, told Reuters. "Haiti is now on its knees," Prime Minister Ariel Henry said in a video address on Wednesday. "The earthquake that devastated a large part of the south of the country proves once again our limits, and how fragile we are." The United States is providing assistance, including the dispatch of the Navy Warship USS Arlington, which carries more than 600 personnel and is due to arrive in Haiti on Friday, CBS News reported. The U.S. Coast Guard has rescued

dozens of injured people and has delivered thousands of pounds of supplies to victims. "We have all kinds of rescue equipment," a Coast Guard worker told CBS News. "We have over 80 rescuers in this area." However, hospitals that were already dealing with Covid-19 patients are overwhelmed, forcing doctors to treat some patients outside. The poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti still has not completely recovered from a devastating 2010 earthquake that is believed to have killed more than 200,000 people. Tropical Storm Grace, which brought heavy winds and rain to the country earlier this week, has complicated relief efforts after Saturday's earthquake, and the country is dealing with political instability following last month's assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Brazil Income Tax Reform Unlikely to Pass: Deputy Speaker

An income tax reform that would include a 20 percent tax on company dividends is unlikely to pass because of wide opposition to it among

and El Salvador's history have demonstrated that militarism leads to dark chapters where armed forces become the state, out-ranking civilian institutions in power and budget. Regardless of Bukele's plan, homicide is a sensitive matter in El Salvador with real impacts on people's lives that should not be used for electoral purposes, as Bukele's tactics currently suggest."

A **Adam Blackwell, vice president for international at Development Services Group and former Canadian ambassador to the Dominican Republic:** "I have never been an advocate for the militarization of policing either through the sustained deployment

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NEWS BRIEFS

Hurricane Grace Rakes Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula

Hurricane Grace is moving across Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula this morning with 80 mile-per-hour winds, CBSMiami reported. As of 8 a.m. Eastern Time, Grace was 45 miles south-southeast of Valladolid. The storm is forecast to build strength in the Gulf of Mexico late Thursday through Friday and is likely to make a second landfall on the mainland coast of Mexico late Friday or early Saturday, according to the report. The storm dumped more than a dozen inches of rain in some countries of the Caribbean, leading to floods and mudslides.

Mexico's López Obrador Backs Central Bank's Interest-Rate Tightening

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Wednesday supported the central bank's moves to raise interest rates, saying inflation "must be kept under control," Reuters reported. López Obrador had previously made statements pushing for the Bank of Mexico to focus more on growth than inflation threats, leading some analysts to worry about government interference with the independent central bank. However, the leftist leader on Wednesday criticized board member Gerardo Esquivel for his plan to allocate International Monetary Fund resources to pay off debt to save interest costs.

Chile's Economy Grows 18% in Second Quarter, Beating Expectations

Chile's economy grew 18.1 percent in the second quarter as compared to the same period last year, as government stimulus spending fueled retail sales, Bloomberg News reported. Gross domestic product grew 1 percent in the second quarter as compared to the first, beating analysts' forecasts of 0.7 percent growth.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

and commit hideous crimes, but hardline anti-gang measures tend to fail to protect civilians. Instead, these actions increase the risk of security forces committing abuses. Experts are also concerned for the safety of civil society actors, given the regional trend of escalating militarization followed by increased repression of environmental and human rights defenders, at-risk youth and journalists. Citizens and the international community must push for transparency in public security strategies focused on long-term results. Moreover, what is happening in El Salvador cannot be characterized solely as a process of militarization where security problems are addressed using military techniques, but also as militarism. Latin America

Brazilians, said the deputy speaker of Brazil's Chamber of Deputies, Marcelo Ramos, Reuters reported Wednesday. "Everyone is against the bill. The airlines, agribusiness, industry, the financial market, civil construction. There is no way it can pass the chamber," he told the wire service. The legislation would have to be rewritten in order to win consensus, he said. President Jair Bolsonaro has shifted his focus to social welfare initiatives "not to help Brazilians, but for purely electoral reasons," Ramos told Reuters. "He has realized that is his last chance to get re-elected ... Austerity policies achieved with much sacrifice by the Brazilian people have been abandoned." Bolsonaro's press office did not immediately respond to a request for comment by the wire service. The lower chamber postponed a vote on the bill that had been scheduled for Tuesday, but the chamber's speaker, Arthur Lira, said it would not be shelved indefinitely because the country needs the reform. In May, Lira, Senate President Rodrigo Pacheco and Economy Minister Paulo Guedes reportedly struck a deal to attempt to pass a series of piecemeal changes to the country's tax system rather than taking on a large-scale reform. [Editor's note: See related Q&A in the June 11 issue of the Advisor.]

BUSINESS NEWS

Unionized Workers at Escondida Getting Big Benefits, Bonuses

Unionized workers at BHP's massive Escondida copper mine in Chile last week struck a deal with significantly higher benefits and bonuses, Reuters reported Wednesday. The union, which entered talks with high expectations thanks to high prices for the commodity, last Friday inked a deal that will provide benefits equivalent to about \$30,000 each, including a bonus equivalent to 1 percent of dividends paid to shareholders and distributed to all workers in equal parts, according to the report. Such major concessions at the bargaining table likely raise the prospect for tough negotiations and strikes at mines around the country, analysts told the

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

What Will Result From the Recent Protests in Cuba?

Q **Massive protests broke out across Cuba on July 11, with demonstrators calling for President Miguel Díaz-Canel to step down as citizens struggle amid the country's worst recession in years, rising Covid-19 cases and decades of limits on civil liberties. The government responded by deploying security forces, which have reportedly arrested more than 100 people, and by blocking access to the Internet on the island. What sparked the nationwide demonstrations in Cuba, and why are they happening now? How significant are the recent protests, and will they lead to substantial changes or more repression against dissidents on the island?**

A **Nicolás Mariscal, member of the Advisor board and chairman of Grupo Marhnos in Mexico City:** "July 11 was, for many Cubans, the most rewarding day in decades. Thousands of people took to the streets in more than 40 municipalities to protest. Thousands of Cubans joined street demonstrations from Havana to Santiago chanting 'freedom' and called for President Miguel Díaz-Canel to step down. The government referred to them as criminals and deployed security forces to deter the protests and arrest dozens of people. However, the government has refused to listen and understand the roots of these protests. On the one hand, the

pandemic has brought devastating damage to the Cuban economy and its health sector. Tourism has plummeted, which is an important source of income. Hospitals have collapsed, and there is a profound lack of supplies, beds and medicine. Despite being the first country in Latin America to develop two vaccine candidates for Covid-19, vaccination is slow. In parallel, the economic crisis has worsened. GDP growth contracted 11 percent last year. Most commodities and staples are priced in dollars, and Cubans can only obtain dollars in the informal market, at a considerably higher exchange rate. The embargo and some of former Trump's measures that dismantled Obama's normalization process have also affected the economy. Cubans no longer have anything to lose. Business managers, tourism companies and all citizens who thought health services were accessible for everyone all share a deep disappointment and frustration toward the government for not delivering expected results. Most Latin American countries have expressed their concerns over the repressive measures carried out against the protesters, but outer voices cannot be heard when even the inner ones are silenced."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment above is a continuation of the Q&A published in the July 20 issue of the Advisor.

wire service. The benefits achieved at Escondida are significantly higher than the \$24,000 union workers at Antofagasta's Los Pelambres mine achieved in March, according to the report. Meanwhile, Antofagasta on Wednesday reported significantly higher earnings results. Revenue for the first half of 2021 was \$3.59 billion, 67.9 percent higher than the same period in 2020 mainly as a result of higher copper prices and only partially offset by a decrease

in the volume of copper sales, the miner said. Copper production in the first six months of the year was 361,500 metric tons, in line with expectations and 2.8 percent lower than in the same period last year mainly because of lower grades. However, the company warned investors that copper output looking ahead could be hurt by this year's lack of rainfall, as water is essential to the company's operations.

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of military personnel into the streets and communities or through a police force armed and trained as if it were the military. While lethal force may be popular politically (Bukele seems to like it), in my experience this is not the way to establish legitimate rule-of-law institutions that earn the respect of the communities they serve. While Bukele has already significantly increased the budget of the military, the broader question

“ I have never been an advocate for the militarization of policing...”

— Adam Blackwell

is where will these military personnel come from? How will they be recruited? To what standard, and where and how will they be deployed? The gangs already seem to be under ‘control’ through massive incarcerations. More than 20,000 gang members are in jail, many of the senior leaders have been killed, and then there is a truce of now two years and counting. As with previous gang truces, there are bound to be some days of higher homicide numbers as cracks in the gang leadership and control emerge. Perhaps the bigger question here is where is phase 5 (rehabilitation and re-entry) of the plan for territorial control and what about prevention? This will require a new law, resources and corresponding institutions to move beyond law enforcement and suppression. Without a balanced multidimensional approach by investing in an army of social workers, health care practitioners and educators, there will be suspicions that this is just another heavy-handed approach by an authoritarian regime.”

A Douglas Farah, president of IBI Consultants: “Bukele’s decision to double the size of the military, exclusively for internal security tasks, is extremely dangerous in a nation with a history of dictatorship, gross human rights abuses and civil war. This is unlikely to have a significant impact on combating the gangs but will likely erode civil liberties and human rights protections. The military is not trained, equipped or prepared for this mission, and the expansion does not address that reality. The minister of defense has acknowledged that the gangs have infiltrated the armed forces, thereby making the expansion a potential boon for the gangs rather than an effective method of territorial control. The recorded drop in homicides in 2020 was due to several factors beyond Bukele’s Territorial Control plan, including: a significant rise in ‘disappearances’ that were mostly homicides but not recorded as such, making the seeming drop less dramatic; consolidation of gang control in some areas, leading to less conflict; the ongoing, amorphous pact between the Bukele administration and the MS-13 gang as reported in multiple published investigations, which has led to fewer homicides in exchange for prison benefits and other incentives; and the Covid pandemic that limited economic opportunities and territorial disputes. The current rise in homicides is due to the easing of the pandemic, friction within the gangs and between the gangs and the government over the terms of pact, and growing need for the gangs and other criminal structures to recoup the economic losses accrued during the Covid crisis. Expanding the military does not address these issues.”

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

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