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FEATURED Q&A

What Will Almagro Prioritize in His Second OAS Term?



Luis Almagro last month was re-elected secretary general of the Organization of American States. // File Photo: Organization of American States.

Q Luis Almagro, who has been secretary general of the Organization of American States since 2015, was re-elected on March 20 to a second five-year term heading the organization, garnering 23 of the 33 votes cast by member states. What does Almagro's victory mean for the organization and for Western Hemisphere relations? What will be Almagro's priorities during his second term, and are they the correct ones? What is the OAS' role in the region during such challenging times, and to what extent has the organization's stature and credibility been affected by its part in recent electoral controversies in countries such as Bolivia?

A Ronald Sanders, ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda to the United States: "During Almagro's first term, the OAS experienced bitter division, leaving the organization weak and lacking a coherent way forward. Almagro was almost a 'one item' secretary general, consumed by events in Venezuela and acting in concert with countries that used the organization in furtherance of domestic political agendas tied to removing the Maduro government. A majority of only 18 votes secured his control of the OAS. To operate based only on satisfying a majority, however achieved, neglects the interests of all others. The OAS will not survive in constant contention, vexation and division. Almagro's second term provides him an opportunity to build bridges between member states and to lead a collective hemispheric agenda, which should include tackling climate change and a failing trading system; financing development; and addressing communicable diseases—all of which are integral to maintaining security, democracy and human rights. The latter

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Peru, Panama Limit Days Outside by Gender

Peru and Panama have limited by gender the days that residents can go outside to purchase essentials in an effort to slow the spread of Covid-19.

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Guyana Project Output Unaffected by Price Shock: ExxonMobil

The recent oil price shock has not affected production at the Liza project in Guyana, according to a spokeswoman for ExxonMobil.

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POLITICAL

Morgues at Capacity in Guayaquil, Bodies Lie in Streets

Morgues in Ecuador's largest city have been overwhelmed amid the coronavirus pandemic. Bodies lie in the streets of Guayaquil as "no one wants to recover them," said Mayor Cynthia Viteri, who herself has contracted the virus.

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Viteri // File Photo: City of Guayaquil.

POLITICAL NEWS

Morgues at Capacity in Guayaquil, Bodies Lie in Streets

Guayaquil has emerged as among the Latin American cities hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic, with morgues in Ecuador's most populous city overwhelmed and bodies in some cases left lying on sidewalks and in the streets, UPI reported Thursday. Other corpses have been left unclaimed in hospitals and clinics as fatalities have happened faster than crews can bury the dead. "They're leaving them in the villages, they fall in front of hospitals," Mayor Cynthia Viteri said last week in a video message. "No one wants to recover them." Viteri herself is quarantined after she tested positive for Covid-19. Ecuador has 3,163 confirmed cases of the disease and 120 deaths related to it. In the region, only Brazil and Chile have more confirmed cases. Authorities in Guayaquil say they have collected at least 400 corpses in recent days, UPI reported. Images on social media show people coughing outside of overcrowded hospitals in Guayaquil and some slumped over on the streets, the Miami Herald reported. "What's happened with our health care system?" Viteri said in a posting on Facebook. "Families are wandering the city, knocking on doors hoping a hospital will take them in, but there are no more beds." The city has raided a \$10 million fund that was intended to celebrate Guayaquil's bicentennial in order to buy 50,000 additional testing kits, 40 portable ventilators and 20 ventilators for intensive care units, the newspaper reported. Additionally, it has brought in four refrigerated trucks to store bodies. Leaders elsewhere have taken notice of the dire situation in Guayaquil and are using it as a warning. "They said the pandemic wouldn't hit Latin America so hard because we're used to illnesses, because it's hot, because the population is young, etc, etc," Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele wrote in a posting on Twitter. "Look at what's happening in Ecuador. If you don't see yourself reflected in the mirror of Italy, Spain or New York, look at yourself in

that one." Bukele has taken among the most aggressive measures in the region in an effort to contain the virus. He closed the country's borders and its international airport on March 14, before the country had even confirmed its first case of Covid-19. "The world IS NOT doing enough to stop the virus. Its advance is ruthless, and it has already brought the world's most powerful countries to their knees," Bukele tweeted last week. "We're also not doing enough. The worst part is that there are people complaining that we're being too strict. They don't understand anything." El Salvador has 46 confirmed cases of the disease and two related deaths.

Peru, Panama Limit Days Outside Home by Gender

Peru and Panama on Thursday limited the times men and women can leave their homes as part of each country's efforts to curb the spread of coronavirus, Reuters reported. In Peru, where President Martín Vizcarra has mandated a strict quarantine, men and women will only be allowed to go outside on designated days divided by gender through April 12,



We have to get fewer people to be on the streets every day."

— Martín Vizcarra

Vizcarra announced Thursday. On Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays, only men will be able to leave their homes to stock up. Women can go out on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. No one can leave on Sundays. "We have to get fewer people to be on the streets every day," Vizcarra said. Peru has also resorted to calling up army reservists in order to enforce the quarantine measures, given that many Peruvians continue to violate them. Vizcarra said earlier this week that some 36,000 people had been arrested for not complying. The Andean nation has 1,414 confirmed cases and 55 deaths.

NEWS BRIEFS

Bank of America Expects Larger Contraction for Brazil's Economy

Bank of America on Thursday said it expected a deeper economic contraction in Brazil than previously forecast because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Reuters reported. The bank said it now expects a 3.5 percent contraction in Latin America's largest economy, as opposed to the previously expected 0.5 percent contraction. Bank of America also said it expected Brazil's currency to weaken to 5.2 reais per U.S. dollar.

Guatemalan Congress Approves \$130 in Monthly Aid to Families in Need

Guatemala's Congress early today approved monthly aid of 1,000 quetzals (about \$130) for families affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, Prensa Libre reported. The bill, which President Alejandro Giammattei proposed, had stalled due to problems with the wording after Congress approved it in an emergency session. In total, the economic package will give out six billion quetzals per month to families in need.

Venezuelan Navy Vessel Sinks After Deliberately Ramming German Ship

A Venezuelan Navy patrol boat deliberately rammed a German cruise ship in international waters and then sank off the South American country just after midnight on March 30, Deutsche Welle reported today. Hamburg-based Colombia Cruise Services said the Resolute cruise ship, which was carrying a crew of 32 people but no passengers, was the target of an "act of aggression." The Venezuelan patrol vessel accused the cruise captain of violating Venezuela's territorial waters. After the collision, the Navy boat began taking on water and went down, but its 44-member crew was rescued by another vessel. The cruise ship sustained minor damage.

Meanwhile, Panama's security minister, Juan Pino, announced that men and women would only be allowed to leave their house during predetermined hours, Metro Libre reported. "With an absolute quarantine, men and women will have a schedule to transit," Pino said, Reuters reported. Panama has registered 1,317 confirmed cases of coronavirus and 32 deaths.

BUSINESS NEWS

Production at Guyana Project Unaffected by Price Shock: Exxon

The recent oil price shock has had no impact on production at Guyana's flagship Liza project, which ExxonMobil operates, according to a company spokeswoman, who added Exxon would make adjustments as necessary, Reuters reported Thursday. An oil price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia in combination with rapidly dwindling crude demand amid the Covid-19 pandemic has left many Latin American producers struggling to cover production costs, which in turn increases the chances of output cuts. "We are managing production rates to ensure safe and responsible operations," Janelle Persaud, Exxon's public and government affairs advisor in Guyana, said in a statement, adding that, "We continue to monitor the situation closely and will make adjustments as necessary." Output at the offshore Liza well, which Exxon manages alongside partners Hess Corp. and China's CNOOC, is expected to reach some 120,000 barrels per day (bpd) in its first phase. Production began in December. According to Guyana's finance ministry, the country will get around \$1.2 million in royalty payments from Exxon and its partners recently lifting some one million barrels of crude from the Liza well, Stabroek News reported. Crude prices rose on Thursday, with Brent—which many producers use as a benchmark—approaching \$30 a barrel after U.S. President Donald Trump said he expects Russia and Saudi Arabia to announce a major cut in their output, Reuters reported.

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should be strictly applied with no repetition of the organization's dubious role in last October's elections in Bolivia. He would have to be attentive equally to the aspirations of each regional group, forging a vibrant action plan on which there is genuine consensus. Member states must also be committed to that goal and act on it, or the organization will wither into a few states using it as a bull-horn for their own positions, disdained by others tired of being subjugated. If Almagro does not play this role, the organization will become an unsustainable and unattractive cauldron for disagreement and discord, and Almagro's legacy would be calamitous."

A Michael Camilleri, director of the Peter D. Bell Rule of Law program at the Inter-American Dialogue: "Secretary General Almagro's successful re-election was due reward for his energetic style of leadership and, above all, his principled and forceful approach to the democratic and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. While a minority of member states sought a more conciliatory leader who would return the OAS to its traditional consensus-based approach, Almagro's unapologetic use of the secretary general's bully pulpit was ultimately vindicated. We can expect more of the same in his second term. At the same time, Almagro will face a more complex set of challenges. The crisis in Venezuela is not going away, but the OAS must now simultaneously manage problematic election processes in Guyana and Bolivia, not to mention the ongoing democratic breakdown in Nicaragua. A Summit of the Americas, to be hosted by the United States, looms in 2021. And Covid-19 will strain fragile social services, devastate economies and provide openings for corruption and autocratic behavior. The OAS, even if in its current state of tight budgets and institutional weakness, has tools to support governments or hold them to account, as the case may be. Secretary General Almagro will continue to lead from the front, but his

success in his second term may depend less on the force of his personality and more on his ability to effectively manage and marshal the OAS with transparency, consistency and focus."

A John Maisto, member of the Advisor board and former U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua, Venezuela and the Organization of American States: "Uruguayan socialist Luis Almagro has become the secretary general of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and all the democratic governance parts of the Inter-American System—fair elections; human rights; and fighting corruption, crime and terrorism. His tenure has been marked by unflinching attempts to apply the charter and by pushback from authoritarian governments and their usually bought-off allies who invoke anti-imperialism ranting. But, most importantly, he has enjoyed strong support from the governments grounded in representative democracy, led by the United States, whose deft diplomacy helped deliver Almagro's victory. The OAS needs Almagro to maintain its newly found credibility and relevance. His priorities will focus on the charter to deal with political issues: Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua. His 2015 electoral pledge—'more rights for more people'—is shorthand for the charter's first article on governments' obligations to promote and defend democracy. Look for vigorous, professional, impartial, respected election observation, as seen in Bolivia and Guyana, support for the independent Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the San José-based Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and improved horizontal cooperation among members through existing commissions on combating narcotics, terrorism and corruption. An OAS role in Venezuela may require partnership with the United Nations, the European Union or an ad-hoc Latin American group. Almagro is now well positioned to press the OAS members who supported him to advance the charter-grounded de-

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mocracy agenda—the United States, Canada, Brazil—for badly needed increased funding. Without it, the OAS' new relevance could be fleeting."

A Hector Schamis, adjunct professor at Georgetown University and columnist at Infobae: "When Almagro arrived in May 2015, the relevance of the OAS had been eroded, and its credibility was widely questioned. The framework of multilateralism inspired by Castro-Chavismo—ALBA, Petrocaribe, Unasur, CELAC—was designed to overshadow the OAS. Almagro's re-election confirms that the OAS has recovered its centrality. It is, again, the main political forum in the hemisphere, a goal he pursued from the very beginning of his tenure. The Inter-American System is about democracy and human rights, principles not always remembered by those who invoke an archaic conception of sovereignty and decry an alleged 'interventionism' of the OAS. There is no such a thing. As in every international regime, the provision of public goods is dependent on shared norms and accomplished through mutual oversight. Almagro should continue to focus on the offenders and hold them accountable. The founding documents of the system

compel the secretary general to do so. As he put it several times, 'The Inter-American Democratic Charter is the constitution of the Americas.' It must be complied with. Why is the question centered on whether the stature

“Almagro's re-election confirms that the OAS has recovered its centrality.”

— Hector Schamis

and credibility of the OAS was 'affected,' and not on whether it was 'enhanced'? Enhancement is, in fact, the outcome of the observation and audit of the electoral process in Bolivia, which verified malicious actions undertaken to alter electoral results. The European Union arrived at similar conclusions. The 'controversies' were motivated either by ideology or by an attempt to thwart Almagro's re-election. They were not based on an objective analysis of what turned out to be, plain and simple, an electoral fraud."

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Advisor Video

Containing the Spread of Covid-19 in Latin America & the Caribbean

A Latin America Advisor interview with Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, Assistant Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)

PLAY

