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FEATURED Q&A

How Can Nicaragua's Opposition & Ortega Find a Path Forward?



Massive protests across Nicaragua last year led to at least 300 deaths and millions of dollars in economic losses. // File Photo: Voice of America.

Q Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's negotiators and an opposition coalition have agreed on a roadmap for talks that seek to resolve a nearly 10-month conflict after violent protests broke out last April over public frustration with Ortega.

The roadmap specifies that the dialogue will be closed to the public and sets an initial deadline of March 28 for concluding it. What do both sides want to see come out of the talks? How likely is Ortega's administration to accede to the opposition's demands to release political prisoners, restore freedom of expression and pass an electoral reform? What sorts of compromises would each side have to make in order to reach an agreement, and how willing are they to make them?

A Manuel Orozco, director of the Migration, Remittances & Development program at the Inter-American Dialogue: "The political process right now is one of conflicting expectations. Ortega-Murillo want a return to normalcy without the accountability needed to redress the actions involving human rights violations, at the very least. The opposition on the other hand expects a path toward democratic transition through political reforms. However, Ortega-Murillo are highly unlikely to support any democratic transition unless they control the terms of political change. Their interpretation of the conflict is to survive this year and have national elections to move out of the conflict. The challenge, however, is that the opposition is growing impatient, the international community is aware of the intransigence of the government and the economy cannot sustain the government for long. The opposition is willing to arrive at a compromise over election reforms, but not

Continued on page 4

TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Bolsonaro Visits CIA on First Day in Washington

On his first full day in the United States, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro made an unannounced visit to the Central Intelligence Agency, or CIA, which drew scorn from his opponents back home.

Page 2

ECONOMIC

IMF Commends Macri's Policies in Argentina

The International Monetary Fund's third review of Argentina's economic plan unlocks around \$10.87 billion, which will help preserve "high-impact social spending."

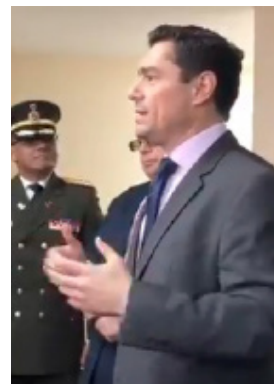
Page 2

POLITICAL

Opposition Takes Over Venezuelan Buildings in U.S.

Carlos Vecchio, the opposition's ambassador to the United States, posted videos on social media showing his staff and military officers walking through buildings in Washington left vacant after diplomats loyal to President Nicolás Maduro were expelled.

Page 2



Vecchio // Photo: @carlovecchio via Twitter.

POLITICAL NEWS

Bolsonaro Visits CIA, Meeting With Trump Scheduled Today

U.S. President Donald Trump is scheduled to meet today in Washington with the “Trump of the Tropics,” Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, The Hill reported. Bolsonaro’s far-right, nationalist views have led many to draw parallels between him and Trump, and both leaders have publicly praised each other. A senior Trump administration official told the newspaper that the meeting “is historic in all proportions because



Bolsonaro // Photo: Agência Brasil.

it’s no longer what the potential of the U.S.-Brazil relationship could be: it’s about what the U.S.-Brazil relationship is.” Under more than a decade of leftist Workers’ Party rule, Brazil maintained cordial but not especially close relations with the United States, as it embraced socialist leaders such as Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and the Castro brothers in Cuba. Both Trump and Bolsonaro have taken hard stances against current Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and on trade ties with China. Bolsonaro broke precedent by heading to Washington, not Argentina, for his first official trip abroad. On his first full day in the United States, Bolsonaro made an unannounced visit to the Central Intelligence Agency, or CIA, which drew scorn from his opponents back home. “No Brazilian president had ever paid a visit to the CIA,” Celso Amorim, who served as foreign minister under former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, told the Associated Press. “This is an explicitly submissive position. Nothing compares to this.” Brazilian officials told reporters

that Bolsonaro met with the spy agency’s chief, Gina Haspel, at its headquarters in Virginia to convey the importance he places on “fighting organized crime and drug trafficking and the need to strengthen intelligence.” Bolsonaro will also meet today with the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro. A leader of Brazil’s growing evangelical community, Bolsonaro then plans to meet with U.S. religious groups before a working dinner and departing for Chile at around 10 p.m.

Opposition Takes Over Venezuelan Buildings in U.S.

The U.S. State Department announced Monday that supporters of Venezuelan opposition leader and internationally recognized interim President Juan Guaidó have taken control of three diplomatic buildings in the United States, the Associated Press reported. Carlos Vecchio, Guaidó’s ambassador to the United States, posted videos on social media showing his staff and military officers walking through buildings in Washington left vacant after diplomats loyal to President Nicolás Maduro were expelled. Two military attaché installations in Washington D.C. and the Venezuelan consulate in New York have been taken over. The Maduro government described the move by Guaidó’s supporters as a “forced and illegal occupation” and called on the United States to “immediately reverse said de facto forced occupation.” The only remaining American diplomats in Venezuela left the embassy in Caracas and flew home last Thursday. In related news, Venezuela has suspended oil exports to India, the Azeri energy ministry said in a statement following a meeting with Manuel Quevedo, the Venezuelan oil minister and head of state-run oil company PDVSA, Reuters reported. Energy ministers from around the world are gathering in Baku, Azerbaijan. The United States has imposed a series of sanctions on Venezuela to cut off oil revenue and force Maduro to step down. India had been considering Venezuela’s proposal to use the rupee currency for trade payments to protect the country from sanctions, The

NEWS BRIEFS

IMF Commends Macri’s Policies in Argentina

The International Monetary Fund on Monday announced that its staff had reached an agreement with Argentina over its third review of the country’s economy after a financing deal last year, Reuters reported. “We commend the authorities’ policy efforts and strong determination to address macro-economic imbalances and advance their economic stabilization plan,” the IMF said in a statement. The review unlocks \$10.87 billion, which will help preserve “high-impact social spending.”

Mexico Unveils List of Bidders Invited for \$8 Billion Refinery

Mexico on Monday unveiled a list of domestic and international companies it has invited to bid on the construction of an \$8 billion oil refinery, Reuters reported. Four consortia comprised of companies from around the world—including Bechtel, KBR and Jacobs of the United States—were selected. Mexican national oil company Pemex would own the facility, which will be built near the Dos Bocas port on Mexico’s southern Gulf coast. In his election campaign last year, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador pledged to wean the country off fuel imports.

Citigroup Expects Higher Revenues From Brazil

Citigroup’s chief executive in Brazil said the bank expects fees from advising on public asset sales and a revival in capital markets could bring annual revenue from \$1.1 billion today to \$1.5 billion in the coming years, Reuters reported Monday. Marcel Marangon did not cite a timeframe, but added that Citi is also planning to expand its commercial banking division in the South American country, according to the report. Citi sold its consumer banking business in Brazil to Itaú Unibanco in 2016.

Economic Times reported. India has already advised its refiners to avoid payment systems controlled by the United States, according to the report. Only private refiners Reliance Industries and Nayara Energy have been importing Venezuelan oil, at about 300,000 barrels per day. The rupee trade proposal would secure Indian buyers for Venezuela's oil, but most of the sale proceeds would remain tied up in India because of the large trade imbalance between the two countries, an official said.

BUSINESS NEWS

América Móvil Buys Nextel Business in Brazil for \$905 Mn

América Móvil on Monday agreed to buy Brazil's Nextel Telecomunicações in a deal valued at \$905 million less net debt, Bloomberg News reported. The Mexico-based wireless carrier, which operates the Claro brand in Brazil, wants to strengthen its mobile network and boost its holdings of spectrum in South America's largest market. Telecom Italia last year considered making an offer for the company but decided not to proceed, Reuters reported. Nextel Telecomunicações' owner, NII Holdings, will next ask shareholders to wind down the company, which has struggled over most of the last decade to stay relevant in a Latin American market increasingly dominated by two service providers, América Móvil and Spain's Telefónica. "The sale represents the disposition of NII's sole remaining operating asset," Virginia-based NII said in a statement. The transaction remains subject to regulatory approval. Telefónica, which runs Brazil's largest wireless carrier, expects to boost revenues and margins this year by raising prices and automating more of its customer services, Reuters reported last month. The company reported its net profit dropped 2 percent to 1.5 billion reais (\$404.55 million) in the fourth quarter of last year, pressured by asset depreciation and stagnant revenues, a weaker result than most market analysts had expected.

CAPITOL HILL WATCH

A Look at U.S. Congressional Activity on Latin America

Kaine Visits Migrants on Colombia Border

More must be done to help Venezuelans deal with the country's humanitarian crisis, U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) said following a trip March 16-17 to Cúcuta, a border town between Colombia and Venezuela, CNN reported. "What I saw this weekend is that it's not just a power blackout—it's a human rights blackout, a justice blackout," Kaine said on Twitter. The visit, which he called a message of bipartisan support for the country, included a stop at a soup kitchen for Venezuelan refugees. "The stories were heartbreaking," he said. Kaine also applauded the Colombian people for their "compassion" in providing humanitarian assistance to their neighboring country. "The U.S. is doing a lot, other nations in the world are doing a lot, but we should do a lot more," Kaine said.

Torres Applauds DoD Action on Guatemala

U.S. Rep. Norma Torres (D-Calif.) on Saturday applauded the Department of Defense's decision to suspend military assistance and training to Guatemala following the "incorrect use" of J8 Jeeps provided by the United States, Prensa Libre reported. The vehicles, which the U.S. government donated to ramp up efforts to combat drug trafficking, were used last August to circle the headquarters of the U.N.-backed International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, or CICIG, after Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales called for the anti-corruption agency to be expelled from the country. "For months, we've demanded a response to the Guatemalan authorities' flagrant misuses of U.S.-donated Jeeps," Torres said on Twitter. "My Guatemala Rule of Law Accountability Act must be passed to make sure this never happens again," she added. The legislation, which she introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives last December, seeks to require the United States to impose sanctions, including asset blocking and the denial of visas, on "individuals who have undermined the rule of law in Guatemala," according to the congresswoman's website.

Lawmakers Seek to Amend Dream Act

Two Florida legislators are preparing to file a bipartisan amendment to the most recent version of the Dream Act as they seek to give Venezuelans in the United States temporary protected status, or TPS, which would prevent their deportation, The Hill reported last week. Reps. Mario Díaz-Balart (R-Fla.) and Darren Soto (D-Fla.) on Thursday said the amendment would include Venezuelan migrants under the TPS program. Currently, immigrants in the United States from countries under TPS are protected for as much as 18 months at a time, but the new version of the Dream Act would make the benefits permanent, according to the report. "This common-sense bill provides a solution to the many Venezuelans who currently reside in our country who fled a socialist dictatorship, and the oppression, hyperinflation, extreme shortages of food and medicine, and crime that the regime is responsible for," Díaz-Balart said in a statement. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Feb. 8 issue of the Advisor.]

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

about releasing prisoners. In fact, a premise to start any negotiation should include eliminating the anti-terrorism law which criminalizes public protest. So far, despite U.S. and opposition pressures, Ortega-Murillo continue to resist. The political change will only occur once the balance of power shifts in the opposition's favor, resulting from growing disaffection, dissent among Sandinistas, U.S. and other sanctions, a continued loss of government revenue and a strong leadership within the opposition. This stage of political change is lengthy, unless Ortega-Murillo compromise to accept the opposition demands in exchange of some form of amnesty. While not a desirable outcome, negotiating amnesty over broad political change will accelerate the country's transition to democracy."

A **Dan Kovalik, human rights and labor rights lawyer and peace activist:** "As far as Daniel Ortega is concerned, I think that he would like to see a lasting peace come out of the talks. At this point, according to a recent poll taken by M&R Consultants, Ortega has a 55 percent approval rating. From his point of view, the best thing that could happen is for the opposition to simply settle down and allow him to rebuild the economy that the opposition trashed over the summer. The opposition has shown itself to be almost totally devoid of any programs or any candidates; they simply want Ortega to step down, which is not going to happen. I would not concede that there are political prisoners or a lack of freedom of expression. With that said, I am sure Ortega would make conciliatory moves to the opposition, such as granting an amnesty to individuals involved in lesser crimes during the summer crisis. I believe he is also willing to agree to some changes in the electoral system, but I don't see him agreeing to early elections given his current popularity. I think the compromises on Ortega's part that I have outlined may be enough to reach an agreement with the

opposition, which, at this point, knows that it has a very weak hand. The truth is that the opposition had its chance last April and May to force some major changes in the country, but it squandered this chance by putting forth no demands (aside from Ortega's resignation) and by turning to criminal violence. The opposition will be lucky to come out of this with some type of face-saving deal."

A **Jim Swigert, senior associate and regional director of the Latin America and the Caribbean programs at the National Democratic Institute:** "Most likely, President Ortega wants to use these talks to forestall tougher sanctions as Nicaragua's economy deteriorates. The combination of U.S. (bipartisan) economic sanctions, E.U. threats and OAS pressure, is having an impact. Ortega's decision to start up talks and the subsequent release—on house arrest—of 100 or so political prisoners (while leaving more than 600 still imprisoned) evidences that he can be maneuvered into concessions, if under sustained pressure. Despite the resumption of talks, expectations are minimal that the Ortega-Murillo regime is prepared to take serious action to address the Civic Alliance's core demands for genuine democratic elections and justice. Still, the Alliance is right to engage and test the government. Negotiations are the only way to bring about the democratic elections necessary to overcome the crisis and to put Nicaragua on the path toward a better future, revive the economy and secure the rule of law and justice. The Civic Alliance was correct on March 10 to step back from the talks to demand freedom for political prisoners and an end to persecution of Nicaraguans critical of the government. The Alliance's decision March 13 to return to the table is risky and is testing their ability to sustain a unified approach. They may need to step away again. It is clear that sustained national and international pressure is essential for talks to have any prospects for progressing."

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