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FEATURED Q&A

Should Mexican Troops Keep Fighting Cartels?



Mexico's Supreme Court in November overturned a law that formalized the use of troops to fight gangs. // File Photo: Mexican Government.

Q Mexico's Supreme Court last month overturned a new law that formalized the use of military troops to combat criminal gangs, with nine of the 11 justices vetoing the measure. Human rights groups claimed the legislation could lead to abuses by the Mexican military, which is already accused of human rights violations. Meanwhile, incoming Security Minister Alfonso Durazo said "there is no way to pull Mexico's armed forces out of the fight against organized crime," adding that new President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration will propose the creation of a National Guard with military personnel to take over such duties. What were the reasons behind the Supreme Court's decision to invalidate the security law, and are they justified? Is López Obrador's plan to form a National Guard to combat organized crime a good idea? What changes should the incoming administration implement to curb Mexico's persistent insecurity?

A Gonzalo Escribano, government affairs director at Speyside Mexico: "A few weeks ago, AMLO presented his security strategy, which generated division with his base. At first glance, the plan seems to be a continuation of the military-centered strategies of the last two presidents. The National Guard model, in fact, is very similar to Peña Nieto's 2012 idea to create a similar force, the Gendarmerie; an idea that the armed forces blocked as Peña Nieto refused to give them command over it. Many of AMLO's voters were expecting to see a radical departure from this approach. The strategy of using the armed forces in the fight against criminals was first implemented in 2006. It has

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López Obrador Takes Office as Mexico's President

Andrés Manuel López Obrador was sworn in, vowing a transformation of the country and pledging to fight corruption and impunity.

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Cargill Buys Colombia-Based Campollo

The U.S.-headquartered food conglomerate bought Colombian chicken producer Campollo, expanding its protein business in Latin America.

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G-20 Summit Ends With Pledge on Global Trade

The Group of 20 Summit, hosted by Argentine President Mauricio Macri in Buenos Aires, ended with a pledge by countries to improve global trade. The gathering also highlighted deep divisions on issues including climate change and migration.

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Macri // File Photo: Argentine Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

López Obrador Takes Office as Mexico's President

Andrés Manuel López Obrador was sworn in Saturday as Mexico's president and in his 80-minute inaugural address vowed "a peaceful and orderly transition, but one that is deep and radical ... because we will end the corruption and impunity that prevent Mexico's rebirth," NBC News reported. Mexico's first leftist



López Obrador was sworn in Saturday. // Photo: Facebook page of Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

president since the 1970s, López Obrador wore the tricolor presidential sash and during his inaugural speech said he would use expanded social programs, public works projects, an apprentice program for millions of youths and doubled pensions for the elderly to strengthen the state's role in the economy, The Wall Street Journal reported. In addition, López Obrador blasted the country's market-oriented policies of the last 35 years as a disaster that failed to grow the economy and led to the concentration of wealth. In the speech, López Obrador vowed to do "all we can to abolish the neoliberal regime." He also reiterated a pledge to call for a referendum on his mandate midway through his six-year term. In his inaugural address in the lower house of Mexico's Congress, López Obrador spoke to Mexican legislators and approximately 400 foreign guests, including U.S. Vice President Mike Pence and Ivanka Trump, U.S. President Donald Trump's daughter and advisor. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro traveled to Mexico City for the ceremony, but canceled his appearance at the event at the last minute. Mexico's opposition, led by

the National Action Party, protested Maduro's presence in the country, The Wall Street Journal reported. One banner read, "Maduro, you are not welcome." In one of his first acts as Mexico's president, López Obrador signed an agreement to work with Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras on an initiative to slow the flow of Central American migrants seeking asylum in the United States, the Associated Press reported. The plan is designed to address the causes of migration and includes a fund to create jobs in the region, Mexico's Foreign Ministry said Saturday. Over the past several weeks, caravans of Central Americans have trekked north through Mexico toward the United States where many are seeking asylum. In his inaugural address, López Obrador made a gesture toward friendly relations with the United States. "I want to point out that from the day of my election I have received a respectful treatment from President Donald Trump, whom I thank for having sent to this ceremony in a message of friendship his daughter Ivanka," said López Obrador, the Los Angeles Times reported. At the ceremony, López Obrador also thanked outgoing President Enrique Peña Nieto, thanking him for "not intervening" in the July presidential election "unlike other presidents in past elections." However, López Obrador then blasted some of Peña Nieto's main initiatives, such as education reform and an energy-sector overhaul. López Obrador has already sought to cancel the previous government's plan for a new multi-billion-dollar airport to serve Mexico City, a move that sent the peso falling and weakened business confidence in Mexico. However, on Sunday, several local news outlets reported that construction on the new airport will continue pending negotiations between the new government and investors in the project, Reuters reported. The wire service was unable to independently confirm the report and was unable to reach Mexico's Finance Ministry for comment. On Sunday, López Obrador used his first full day in office to reiterate his vow to use military personnel to provide public security, the Associated Press reported. Speaking to generals at a military installation in Mexico City, the new president said revamping the military is "indispensable" to the goal of making the country safer. López Obrador also enters office with political majorities in both cham-

NEWS BRIEFS

Cargill Buys Colombia-Based Chicken Producer Campollo

U.S.-based Cargill has bought Colombian chicken producer Campollo, FoodBev Media reported today. The Colombian company has more than two decades of experience and its products are "a top choice among consumers and retailers across Colombia," the U.S. food conglomerate said in a statement. Cargill bought Colombia's Pollos Bucanero last year.

Police Raid Deutsche Bank's HQ in Connection With Panama Papers

Police raided Deutsche Bank's headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany, and other offices on Thursday and Friday in a money laundering investigation linked to the so-called "Panama Papers," Reuters reported. After a review of the documents from Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca that were leaked to the media in 2016, two Deutsche Bank employees have been accused of helping clients open offshore firms to launder money, according to a spokeswoman for the Frankfurt prosecutor's office. On Thursday, the bank said it was cooperating with investigators.

Venezuela's Maduro Boosts Price of Petro Digital Currency

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro announced last Thursday that the price of the petro, the country's cryptocurrency, has been increased from 3,600 sovereign bolívares to 9,000 bolívares, Bitcoin News reported. Maduro had pegged the price of the petro to the sovereign bolívar in August. Venezuelan cryptocurrency regulator Sunacrip has been selling the digital currency, which officials at the U.S. Treasury have called a scam, since the end of October, but the wallet of the petro remains unavailable.

bers of Congress, the first Mexican president to have that since 1997, The Wall Street Journal reported. His party also won Mexico City's mayor's office. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Nov. 14 issue of the Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

G-20 Summit Ends With Statement on Improving Trade

The Group of 20 summit in Buenos Aires came to a close on Saturday with leaders agreeing to improve the global trading system after two days of long talks and deep divisions between member countries in areas including climate change and migration, the Associated Press reported. In a joint statement, which all member nations signed, leaders acknowledged flaws of the multilateral trading system, calling for a reform to the World Trade Organization. The G-20 nations, except for the United States, also reaffirmed their commitment to the Paris climate agreement. President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the agreement last year. European Union officials said the United States was the principal holdout on nearly every issue that was discussed during the two-day meetings in the Argentine capital, the AP reported. They said the U.S. representative had said that too much talk about migration would have been a "deal-breaker" for Trump. The United States also reportedly pushed for the word "protectionism" to be dropped from the official communiqué. Given the tension among member countries, French President Emmanuel Macron was optimistic about the result. "With Trump, we reached an agreement," he said. "The U.S. accepted the text." A few hours after the summit officially ended, China and the United States announced they had reached an agreement to not impose new tariffs on each other starting Jan. 1, El País reported. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Nov. 28 issue of the Advisor.]

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delivered, at best, mixed results, and the fact is that the levels of violence, insecurity and human rights abuses are higher than ever. The creation of the National Guard will require a constitutional amendment. The bill provides that the new guards will receive human rights training and will be tried in civil courts. However, it remains to be seen if these caveats will be enough to convince all of Morena's lawmakers, as well as some members of the opposition, to vote in favor of the reform and achieve the majority needed for a constitutional amendment. AMLO's plan does not end with the creation of the National Guard. Other priorities are fighting corruption, rethinking the prohibition of drugs and fighting inequality and poverty. The plan overlooks two necessary keys for Mexico to escape its insecurity crisis: building strong local police forces and addressing the immense deficiencies of the country's system of law enforcement."

A **Amanda Mattingly, senior director at The Arkin Group in New York:** "López Obrador's proposal to create a National Guard force, which would incorporate law enforcement authorities and branches of the military in the fight against organized crime, is not a bad idea in theory. In practice, however, it could lead to an increase in abuses that human rights groups already accuse the military of committing, and further increase the bloodshed. It is not necessarily a new plan either, as the Mexican military has been involved in the fight since former President Felipe Calderón dispatched it in 2006. Involving the military in domestic law enforcement is a tricky thing and was always supposed to be temporary, which is presumably why the Supreme Court overturned the new security law designed to formalize the arrangement. But López Obrador is realizing that the army is better equipped and more trustworthy than the police, and it is unrealistic to call them back to the barracks now. Infiltrating and dismantling the criminal organizations

requires skill and coordination as well as intelligence-based methodologies and the capabilities of a better trained service. Still, creating a National Guard will not be enough. López Obrador needs an ambitious, multilayered security agenda right out of

“**Involving the military in domestic law enforcement is a tricky thing and was always supposed to be temporary...**”

— Amanda Mattingly

the gate—one that is tough on the criminal organizations and drug cartels, reforms the security apparatus and judicial system and addresses the underlying issues of poverty, inequality, corruption and impunity. Winning the presidency with 53 percent of the vote, he has the mandate to do this, but the question is whether he has the vision and conviction to carry it out."

A **Raúl Benítez Manaut, researcher at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Science and Humanities at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM):** "The war against drug trafficking that began in 2007, with the support of the United States through the Mérida Initiative, is at a critical moment as Andrés Manuel López Obrador takes office. Official data report a total of 225,790 homicides between December 2006 and October of this year. More than 27,000 people have disappeared. The government for 12 years pushed the militarization of a war on drugs, and the country's armed forces were empowered politically. On Dec. 21, 2017, then-President Peña Nieto announced that the Law of Interior Security had taken effect. However, in November, the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional. This

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law was a military project to give jurisdiction to the armed forces. During the campaign, AMLO criticized the armed forces and announced his plan to remove them from the streets. He said a great amount of human rights were being violated. AMLO's original project was to strengthen the federal police. However, he changed his mind at some point between September and October. There was a reconciliation between AMLO and the military. Now, he proposes constructing a new military force, the National Guard. This would be led by the army, with the so-called military police, and would include the participation of the navy, with the navy police, as well as the federal police forces. We could speak of a 'neo-militarization' of the new government. The war on drugs in Mexico still does not end."

A **Monica de Bolle, director of the Latin American Studies program at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies:** "The Supreme Court's decision does seem justified in the face of human rights abuses that inevitably arise from placing the military in a law enforcement role. This said, Mexico's uncontrolled violence and drug problems urgently need a strategy that perhaps combines a role for

the military together with policies to address potential gaps left by trying to dismantle the illegal drug economy—thus far, the country has failed miserably, under many different

“**Forming a National Guard to combat organized crime seems like more of the same, repackaged.”**

— Monica de Bolle

presidents, to come up with such a strategy. Forming a National Guard to combat organized crime seems like more of the same, repackaged. Who will integrate the National Guard? What kind of training will members receive? How does this fold into the Mérida Initiative, which has so far proved to be unsuccessful? Despite campaign promises, there's no clarity on the security strategy to be followed by the AMLO administration."

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

LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

is published every business day by the Inter-American Dialogue, Copyright © 2018

Erik Brand

Publisher
ebrand@thedialogue.org

Gene Kuleta

Editor
gkuleta@thedialogue.org

Anastasia Chacón González

Reporter
achacon@thedialogue.org



Michael Shifter, President

Genaro Arriagada, Nonresident Senior Fellow

Bruno Binetti, Nonresident Fellow

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Latin America Advisor is published every business day, except for major U.S. holidays, by the Inter-American Dialogue at 1155 15th Street NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005

www.thedialogue.org

ISSN 2163-7962

Subscription inquiries are welcomed at freetrials@thedialogue.org

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